

**When We Don't See Eye to Eye:
Discrepancies Between Supervisors and Subordinates in Absence Disciplinary Decisions**

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RUNNING HEAD: DISCREPANCIES IN ABSENCE DISCIPLINARY DECISIONS

This paper has not undergone formal review or approval of the faculty of the ILR School. It is intended to make results of Center Research, conferences, and projects available to others interested in human resource management in preliminary form to encourage discussion and suggestions.

Abstract

This study provided a within-subjects assessment of the factors associated with absence disciplinary decisions for both supervisors and subordinates. In addition, this study examined discrepancies in disciplinary decisions between a supervisor and his or her subordinates based on differences in psychological and demographic attributes. A sample of non-academic employees from 19 intact triads (one supervisor; two subordinates) at a large Midwest university responded to hypothetical scenarios describing factors that might contribute to absence disciplinary decisions. The results demonstrated that both supervisors and subordinates consider the same set of factors as relevant to disciplinary decisions. Furthermore, with few exceptions, psychological and demographic differences between supervisors and subordinates related positively to discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. The implications of these findings for managing disciplinary programs in organizations are discussed.

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A major purpose of organizational disciplinary policies is to establish the boundaries for acceptable employee behavior (Arvey & Jones, 1985). To meet this objective, it is critical that supervisors respond to violations of the organization policy in a consistent manner (Redeker, 1989). Furthermore, it is important that supervisors and their subordinates see eye to eye on what is acceptable discipline in response to an employee transgression for particular circumstances. To date, scholars have studied the decision making processes managers and supervisors engage in when responding to employee insubordination (Klaas & Wheeler, 1990), substance abuse violations (Klaas & Dell'Omo, 1991), and employee absenteeism (Martocchio, 1992a). While these researchers investigated supervisor decision making consistency, there has not been any research that compares the decision making processes of supervisors and their subordinates regarding acceptable absence disciplinary responses.

Not seeing eye to eye may have significant consequences for the employer. One potential consequence is a compromised disciplinary procedure. Disciplinary procedures can be thought of as arising out of negotiations between employees and the employer that focus on balancing the distinct interests and goals maintained by these groups (Scott, 1987). Once in place, disciplinary procedures provide guidance to members of differing groups, and these agreements establish constraints on what may be regarded as an acceptable course of action (Simon, 1964). Furthermore, disciplinary procedures serve as a check on the maintenance of the negotiated agreement regarding acceptable versus unacceptable employee behavior in the work place (Arvey & Jones, 1985; Scott, 1987). Discrepancies in disciplinary decisions may signify a potential breakdown in this negotiated order, which is likely to result in a rise in grievance activity (Ichniowski, 1986). In practical terms, increased grievance activity represents a charge by employees that their agreement with management has been violated (Slichter, Healy, & Livernash, 1960). Discrepancies also

may be a sign that the behavioral constraints intended by the policies are not effective because they are not unequivocally perceived. In such a situation, failure of the disciplinary system in motivating desired behavior may result.

Further potential consequences stemming from grievance activity are some combination of a displacement effect (Katz, Kochan, & Weber, 1985) and a worker reaction effect (Slichter et al., 1960). The displacement effect, defined as the number of paid employee-hours needed to process the grievance that otherwise would have been devoted directly to production tasks (Katz et al., 1985), has been shown to be inversely related to productivity (Ichniowski, 1986). Disciplinary decisions that are discordant with expectations may result in a displacement effect due to increased grievance activity. The worker reaction effect refers to a change in employees' effort when they perceive that work place practices are being applied inconsistently or unfairly (Slichter et al., 1960). Behavioral reactions are hypothesized as outcomes of felt inequity (Ichniowski, 1986). In the case of disciplinary decisions, it is reasonable to expect employees to feel inequity when management sanctions differ from subordinate expectations. There is some evidence for the worker reaction effect. Recently, Klaas, Heneman, and Olson (1991) found that policy grievances, which an employee uses to challenge management's interpretation of policy and contract provisions, were associated with increases in subsequent undesirable employee behavior such as unsanctioned absence within work units.

