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# COWORKER DISTRIBUTIVE FAIRNESS JUDGMENTS OF THE WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATION OF EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

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I present a model of when and how coworkers judge the distributive fairness of workplace accommodations of employees with disabilities. Fairness judgments are made when accommodations are salient and relevant to coworkers. I thus present factors influencing the salience and relevance of accommodation. I also argue that fairness judgments are based on equity and need rules and therefore explore factors influencing equity comparisons and perceived warrantedness. Finally, I suggest directions and ideas for future research.

The popular press and professional press have pointed to abuses of the accommodation stipulation in the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; see West & Cardy, 1997, for a discussion). Anecdotes such as the woman who claimed that receiving Fridays off was the only viable accommodation for her stress-related disability (Stamps, 1995) are common. It appears that now that fears over the potential high cost of disability accommodations have abated, new concerns have arisen over the possibility that persons with disabilities or claiming to have disabilities will somehow unjustly benefit from the accommodation stipulation. At the same time, researchers have often documented that people with disabilities are reluctant to disclose those disabilities to their employers and to ask for a needed accommodation they are entitled to under the ADA (Cleveland, Barnes-Farrell, & Ratz, 1997; Florey, 1998). Thus, it appears that there is a great deal of concern over people receiving accommodations to which they are not entitled, while those who are entitled may be reluctant to claim their rights.

In order to understand this seemingly contradictory state of affairs, one must consider the dynamics involved in the granting of a workplace accommodation and the reactions of workgroup members most closely affected by the accommodation (apart from the individual

receiving an accommodation). Because the granting of an accommodation means that one person in the workgroup is given different treatment, it is likely that other group members might somehow react to this differential treatment based on how fair they perceive the accommodation to be. Consideration of coworkers as stakeholders in the accommodation process has been minimal so far (see Cleveland et al., 1997, for a brief exception), with most researchers focusing on the cost of accommodation (e.g., Braddock & Bachelder, 1994; Lee & Newman, 1992), legal issues (e.g., Blanck, 1997; Lee, 1996, 1998), or the organization's willingness to accommodate (e.g., Cleveland et al., 1997).

In this article I present a model that explicates (1) when coworkers will engage in a judgment process to determine whether the accommodation of another is just or fair and (2) the factors affecting the actual distributive fairness judgments. However, before addressing these issues, I turn to a discussion of why coworker fairness reactions to accommodation matter.

## COWORKERS AS STAKEHOLDERS IN ACCOMMODATION

Because coworker reactions have been given so little attention in any dialogue about accommodating persons with disabilities at work, it is necessary to justify why coworkers should be considered important stakeholders in the accommodation process and, thus, why their reactions are worthy of study. Accommodation is a

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right guaranteed by the ADA (1990), regardless of how coworkers feel about it. Yet, contrary to early legal opinions (Smith, 1992), recent court decisions have taken coworker reactions into account in cases where an accommodation was judged contrary to a collective bargaining agreement (e.g., *Benson v. Northwest Airlines*, 1995; *Kralik v. Durbin*, 1997; *Wooten v. Farmland Foods*, 1995) because coworkers' negative responses (in the form of grievances) would make the accommodation "unreasonable." Although decisions about granting the accommodation usually are made by supervisors (Cleveland et al., 1997; Florey & Harrison, 1998), and the responsibility for requesting the accommodation rests on the person requiring it, it is still necessary to examine coworker reactions for several reasons.

First, coworker reactions may influence the successful implementation of an accommodation. Many accommodations require the cooperation and support of others in the workgroup (McLaughlin & Gray, 1998). For example, accommodations such as restructuring of work, change in shift schedules, and the trading of tasks (all common accommodations) would be extremely difficult to implement without involving coworkers. For any accommodation to be helpful (to anyone in the group), coworkers should willingly cooperate, if needed. Their cooperation in the accommodation process is likely to be a function of how they feel about the process.

Second, coworker reactions can impact the person entitled to the accommodation. The manner in which persons with disabilities expect their coworkers to respond may influence their own likelihood of requesting the accommodation (Florey, 1998). That is, past responses to accommodation of group members will influence the likelihood of future requests being made. For example, a person with a disability might fear that coworkers will become resentful if he or she requests an accommodation and consequently receives different treatment. Coworker reactions may also influence how they treat a person who has been accommodated.

Third, coworker responses may be one factor supervisors consider when deciding whether to grant an accommodation (Cleveland, Barnes-Farrell, & Huestis, 1996; Cleveland et al., 1997). Although legally the supervisor should not consider workgroup reactions, he or she may still consider reactions as a factor that enters into

the "cost" of accommodation. If supervisors expect that coworker reactions will lead to decreased morale or productivity, they may reason that accommodating one individual is not worth it.

Finally, coworker responses, on a collective scale, can influence public policy and the general public's reaction to the ADA. The recent popularity of ADA "backlash" stories in the media may, in part, be fueled by a sufficient number of people having what they perceive to be negative experiences with ADA-related work experiences. For example, the case of Casey Martin illustrates how harsh coworkers (i.e., fellow golfers) can be. Mr. Martin is the professional golfer who requested to use a golf cart in a PGA-sponsored golf tournament—a procedure against PGA policy.

In summary, coworkers are an important group of stakeholders in workplace accommodation situations, especially when accommodations can influence how everyone's work gets done, as well as everyone's rewards. Here I expand on past research on accommodation of employees with disabilities beyond issues of dollar cost by considering coworkers as stakeholders in this process. In the next section I present a model of when and why coworkers are likely to judge an accommodation as fair or unfair.

## ACCOMMODATION AND JUSTICE JUDGMENTS

The ADA (1990) stipulates that workplace accommodations be provided to persons with disabilities so that they can perform essential job functions and enjoy the same benefits of employment as others (Vernon-Oehmke, 1994). From the coworker perspective, this means that a peer is given different treatment at work. This different treatment can take many forms, such as a change in duties (e.g., task reassignment), a change in a valuable commodity (e.g., longer lunch breaks), a change in the physical conditions of work (e.g., a quieter work space), a change in the tools of work (e.g., a large-screen computer monitor), a change in resources available to coworkers (e.g., money spent on the accommodation is unavailable for new equipment), or even a change in location (e.g., permission to work from home). Thus, an accommodation can involve a change in the work inputs and outcomes of the person being accom-

modated, a change in coworker inputs and outcomes, or a change in workplace policy or procedures. These changes are all critical components that drive employee fairness perceptions.

Thus, the focus of this article is to draw on a variety of literature, particularly the organizational justice literature, to develop a model of the factors influencing when and whether coworkers perceive an accommodation as fair or unfair. This model is depicted in Figure 1. Before discussing the model, I discuss its boundary conditions.

### Boundary Conditions

First, I focus on fairness perceptions because the justice literature has a strong theoretical base and has been used by others to explain reactions to various other types of personnel actions (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; Truxillo & Bauer, 1999). Considering reactions in terms of fairness perceptions is useful, because perceptions of fairness are related to many specific attitudinal and behavioral reactions, such as aggression (e.g., Greenberg & Alge, 1998), revenge (e.g., Bies & Tripp, 1998), job satisfaction (e.g., Greenberg, 1988), commitment to the organization (e.g., Folger & Konovsky, 1989), performance (e.g., Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990), and organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Moorman, 1991). The relationships between fairness perceptions and specific reactions are beyond the scope of this article, and I leave them for researchers to explore in the future.

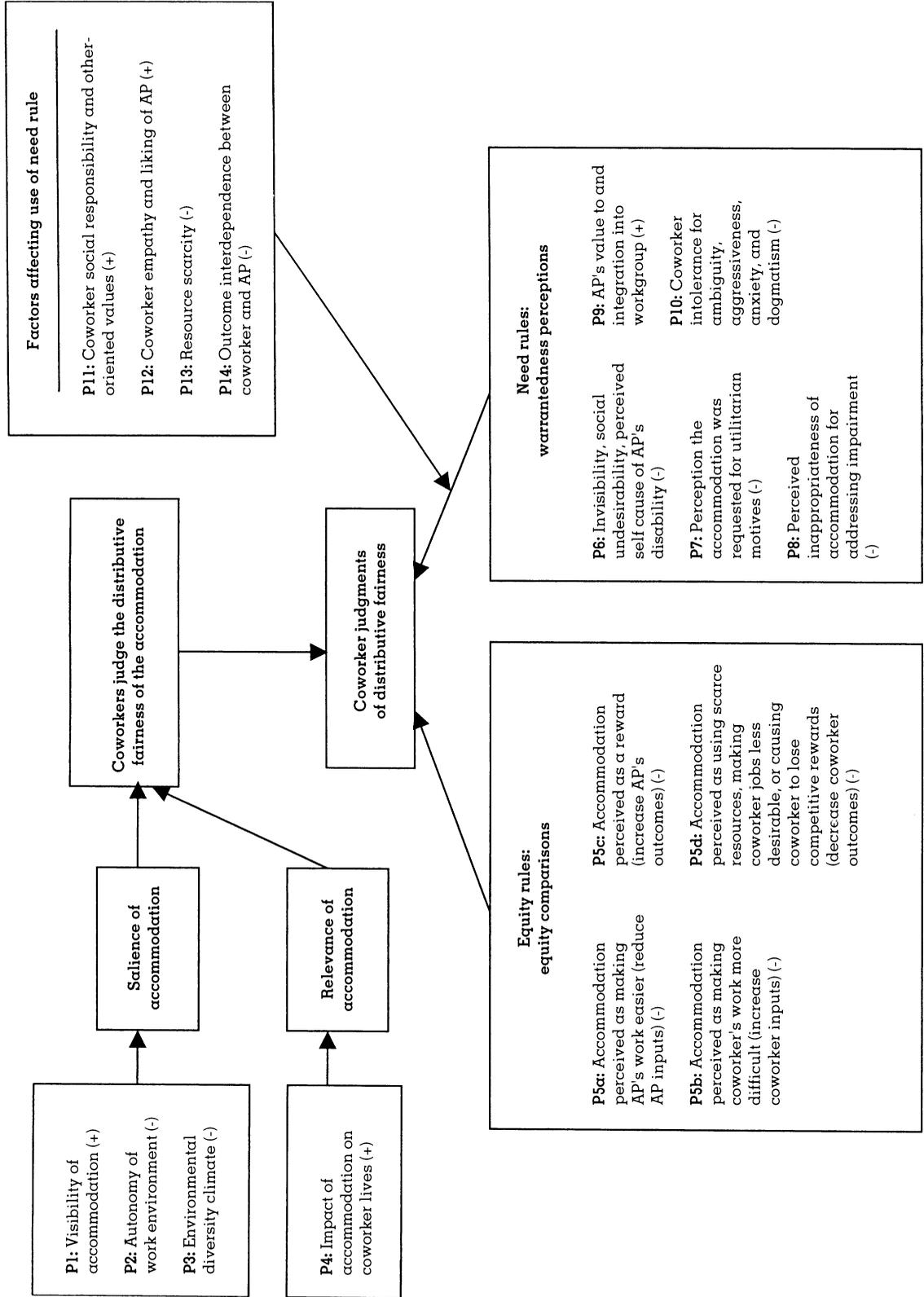
Second, I focus solely on perceptions of distributive fairness. However, organizational justice scholars have focused on both distributive and procedural forms of fairness (Greenberg, 1990a). On the one hand, distributive fairness refers to the perceived fairness of the outcome of a decision (Greenberg, 1987, 1990a), which in this case means how fair coworkers believe the accommodation is in terms of its effect on the distribution of rewards and resources. On the other hand, procedural justice perceptions are generally defined as the degree to which people perceive the process through which outcome decisions are made as fair (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). In this case procedural justice judgments would refer to the degree to which coworkers perceived the process of granting an accommodation as fair.