Based on these concerns, two questions regarding disciplinary decisions warrant study. First, do supervisors and subordinates make similar disciplinary decisions in response to absenteeism? Second, what are the possible antecedents of discrepancies between supervisors and subordinates in absence disciplinary decisions? We draw on past research on employee discipline systems, as they relate to absence in particular, to determine which factors are most important in influencing disciplinary decisions using a policy capturing approach. We then use past theory and empirical evidence to hypothesize and test the factors that cause supervisors and subordinates to differ in absence disciplinary

decisions. In particular, Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition framework (ASA) and Pfeffer's (1983) model of organizational demography (OD) provided theoretical justification for this research. Both emphasize that the personal attributes of the individuals who make up an organization's work force, and the interpersonal context created by the mix of personal attributes represented in the work force, are key determinants of behavior. In this case, the negotiated order that is manifested in the disciplinary procedures sets the stage for examining discrepancies in absence disciplinary decisions.

We chose to study absence disciplinary decisions because employee absenteeism has been widely recognized by practitioners and researchers as an important organizational issue (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). Because of its potentially disruptive effects on an organization's work flow (Atkin & Goodman, 1984), individual job performance (Bycio, 1992), and its financial burden on organizations (Martocchio, 1992b), managers and supervisors have a vested interest in minimizing absence levels. One legitimate way managers and supervisors can curtail absence is through disciplinary sanctions that are typically specified in their organization's formal absence control policy. As indicated earlier, if these policies are to be effective, they must be perceived in the way that was intended by management. Thus, disagreements between supervisors and subordinates about the application of the procedures to specific cases signal a breakdown of the disciplinary system.

Whereas some absence control policies are based on a no-fault system in which there is no judgment about the legitimacy of the absence (viz., Kuzmits, 1981), others distinguish between legitimate versus illegitimate reasons for absence occurrences. The latter typically require substantially more supervisory discretion in judging the legitimacy of particular absence occurrences, and are more prevalent in organizations (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). Although an organizational policy may specify a range of appropriate disciplinary actions, discipline for an employee depends largely on a judgment made by a supervisor.

Theoretical Basis

Schneider's Attraction-Selection-Attrition Framework

Schneider (1987) has argued that psychological attributes of people, not the organizational technology or organizational structure, are the fundamental determinants of behavior in organizations. Schneider's claim relies on a similarity-attraction paradigm in which similarity is a key antecedent of interpersonal attraction (Byrne, 1971). In that paradigm, similarity has the effect of reducing the psychological distance between individuals, which is associated with attraction (Byrne, Clore, & Smeaton, 1986). Dissimilarity, on the other hand, has the effect of increasing the psychological distance between individuals, which is associated with repulsion (Rosenbaum, 1986).

Based on these principles of similarity and dissimilarity, Schneider (1987) maintains that individuals are systematically attracted to, are selected by, and remain in an organization based on psychological attributes. After the new members enter the organization, their interaction with more tenured members of the organization are likely to influence the feelings of both parties. If both parties are dissatisfied with the match, pressures form, and these members leave. Differences in personal attributes among group members are likely to be associated with poor matches (Schneider, 1987). There is some support for this prediction (Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin, & Peyronnin, 1991; O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989).

Over time, these processes bring about psychologically homogeneous work groups (George, 1990; Jackson et al., 1991). However, at any point in time, there is likely to be dissimilarities among members: Selection is typically an ongoing activity, which means there are probably differences in employees' socialization experiences at any point in time (Schuler, 1992). An implication of differences in socialization experiences is that some employees may fit well within the organization, and others may not (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). One way in which poor fit may be realized is through supervisors' discrepant views on appropriate discipline (Arvey & Jones, 1985).

Pfeffer's Organizational Demography Model

The main tenet of Pfeffer's (1983) organizational demography model is that the demographic compositions of organizations influence behavioral patterns. Unlike ASA, which examines an individual's similarity within groups of individuals, Pfeffer's model considers the organization as the unit and considers demographic or fixed rather than psychological or malleable characteristics. In this model, similarity effects are expected to influence organizational homogeneity through their influence on the frequency of communication. Research has demonstrated that increased demographic similarity relates positively to frequency of communication (Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989) and liking (Ducheon, Green, & Taber, 1986; Pfeffer, 1983; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Tsui and O'Reilly (1989) extended the organizational demography model by focussing on relational demography, which refers to the study of comparative demographic characteristics of members of dyads or groups who are in a position to engage in regular interactions. For this unit of analysis, Tsui and O'Reilly argued that strong communication among the interacting members of a dyad would explain relational demographic effects in addition to interpersonal attraction. They found that increasing dissimilarity in superior-subordinate demographic characteristics was associated with lower effectiveness as perceived by superiors, less personal attraction on the part of superiors for subordinates, and increased role ambiguity experienced by subordinates.