I focus solely on distributive fairness perceptions because many of the prescriptions for fair treatment resulting from the procedural justice literature are difficult to apply to an accommodation scenario. This research suggests that when rules for accommodation decisions are consistently applied, bias is suppressed, coworkers have voice in affecting the accommodations that will influence their own working environment, and the reason for the accommodation is communicated clearly and respectfully, coworkers will be more likely to perceive the accommodation as procedurally fair (cf. Greenberg, 1990a; Tyler, 1994). However, these rules are difficult to apply in accommodation scenarios, for several reasons.

First, accommodation is an individual issue, making it difficult to develop consistent rules governing the accommodation procedure. Second, clearly communicating the reason for the accommodation may present a serious breach of the privacy rights of the accommodated person. Third, coworkers do not have a legal right to voice in the decision about how an accommodation is to be made. Finally, coworkers usually will lack the knowledge necessary to determine someone else's accommodation needs. This is not to say that the rules governing procedural justice do not apply to accommodation scenarios, but that they may be difficult to enact. I say more about procedural justice in the Conclusion section but remain focused here on distributive fairness judgments.

A third boundary condition is that this model applies to single coworker reactions only. Others have addressed supervisor reactions (Cleveland et al., 1997; Florey & Harrison, 1998), usually in terms of the decision to grant accommodations. However, coworkers do not usually decide whether an accommodation is granted. Thus, although coworker reactions may be related to supervisory decisions to grant an accommodation (Cleveland et al., 1997), the judgments most relevant to these two groups of stakeholders differ (see Leventhal, 1976, for a discussion of the difference between resource allocators and recipients). Also, I focus on explaining a single coworker's reaction, as opposed to coworker reactions as a group. Thus, whereas antecedents to fairness judgments occur at multiple levels in Figure 1, the dependent variable occurs at the individual level. This boundary condition exists because it allows for a more parsimonious

**FIGURE 1**  
**Model of Factors Affecting Coworker Distributive Fairness Judgments of Workplace Accommodations**



Key: AP, accommodated person.

model and because the justice literature, at this point, has little to say about group fairness perceptions (Lind, Kray, & Thompson, 1998).

Finally, I assume that an accommodation has been both requested and granted because of a disability. I also assume that the person granting the accommodation has the authority to do so and that the accommodation is legitimate according to company policy. This precludes a discussion of scenarios in which an accommodation clearly violates company policy and is granted for reasons other than disability. Although many propositions presented here can be generalized to situations in which accommodation is granted for other reasons (e.g., child care responsibilities), the focus here is on disability accommodation.

### Model Overview

As illustrated in Figure 1, I propose factors that will influence (1) when coworkers will engage in judging the distributive fairness of an accommodation and (2) coworkers' actual judgments of distributive fairness. As depicted in the model, whether or not coworkers judge the distributive fairness of an accommodation depends on the salience and relevance of the accommodation. Thus, I propose factors that will likely influence the salience and relevance of an accommodation. If the accommodation is salient and relevant to coworkers, those coworkers will engage in evaluating the distributive fairness of the accommodation.

In the next portion of the model, I depict that coworker fairness judgments will be a function of the fairness rules that employees use—specifically, equity and need rules. Factors proposed to influence equity comparisons and warrantedness or need perceptions are also depicted. All of these factors may influence coworkers' distributive fairness judgments, yet the weight of various factors may be influenced by the degree to which coworkers rely on equity- or need-based rules. Thus, in the model I also present some conditions that would influence the extent to which coworkers would use need rules.

I now turn to a discussion of the model and its propositions, beginning with a discussion of when judgments of fairness will be triggered.

### When Will Coworkers Make Fairness Judgments About Accommodations? Salience and Relevance

One should not assume that coworkers will engage in judging all accommodations to be fair or unfair. Judging the fairness of an accommodation is a conscious process, thus requiring attention (Ashcraft, 1994; Upshaw, 1984). The issue of what makes people pay attention to environmental events has been studied in several bodies of literature, such as social cognition (e.g., Taylor & Fiske, 1978), decision making (e.g., Abelson & Levi, 1985), and managerial problem sensing (e.g., Kiesler & Sproull, 1982). This literature suggests two characteristics that make people notice events: salience and relevance. Coworkers simply may not notice that an accommodation has been made, or the accommodation is so irrelevant to them that they do not consider it.

Here I propose various conditions under which coworkers will likely judge the fairness of an accommodation because the accommodation is salient and relevant to them. Factors likely to influence the salience of an accommodation are those that make the accommodation process more visible and unique. I include accommodation visibility, the nature of the job, and workplace diversity climate.

For an accommodation to be salient, it must be visible—that is, it can be seen (e.g., a special computer monitor). Visibility is influenced by the degree to which an accommodation makes one's working conditions different from coworkers' conditions. For example, an employee is permitted to sit while others must stand, or an employee is made exempt from forced overtime. Examples of invisible accommodations include allowing a person to take work home (if coworkers are not told) and small physical changes to work stations.

*Proposition 1: The more visible an accommodation, the more salient it will be and, consequently, the more likely it will be that coworkers form a judgment of the fairness of the accommodation.*

Job autonomy within the workgroup is also likely to influence the salience of an accommodation because it influences the degree to which the accommodated person's work differs from

that of others. If the work environment is one in which employees can accomplish their work in an autonomous manner and in which various accommodations are routinely provided for reasons other than disability (e.g., family responsibilities), then accommodations provided for disability are less likely to be salient. In this case it is the norm for employees to decide how they will perform their own work. Variance in how one performs one's job would not be noticed to the extent that it would be in a situation in which work was performed in a more uniform manner. In other words, the accommodation would appear as a deviation from coworkers' scripts of how work is accomplished and would thus be more likely to be noticed (cf. Rumelhart, 1984; Taylor & Crocker, 1981).