Together, the OD and ASA models are useful for examining discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. An underlying premise of both models is that psychological and demographic similarity reflect compatibility in interests and goals between individuals and groups of individuals; psychological and demographic dissimilarity reflect poor matches. When disciplinary procedures are viewed as a mechanism to balance the interests of employees and the employer, psychological and demographic similarity between the subordinate and supervisor is likely to result in uniform disciplinary decisions. Logically,

psychological and demographic dissimilarity is likely to result in discrepant disciplinary decisions.

Hypotheses

On the basis of an elicitation study conducted by Martocchio (1992a), six decision making factors were hypothesized to influence absence disciplinary decisions. These consist of the following: (a) absentee absence history, (b) absentee job performance, (c) absentee criticality to the department, (d) absentee's ability to attend work, (e) absentee status, and (f) approved absence versus absence not approved. First, we hypothesize the relative effect of these factors which are expected to influence absence disciplinary decisions. Then, on the basis of the ASA and OD frameworks, we hypothesize variables that are expected to cause differences between supervisors and subordinates in absence disciplinary decisions. The rationale for each of these sets of influences follows.

Influences on Absence Disciplinary Decisions

In terms of discipline, historical behaviors might be particularly relevant with respect to absence, where a history of past absences provides adequate justification for disciplinary actions (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). When absence is deemed by the employer as a violation of acceptable behavior, progressive discipline systems sanction increasingly severe discipline for repeat offenses (Ballagh, Maxwell, & Perea, 1987). Not responding to repeat offenses with progressively harsh discipline would be tantamount to an endorsement by management that unacceptable behaviors, such as absence, are acceptable.

Hypothesis 1: The amount of absences in an absentee's work history will be positively related to the severity of disciplinary decision by (a) supervisors and (b) subordinates.

It is expected that an employee's prior job performance, a key aspect of prior work history, will have an impact on the severity of discipline (Klaas, 1989). Arbitration precedents indicate that arbiters have considered aspects of the grievant's work history in order to determine whether the disciplinary sanction was for "just cause" (Elkouri &

Elkouri, 1981). Klaas (1989) argued that managers would be more likely to consider a worker's work history where that individual has proven to be a productive employee. For others, managers would be more inclined not to consider a worker's work history because the primary concern is to motivate these employees to improve their behavior. Given the cumulative evidence which indicates that absenteeism and job performance are inversely related (Bycio, 1992), it is reasonable to expect supervisors to have relatively low tolerance for absence violations to the extent that these have a negative impact on an employee's job performance.

Hypothesis 2: Below average absentee job performance will lead to a more severe disciplinary decision than above average absentee job performance by (a) supervisors and (b) subordinates.

Klaas and Wheeler (1990) have argued that line managers, through their discretion over the severity of a disciplinary sanction, influence the allocation of human resources to various factors of production. Specifically, where demand for labor is inelastic, they maintained that the cost of disciplinary action is likely to increase as the severity of the action increases. In a laboratory study, Heerwagen, Beach, and Mitchell (1985) demonstrated that a supervisor's perception of the costs of disciplinary action is inversely related to the managers' willingness to take action. In a field context, Boise (1965) found that a worker's value to his department influenced supervisory choice of penalty for rule violation. Specifically, supervisors were less willing to impose penalties on subordinates when their skills were in short supply for fear of angering the subordinate into quitting as a result of disciplinary action.

Hypothesis 3: An absentee whose criticality to his/her department is high will lead to a less severe disciplinary decision than for an absentee whose criticality to his/her department is low by (a) supervisors and (b) subordinates.

Rosen and Jerdee (1974) found that disciplinary action was significantly less serious for violators whose ability to attend was limited. Attribution theory provides rationale.

Research has shown that when external attributions (i.e., causes beyond the employee's control) were made about the reasons for an employee's action, the severity of the supervisory response was less than when internal attributions (i.e., causes within the employee's control) were made by the supervisors (Green & Liden, 1980). To the extent that personal illness renders a worker unable to attend work, discipline should be lower than when an employee is able to attend under the tenet that individuals should not be punished for outcomes beyond their control.

Hypothesis 4: An absentee's ability to attend will lead to a more severe disciplinary decision by (a) supervisors and (b) subordinates.