*Proposition 2: The less autonomous the work environment, the more salient the accommodation will be and, consequently, the more likely it will be that coworkers form a judgment of the fairness of the accommodation.*

Organizational diversity researchers have characterized organizational environments in terms of how amenable they are to workplace diversity. For example, Cox (1993) compares multicultural organizations in which diversity is valued, plural organizations in which diversity is simply tolerated, and monolithic environments in which diversity is discouraged. In the organizational literature the focus is primarily on diversity in terms of cultural, racial, ethnic, or gender dimensions. Although accommodation is not a cultural, racial, ethnic, or gender issue, multicultural organizations are probably more likely to accept and value diversity on many grounds. If people in multicultural organizations are exposed to a wide array of diversity, then the provision of accommodations to persons with disabilities will be less noticeable events. If there are many individuals with disabilities in the workplace, persons with disabilities (and their accommodation needs) will not be unique. If persons with disabilities and the act of accommodating individuals are common events, then the accommodation will be less likely to be salient (cf. Kanter 1977).

*Proposition 3: The more monolithic the diversity environment, the more salient the accommodation will be and,*

*consequently, the more likely it will be that coworkers form a judgment of the fairness of the accommodation.*

An accommodation also must be considered relevant to lead to fairness judgments (Greenberg, 1990a). An accommodation can be salient but irrelevant to coworkers. A highly visible wheelchair ramp is an example of such an accommodation. Relevance refers to whether coworkers perceive the accommodation as having any impact or potential impact on their own lives. An accommodation can be viewed as relevant for many reasons, work related or not, the general criteria being that the accommodation affects coworkers personally. For example, any accommodation that could signal that the person being accommodated was preferred by the supervisor over other coworkers (e.g., assignment to specific tasks) would be viewed as relevant (cf. Lind & Tyler, 1988). Any accommodation that might be of some value to coworkers (e.g., a special chair or longer lunch breaks) also would be viewed as relevant. And certainly any accommodation that required coworkers to change their behavior (e.g., switching job duties) would be seen as relevant. These are but a few examples.

*Proposition 4: The more an accommodation could potentially impact on coworkers' lives, the more relevant the accommodation would be and, consequently, the more likely it would be that coworkers would form a judgment of the fairness of the accommodation.*

In summary, the visibility of the accommodation, the autonomy of the work environment, the organizational diversity climate, and the degree to which the accommodation affects coworkers personally should influence coworkers to make judgments about the fairness of the accommodation. In turn, the more salient and relevant an accommodation is to coworkers, the more likely it is that they will judge the distributive fairness of the accommodation. I now turn to a discussion of factors affecting fairness judgments.

### **Evaluating the Distributive Fairness of Accommodations: Equity and Need**

The organizational justice literature can be most usefully applied to determine how cowork-

ers will evaluate an accommodation as distributively fair. The justice literature has been reviewed elsewhere (e.g., Folger & Greenberg, 1985; Gilliland, 1993; Greenberg, 1987, 1990a; Tyler, 1994) and thus will not be reviewed here. Rather, I focus on how coworkers may evaluate distributive fairness in terms of equity and need considerations and the factors that are likely to impact these judgments.

Scholars have proposed several types of decision rules individuals use when making distributive fairness judgments (e.g., Deutsch, 1975; Leventhal, 1976). Before the factors affecting perceptions of distributive fairness can be discussed, one must specify the decision rule being employed, because different rules will lead to the consideration of different factors. Here I focus on equity- and need-based rules—equity rules because they are thought to be the most common type of rule used in work situations (Greenberg, 1990a; Leventhal, 1976), and need rules because nondisabled people often employ a “needy” script (Jones et al., 1984) when interacting with persons with disabilities. Indeed, most theoretical treatments (e.g., Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984; Katz, 1981; Stone & Colella, 1996) of how people react to others with disabilities include a component suggesting “sympathy effects” or a “norm to be kind” (Hastorf, Northcraft, & Picciotto, 1979). These effects have been proposed to occur for a variety of reasons, such as low expectations and norms regarding how one should treat those who are “less fortunate.” Thus, there is good reason to suggest that distributive fairness judgments may likely be governed by need-based rules, along with equity rules, when the accommodation concerns a person with a disability.

Another common rule for determining distributive fairness is the equality rule (Deutsch, 1975; Leventhal, 1976), which states that everyone be treated equally. This rule is not given specific attention in the model because strict adherence to it would suggest that accommodations, in general, be considered unfair because they are a form of special or individualized treatment. Thus, I focus solely on equity and need.

**Equity rule.** The equity rule, which serves as the basis of Adam’s (1965) equity theory, suggests that people will evaluate an act or outcome as fair or unfair by comparing their own input/outcome ratio to that of a comparison other. This follows from a resource-based model

of justice, which states that people are either motivated to maximize their own outcomes relative to their investments (Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978) or to maximize their control over outcomes (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Coworkers operating under an equity motive would judge the fairness of an accommodation in terms of how the accommodation altered the accommodated person’s input/outcome ratio relative to their own. This is a self-interest motive influenced by several factors.

First, an accommodation that is viewed as making work easier for the comparison other will likely be judged as unfair, because it relates to the perception of the amount of contribution the comparison person is making. In other words, it relates to perceptions of the accommodated person’s input into the equity equation. It should be kept in mind that the ADA focuses only on essential job duties. However, coworkers may consider other contextual or extrarole task-related dimensions of performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1993) as part of the total input or contribution equation. Thus, to the extent that the accommodation limits the accommodated employee from performing extrarole duties, such as organizational citizenship behaviors (Organ, 1990), it will also likely be perceived as unfair. In other words, if coworkers perceive that the accommodation makes the accommodated person a “poor citizen” because it excuses him or her from “nonessential” duties, they may perceive the accommodation as unfair.

Second, perceptions of distributive unfairness may occur when coworkers perceive that accommodating another increases their own inputs, especially when they do not receive a commensurate increase in rewards. Any accommodation that requires the time, energy, or resources of coworkers may be perceived as unfair, unless they perceive an increase in rewards (or perhaps a decrease in the rewards to the accommodated person). Examples of such an accommodation include when a coworker is asked to handle the job duties of an employee given longer rest breaks or when a coworker is required to engage in an undesirable task from which the accommodated person has been made exempt.

Third, perceptions of unfairness may result when coworkers perceive that the accommodation increases the levels of the accommodated person’s rewards or outcomes. This is likely to

occur when the accommodation is viewed as a valuable resource or perk. Examples of accommodations that would be perceived as valuable by coworkers include special chairs, being able to sit while at work, flexible hours, rest periods, working at home, and exemption from stressful tasks.

Finally, if it is perceived that coworkers' own rewards or outcomes have been reduced because of the accommodation, then perceptions of unfairness are likely to result. There are several ways in which an accommodation may be perceived as influencing a coworker's own rewards. First, an accommodation may be viewed as using up valuable resources that could be given to or used by others. For example, when money is spent on special assistive technology, coworkers may think that the money could have been used for more personally beneficial causes (even if this is unlikely). Second, an accommodation may require resources or effort on the part of coworkers and perhaps, in actuality or in coworkers' perceptions, be detrimental either to coworkers' ability to perform their own jobs or to the satisfaction they derive from their jobs. For example, if an accommodation requires that a coworker take on extra undesirable tasks, he or she may become less satisfied with the job. Finally, if rewards are meted out on a competitive basis (e.g., merit pay and promotions), certain accommodations may be viewed as providing a performance advantage, making the accommodated person more competitive in the eyes of coworkers. However, if rewards are based on group performance, accommodations viewed as enhancing another group member's performance also will be seen as relevant, although in this case reactions will probably be more positive.

The following proposition summarizes the factors thought to influence equity judgments regarding the accommodation of a coworker.

*Proposition 5: Coworkers using an equity rule will be more likely to view an accommodation as distributively unfair to the extent that any one of the following conditions is met: (a) the accommodation is perceived to make the accommodated person's work easier (i.e., reduces other's inputs); (b) the accommodation is perceived to make coworkers' own work more difficult (i.e.,*

*increases own inputs); (c) the accommodation is perceived as a reward or perk (i.e., increases other's outcomes); and/or (d) the accommodation is perceived as using scarce resources, making aspects of coworkers' jobs less desirable, or as causing coworkers to lose competitive rewards (i.e., decreases own outcomes).*

**Need rule.** Under the equity rule, I proposed that fairness be judged in terms of the impact it has on input/outcome comparisons. In other words, equity judgments are based on self-interest motives. Distributive fairness perceptions in the workplace traditionally have been thought of as focusing mostly on equity concerns (e.g., Greenberg, 1990a). There is evidence from the disability literature, however, that suggests that nondisabled people may also employ a need rule when engaging with persons with disabilities. There appears to be a stereotype applied to persons with disabilities depicting them as needy, helpless, and deserving of special treatment (Colella, 1996; Makas, 1988; Stone & Colella, 1996). Jones et al. (1984) describe how often nondisabled people, when interacting with persons with disabilities, act according to a "child among adults" script. This script includes condescension, the granting of special favors and help, and adherence to the "norm to be kind" (Hastorf et al., 1979). Indeed, persons with disabilities often complain that others often offer too much help (e.g., Robinson, 1995). Finally, as Greenberg (1990b) succinctly argues, the appearance of being fair and considerate is often integral to one's self-identity, which, when combined with a general "norm to be kind" toward persons with disabilities, suggests that the need rule may be particularly likely to be used when the accommodation is for disability purposes. Indeed, the need motive seems to underlay the reasoning behind the ADA that stipulates that accommodation be granted according to individual needs.

The need motive (Deutsch, 1975) indicates that fairness is determined by meeting the individual needs of workgroup members. In terms of accommodation, this suggests that rather than judge the accommodation in terms of its effect on equity comparisons, coworkers judge based on their perceptions of the degree to which the accommodation is needed or warranted. In other

words, to what extent do coworkers believe that the person being accommodated has a "legitimate" disability and that the accommodation is related to addressing the person's impairments so that he or she may function on the job? This question is best answered by the person who has the disability or by a doctor. Coworkers, however, are likely to form their own answers.

I propose several factors below that may influence coworker perceptions of warrantedness. These are grouped as characteristics of the disability, characteristics of the accommodation, past history of the person being accommodated, and characteristics of the coworker. To my knowledge no specific empirical literature exists in which researchers address the question of perceptions of the warrantedness of workplace accommodation. Thus, the propositions below are derived from the more general disability literature (see Stone & Colella, 1996, for a review).

Ample evidence in the popular press and in anecdotal accounts of managers suggests that a major issue in coworkers' reactions to accommodation is whether or not the coworker is perceived to have a "legitimate" disability. Indeed, a recent survey of case law on the ADA (Lee, 1998) demonstrates that the most common reason plaintiffs lose ADA lawsuits is because courts rule that the plaintiff does not truly have a disability. Furthermore, a great deal of disability research (see Stone & Colella, 1996, for a review) has shown that people react more negatively to some disabilities than to others. It seems reasonable to assume that if coworkers are told a person is being given an accommodation because of his or her disability, they will make judgments about whether that person truly has a "disability" warranting an accommodation.

Three characteristics of disability are likely to lead to accommodation being seen as unwarranted: invisibility, social undesirability, and the belief that the disability is self-caused.

When a disability is invisible (e.g., depression or back pain), coworkers may not believe that the person who has the disability is actually disabled. Indeed, coworkers may question whether the person is faking the disability to get an accommodation if the disability is not readily apparent.