Newly-hired employees of many organizations, including those employed in the organization under study, are designated as probationary status employees for the initial period of employment. During the probationary period, employee performance is monitored frequently. Aspects of performance that are monitored include job-related output based on the particular job, tardiness, and absenteeism. Because a probationary period is a time when one would expect an employee to put his or her "best foot forward," it is likely that a supervisor has high expectations of employee performance. Thus, it is reasonable to expect that disciplinary action, on average, will be more severe for probationary status employees than employees who are beyond the probationary period (Ballagh et al., 1987; Rosenthal, 1979).

Hypothesis 5: Disciplinary decisions will be more severe for probationary status employees than for full status employees by (a) supervisors and (b) subordinates.

Absence approval refers to whether the organization's control policy treats a particular absence occurrence as legitimate or illegitimate. Intuitively, one would expect there to be no discipline in response to an approved absence, and the use of discipline in response to an unapproved absence. This expectation is consistent with the treatment of unapproved absence as a breach of one's duty to report to work (Ballagh et al., 1987).

Consistent with absence control policies, absence approval is typically a key factor that determines the extent of absence discipline (Ballagh et al., 1987; Rosenthal, 1979).

Hypothesis 6: Unapproved absences will lead to more severe disciplinary decisions than approved absences by (a) supervisors and (b) subordinates.

Relational Effects of Personal Attributes on Discrepancies Between Supervisors and Subordinates in Absence Disciplinary Decisions

Consistent with the ASA and OD models, we advance a number of hypotheses that examine the influence of psychological and demographic attributes. However, the structure of our hypotheses follows Tsui and O'Reilly's (1989) work on relational effects in superior-subordinate groups, which is most appropriate for examining disciplinary decisions. The essence of our hypotheses is guided by the expectation that differences between a supervisor and subordinate do explain discrepancies in absence disciplinary decisions. Examining relational effects fits well with our conceptualization of disciplinary procedures as a manifestation of a negotiated order between employees and the employer. This approach holds promise for understanding potential discrepancies in disciplinary procedures.

Consistent with the ASA framework, we argue that differences in psychological attributes between supervisors and their subordinates are likely to explain discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. These factors are (a) attitudes toward discipline, (b) perceptions of organizational justice related to the organization's disciplinary procedures, (c) negative affectivity, and (d) subjective health. Each of these is discussed in turn.

Attitudes toward discipline. Drawing from the literature of judicial decision making, which suggests that attitudes toward punishment play an instrumental role in determining decisions about guilt or innocence (e.g., Moran & Comfort, 1986), Klaas and Dell'Omo (1991) reasoned that such attitudes will also influence disciplinary decisions within the work place. In particular, they hypothesized that those who see punishment as appropriate would be expected to employ punitive decision rules. They based their

hypothesis on the view that an offender must be punished in order to do justice to other members of the organization (Arvey & Jones, 1985). If a supervisor differs from his or her subordinates with respect to the perceived appropriateness of punishment, this is likely to be reflected in differences in willingness to discipline.

Hypothesis 7: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their attitudes toward discipline will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

Organizational justice. Organizational justice refers to the role of fairness as it directly relates to the workplace (Moorman, 1991). Two sources of organizational justice include (a) distributive justice, which describes the fairness of the outcomes an employee receives; and (b) procedural justice, which describes the fairness of the procedures used to determine those outcomes (Folger & Greenberg, 1985). Procedural and distributive justice can be subsumed by an organizational justice construct (Moorman, 1991). An underlying premise of progressive discipline systems is fair and consistent treatment of insubordinate workers in terms of the disciplinary procedure's structure (i.e., procedural justice) and the punishment (i.e., distributive justice) (Ballagh et al., 1987; Belohlav, 1985; Redeker, 1989). In short, that which the decision maker considers fair will likely be manifested in the disciplinary choice. Thus, it seems logical to expect differences in disciplinary choice to vary with differences in fairness perceptions with respect to the procedural and distributive aspects of the disciplinary procedures.

Hypothesis 8: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their perceptions of organizational justice will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

Negative affectivity. Negative affectivity reflects a personality disposition to experience negative emotional states (Watson & Clark, 1984). Individuals high on negative affectivity are more likely to have a negative view of themselves, others, and the world around them, and to interpret ambiguous stimuli negatively (Haney, 1973). Because it is

often not possible to verify the actual causes of an absence incident (Ballagh et al., 1987), one can argue that such causes are somewhat ambiguous. Given the degree of latitude inherent in progressive discipline systems with respect to choice of appropriate discipline, one can argue that differences between individuals in their outlook on life will lead to differences in disciplinary responses to absences.