Some disabilities elicit more negative reactions than others (Combs & Omvig, 1986; Fuqua,

Rathbun, & Gade, 1984; Jones et al., 1984; Tringo, 1970)—that is, they are seen as more socially undesirable. For example, psychological disorders (e.g., depression) are likely to be reacted to more negatively than physical disabilities (e.g., paraplegia) or sensory disabilities (e.g., deafness; Harasymiw, Horne, & Lewis, 1976). Indeed, the popular press has presented many articles discussing the negative reactions that take place when accommodations are provided for mental disabilities (e.g., Rosenberg, 1998; Sandra, 1996; Vander Waerdt & Dailey-Thomas, 1994).

Finally, research has demonstrated that reactions to persons with disabilities are more negative when the disability is believed to be self-caused (Bordieri & Drehmer, 1987; Bordieri, Drehmer, & Cominel, 1988; Weiner, 1979; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). For example, one would expect reactions to be more negative toward a person who was in a wheelchair because he was driving while intoxicated and caused an accident than if he was in an accident caused by another person. Thus, I propose here that when coworkers perceive the disability to be self-caused, they will perceive any accommodation of that disability as less warranted (see also Cleveland et al., 1997).

*Proposition 6: To the extent that coworkers perceive an accommodation to be made for invisible disabilities, socially undesirable disabilities, and/or disabilities perceived to be self-caused, the less likely it is that they will view the accommodation as warranted and, consequently, distributively fair according to the need rule.*

The nature of the accommodation also may influence whether the accommodation is perceived as warranted. Any accommodation that can be viewed as intrinsically valuable on the part of the person requesting the accommodation can bring up suspicions that the person is "faking it" to receive the accommodation. Thus, any accommodation that is believed by coworkers to facilitate performance (e.g., extra time) or to lead to more a pleasant work situation (e.g., rest periods, more comfortable chairs) can result in coworker belief that the accommodation is unwarranted, because it can lead to attributions that the accommodation was requested for util-

itarian motives unrelated to addressing the impairment.

*Proposition 7: To the extent that coworkers perceive an employee is requesting accommodation for utilitarian motives, unrelated to addressing the impairment, the less likely it is that they will view the accommodation as warranted and, consequently, distributively fair according to the need rule.*

Coworkers also may make judgments about whether an accommodation is "needed" for a specific disability when trying to determine if the accommodation is warranted. In other words, they may ask, "Does the accommodation 'fit' the impairment?" It has been demonstrated that people hold stereotypes about what jobs or tasks persons with specific disabilities can and cannot do (Colella, DeNisi, & Varma, 1998; Colella & Varma, 1999; Grand, Bernier, & Strohmer, 1982; Miller, 1992; Strohmer, Grand, & Purcell, 1984). It may be that people also hold stereotypes about what the appropriate or necessary accommodations are for specific disabilities. In any event, coworkers vary in their understanding of what is needed to accommodate various disabilities. For example, most people would agree that a large-print computer monitor is an appropriate accommodation for someone with a severe visual impairment or that a ramp is needed by someone in a wheelchair. But would most nondisabled people believe that frequent absences are needed by someone with kidney disease (so that he or she can receive dialysis treatments)? Perhaps, with clear description about the nature of the disease and treatment, but in many cases such an intervention would be severely imposing on the privacy of the person being accommodated.

Another issue related to whether coworkers perceive that the accommodation fits the disability is how they define the purpose of the accommodation. According to the 1991 *Americans with Disabilities Act Handbook*, reasonable work accommodations are to be provided so that employees with disabilities can perform the essential functions of the job and have equal access to the benefits and privileges of work enjoyed by other employees. It is doubtful that most employees are familiar with the wording of the ADA and the intention of the reasonable

accommodation stipulation. Even if coworkers are familiar with this language, the wording is still vague enough to allow for different interpretations. Indeed, research on how people construe affirmative action plans has demonstrated that individual definitions vary (Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998; Kravitz et al., 1997; Kravitz & Platania, 1993). It is likely that coworkers vary in the extent to which they believe someone should be accommodated. For example, should accommodations be provided so that the person can function at a reasonable level or at the very best possible level? Should accommodations that have no direct impact on job performance be provided? The manner in which coworkers define the reasons for accommodation in the first place will influence whether or not they judge the accommodation to be warranted.

*Proposition 8: To the extent that coworkers perceive an accommodation to be inappropriate for addressing impairments, the less likely it is that they will view the accommodation as warranted and, consequently, distributively fair according to the need rule.*

Past history is also a factor that may contribute to how persons with disabilities are treated at work (Klimoski & Donahue, 1997; Stone & Colella, 1996). When people work together over a period of time, they develop expectations about how tolerant they will be of certain individuals breaking the group norms. Valued or long-term members can accrue a certain amount of idiosyncrasy credits (Katz & Kahn, 1978) that allow them the freedom to deviate from normatively prescribed behavior. Thus, if the accommodation is being provided to a person with a great deal of idiosyncrasy credits, then it is expected that this accommodation will be viewed as more warranted than an accommodation granted to an individual who is expected to adhere closely to group norms. This also is supported by Stone and Colella's (1996) proposition that the status and performance of people with disabilities will be positively related to how they are treated at work.

*Proposition 9: To the extent that the accommodated person is valued and/or integrated into the workgroup, the more likely it is that coworkers*

*will view the accommodation as warranted and, consequently, distributively fair according to the need rule.*

Researchers have conducted much empirical work on individual correlates of reactions and attitudes toward persons with disabilities (see reviews by Livneh, 1982; Schneider & Anderson, 1980; and Stone & Colella, 1996). Research has consistently demonstrated that aggressiveness, anxiety, and dogmatism are negatively related to attitudes toward persons with disabilities and that tolerance for ambiguity is positively related to attitudes (Stone & Colella, 1996). People with negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities are more likely to view any accommodation as unwarranted.

*Proposition 10: To the extent that coworkers are low on tolerance for ambiguity and/or high on aggressiveness, anxiety, or dogmatism, the less likely it is that they will view a given accommodation as warranted and, consequently, distributively fair according to the need rule.*

In summary, the factors considered by coworkers when making distributive fairness judgments depend on the justice rules being employed. Equity and need concerns would lead coworkers to consider different factors. For example, whether or not the accommodation required coworkers to give up valuable resources would be of most concern for equity reasons, whereas whether or not the accommodation adequately addressed the accommodated person's impairment would be a concern for need reasons. There is no reason to believe that both sets of rules cannot operate at the same time (Klimoski & Donahue, 1997); however, extant literature can help us predict when need rules may or may not be important. I now turn to a discussion of this portion of the model.

**Factors affecting the use of the need rule.** Earlier I suggested that, in work situations, distributive fairness judgments would be based primarily upon equity concerns but that when a person with a disability was the comparison other, need rules might also be invoked. Others have acknowledged that both rules may operate at the same time (Klimoski & Donahue, 1996). However, since equity concerns seem to be the major impetus behind most research on distrib-

utive fairness in the workplace, some attention should be given here to predict when coworkers will or will not be likely to use a need rule as well. In this section of the article, I present factors that I predict will influence coworkers' likelihood of employing a need rule and, thus, shifting their focus from solely self-interest concerns to include considerations of the warrantedness of the accommodation. Presenting a comprehensive set of factors thought to influence the use of various distributive fairness rules is beyond the scope of this article. Thus, I focus on those factors particularly relevant to an accommodation and disability scenario.

In very little research have scholars focused on the use of need rules to judge fairness in U.S. work organizations; the popular press, however, seems to suggest that employers are becoming more concerned with individual needs (Cleveland et al., 1997). Certainly, recent legislation such as the ADA and the Family and Medical Leave Act stipulate that work organizations take individual needs into consideration. Also, the literature on organizational citizenship behaviors (Organ, 1990) indicates that an important part of overall job performance is one's willingness to be a good citizen, which includes accepting, helping, and supporting the individual needs of others (e.g., Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Therefore, there is reason to believe that coworkers do use need rules to judge distributive fairness in the workplace, at least in some scenarios.

Both the justice and the disability literature lead to propositions regarding when coworkers will be most likely to use a need rule to judge the distributive fairness of an accommodation. Leventhal (1976) describes several factors likely to influence whether a need rule is adopted. One such factor is the degree of social responsibility felt by the potential helper—in this case, the coworker. Leventhal (1976) suggests that as the degree of social responsibility increases, so will reliance on the need rule to determine fairness. As a coworker feels more social responsibility toward others, he or she will be more likely to use a need rule to judge the fairness of resource allocations given to that person. Research on employee values also supports this proposition. In this research scholars have found that people who value social responsibility or concern for others (generically referred to as "other-oriented values") are more likely to engage in helping

behaviors and less likely to rely on rational cost-benefit rules (Korsgaard, Meglino, & Lester, 1996; McNeely & Meglino, 1994; Simon, 1993).

*Proposition 11: The more coworkers hold social responsibility or "other-oriented" values, the more likely it will be that they use a need rule to judge the distributive fairness of an accommodation.*

Another factor suggested by Leventhal (1976) is the emotional involvement and liking that the helper feels toward the recipient. On a related note, research on altruism has also shown that helping increases when helpers feel empathy toward the recipient (e.g., Batson et al., 1997). In the disability literature researchers make a similar prediction. Katz's (1981) response amplification hypothesis states that nondisabled people amplify their responses toward persons with disabilities because of ambivalent affect (pity and caring on the one hand and negative feelings, such as repulsion, on the other). Thus, in situations in which a person would be responded to positively, responses (such as helping) would be even more positive when the person had a disability. In this case one would expect the need motive to be utilized.

*Proposition 12: The more coworkers feel empathy toward and liking for the accommodated person, the more likely it will be that they use a need rule to judge the distributive fairness of an accommodation.*

Finally, Leventhal (1976) states that as one's desire to protect resources increases, one is less likely to employ a need rule. This coincides with the disability literature (Jones et al., 1984; Stone & Colella, 1996), in which it is proposed that treatment of persons with disabilities at work becomes worse as resources become scarcer.

*Proposition 13: The more scarce the resources, the less likely it will be that coworkers use a need rule to judge the distributive fairness of an accommodation.*

Disability research has also shown that overly helpful or kind behavior toward persons with disabilities disappears when the actor's own work or outcomes depend on the performance or behavior of the person with a disability (Colella

et al., 1998; Russell et al., 1985; Stone & Michaels, 1993, 1994). For example, Colella et al. (1998) found that "norm to be kind" effects disappeared when subjects' own rewards were dependent on the performance of the person with a disability. Stone and Michaels (1994) found that the "norm to be kind" disappeared in competitive task situations.

*Proposition 14: The greater the work interdependence between coworkers and the accommodated person, the less likely it will be that coworkers use a need rule to judge the distributive fairness of an accommodation.*

This proposition may seem counterintuitive. Why would a coworker be less likely to consider a coworker's needs when his or her own outcome depends on that person's performance? If we assume that coworkers believe that the accommodation will help his or her colleague with a disability to perform better, then Proposition 14 may not hold. However, if coworkers are applying the need rule because they are obeying the "norm to be kind," not because they believe that the accommodation will advance their coworker's performance, then they may be reluctant to expend the energy and resources to meet coworker needs at the possible expense of hurting their own performance.

In summary, equity and need rules may, in tandem, govern distributive fairness judgments. Although we can assume that the equity rule is usually operative in work situations, we cannot be so certain when need rules will be employed. Here I have proposed that coworkers' concern for others, empathy and liking toward the accommodated person, scarcity of resources, and outcome interdependence will impact the extent to which the need rule is evoked to judge the fairness of an accommodation.

## DISCUSSION

The accommodation stipulation of the ADA is essentially a new issue that organizations are facing. Previous civil rights legislation has not called for accommodation (with the exception of the Family and Medical Leave Act). In the majority of management research, scholars have focused only on the cost or legal issues surrounding accommodation due to disability, yet this is a phenomenon that can impact organiza-

tions in many other ways, such as coworker reactions. This article is meant to serve as a guide for future research on this essentially ignored but timely and crucial topic.

Here I have developed a model that can help explain the factors influencing when and how coworkers will judge the fairness of an accommodation provided to a coworker with a disability. The model, presented in Figure 1, summarizes the propositions made. Essentially, in this model I posit factors that should influence the salience and relevance of accommodations and, consequently, lead coworkers to make distributive fairness judgments. I then focus on factors that will influence distributive fairness perceptions through equity-based considerations of input/output comparisons and/or need judgments based on the perceived warrantedness of the accommodation.

Over the past ten years, researchers have done a great deal of work examining the various personnel policies and procedures from an organizational justice framework (e.g., Gilliland, 1993; Truxillo & Bauer, 1999). However, an accommodation scenario offers new challenges and perhaps some assumptions different from other policies and procedures (e.g., selection procedures, performance appraisal). First, as described earlier, need rules may play an important role in determining distributive fairness judgments. Previous research along these lines has been focused mainly on equity-based rules. Second, the issue of warrantedness is unique to the accommodation scenario. In other words, in very little literature have researchers addressed the general question of when and why a certain personnel decision is viewed as warranted or "needed" by the employee to whom it is being applied. This is an extremely important concern in examining fairness perceptions regarding accommodation due to disability, and it might apply to other scenarios as well. Finally, the current model focuses on the salience and relevance of the accommodation. These are issues that have not emerged in other research on the fairness of various personnel procedures or policies. This aspect of the model also suggests that managers wishing to avoid negative reaction on the part of coworkers may work with employees with disabilities to determine means to make accommodations as little salient and relevant to others as possible. Apart from these

unique aspects of this model, this article also leads to suggestions for future research.

### Future Research

This model can easily be used to generate empirical research on when and how accommodations will be judged as fair. However, it emphasizes the salience and relevance of accommodations as factors that trigger when judgments of fairness will take place, which suggests that, methodologically, in future work on this issue, researchers should at least make sure that accommodations are salient and relevant if they want to examine how people react to an accommodation. Extant research on disability issues at work has been criticized for ignoring the "relevant" aspect of the interaction context (Stone, Stone, & Dipboye, 1992). This is not to suggest that lab research would be inappropriate but that any research should place respondents in meaningful scenarios.

Future research should also be focused on the extent to which coworkers use equity, need, or a combination of both in judging the distributive fairness of an accommodation. I have extended specific propositions about factors likely to influence reliance on the need rule. This issue has received relatively little attention in the literature on the justice of personnel decision outcomes. However, examining the accommodation for disability scenario has underscored the importance of examining employees' various rules for judging distributive fairness.

Another area for future conceptual and empirical work is procedural justice perceptions of accommodations. Earlier I suggested that the typical accommodation scenario is one in which common rules of procedural justice may not be applied in order to protect the privacy of the person being accommodated. This raises the question of how coworkers can maintain positive procedural justice perceptions when specific rules for procedural justice cannot be followed.

Factors that may impact procedural justice judgments include rules, agreements, or norms governing how employees are to be treated. Bargaining agreements, which stipulate specific terms of employment and rewards, are one example. Group norms regarding the flexibility of employer rewards and employee contributions also may influence procedural justice percep-

tions of an accommodation. One theoretical framework that is useful for examining the impact of such norms is Tsui and colleagues' (Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Hite, 1995; Tsui, Pearce, Porter, & Tripoli, 1997) description of the employee-employer exchange relationship.

Coworkers' perceptions of the organization in overall terms of procedural justice (i.e., how the organization handles most decisions) also may influence how coworkers react to the accommodation, regardless of the procedures followed in granting the accommodation. Perceptions of general procedural justice have been hypothesized to influence the degree to which employees perceive that their organization is supportive (Fasolo, 1995; Shore & Shore, 1995), and it has been found that perceptions of organizational support lead to more altruistic behavior (Shore & Wayne, 1993). Thus, coworkers' perceptions of procedural justice of an accommodation may depend on perceptions of general organizational procedural justice or organizational support.

In future research scholars should also focus on how distributive and procedural justice judgments interact to influence more specific reactions. Recently, Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996) concluded that distributive and procedural justice perceptions interact to influence reactions across many types of scenarios and for many types of reactions. The form of this interaction is such that procedural justice perceptions have a much stronger impact on reactions when outcome favorability is negative. Thus, both distributive and procedural justice perceptions should be examined when one is considering more distal outcomes, such as satisfaction, aggression, retaliation, and willingness to help.

## Conclusion

As we move into the twenty-first century, we can clearly see that the importance of accommodations for persons with disabilities at work will increase. Organizations will continue to spend money to ensure that they are acting within the law, that they can effectively tap into underutilized labor pools to meet the growing labor shortage demands, and that they are providing all their employees with every opportunity to perform effectively on the job. Yet it is also clear that as the number of accommodations increases, so does the potential for negative reactions by coworkers. Organizations cannot sim-

ply bow to the concerns of these coworkers and eliminate accommodations (nor should they want to do so), but they must still be concerned that perceptions of unfairness and favoritism by the nondisabled employees may become a serious problem. In the past, organizations have attempted to ensure fair and just treatment of employees by standardizing policies and treatment procedures; the ADA (1990), however, states that fair and just treatment may sometimes only be achieved by nonstandard accommodation (Rosenberg, 1998).

We need to understand how this impacts on all stakeholders involved in the accommodation process, including workgroup members. To date, there has been little research in which scholars have directly examined how and why coworkers react the way they do to accommodations in the workplace. In this article I have proposed a model and some guidance for how research in the future might try to assess these reactions. Hopefully, this will provide the impetus and the framework needed to develop a better understanding of how an organization can simultaneously serve its employees with disabilities through accommodations and still not alienate its nondisabled employees.

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