Hypothesis 9: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their negative affectivity will be positively associated with differences in disciplinary decisions.

Subjective health. Illness is one of most widely used attributions for absence (Morgan & Herman, 1976; Nicholson & Payne, 1987). Therefore, differences in health should yield differences in attributions about the causes -- and justifiability -- of absence occurrences. For example, if a subordinate is ill a great deal and his or her supervisor is rarely ill, it is likely that the subordinate will be more lenient with respect to absence disciplinary decisions because the subordinate may be more understanding of absences (many of which are actually due to illness) and also as a means of rationalizing past absences (Johns & Nicholson, 1982).

Hypothesis 10: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their subjective health perceptions will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

In addition to psychological attributes, the demographic composition of formal organizations is expected to influence behavioral patterns, including those associated with personnel management practices (Pfeffer, 1983). These factors are (a) job tenure, (b) age, (c) education, (d) race and gender, (e) marital status and kinship responsibilities, and (f) absence history.

Job tenure. Consistent with the OD and ASA frameworks, job tenure should reflect a fit between an individual's goals and organizational goals. Cumulative evidence indicates that the longer the job tenure, the better the fit between individual expectations and the reality of organizational life (Premack & Wanous, 1985). It can be argued that similarity in

job tenure between supervisor and his or her subordinate may reflect an underlying good match with respect to working together within the scope of organizational goals. Thus, the more similar supervisors and subordinates are in terms of their respective job tenure, the more similar they should become in terms of their attitudes and behaviors (Schneider, 1987). This propensity to be more similar over time should generalize to attitudes about the disciplinary systems in organizations. A similar effect is predicted by the OD model, where similarity in terms of job tenure is a reflection of demographic similarity (Pfeffer, 1983).

Hypothesis 11: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their job tenure will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

Age. There are age differences in the cognitive processes adults use for problem solving. Whereas younger adult problem solving processes are characterized by formal and rigid thinking, older adult problem solving processes are characterized by subjectivity in reasoning and a reliance on intuition (Datan, Rodeheaver, & Hughes, 1987). Furthermore, research has shown that older managers are more risk averse than younger managers in that they are more likely to select the least risky alternative when faced with a particular situation (Vroom & Pahl, 1971). In the context of making disciplinary decisions, one might expect older individuals to choose less severe discipline than younger individuals. To the extent that certain extreme discipline (e.g., suspension without pay for 10 working days) may result in the insubordinate employee initiating a formal grievance or possibly a lawsuit against the employer, older supervisors may be more likely to choose less "risky" discipline while younger supervisors may be more likely to follow the disciplinary procedure to the letter.

Hypothesis 12: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their age will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

Education. When members of a group differ on education level, they also tend to vary on beliefs and values and may communicate relatively infrequently since they do not

have "language compatibility" (March & Simon, 1958; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). Thus, the supervisor and subordinate may come to have different conceptions of the subordinate's job requirements, resulting in higher role ambiguity and role conflict for the subordinate. Such a difference in job expectations, coupled with the prestige associated with education, may widen both the cognitive and the emotional distance between superior and subordinate.

Hypothesis 13: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their educational attainment will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

Race and gender. In 1991, more white men had supervisory and managerial jobs than women and racial minorities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1992, pp. 185-190), yet, with few exceptions (Jackson et al., 1991; Lincoln & Miller, 1979), there has been little research on the influence of race and gender composition on organizational outcomes. Lincoln and Miller (1979) argued that "While there is little organizational research which takes explicit account of these attributes, there is every reason to presume that they influence organizational processes in important ways" (p. 185). Relying on March and Simon (1958), Lincoln and Miller maintained that differences and similarities in personal attributes such as race and gender among organizational members influence their "language compatibility," which in turn affects the formation of communication patterns. Communications most affected by ascribed individual attributes are those routed through the network of primary ties (i.e., informal social relations) rather than through instrumental ties (i.e., relations characterized by performing appointed work roles). However, ascribed attributes may well influence the network of instrumental ties indirectly by affecting the process of assigning persons to formal positions (Kanter, 1977). Consequently, racial and gender differences promote the development of instrumental ties, and impede the development of primary ties, which results in increased social distance between organizational members based on gender and race (Lincoln & Miller, 1979). This distance, in turn, should lead to differences in disciplinary decisions.

Hypothesis 14: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their (a) race and (b) gender will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

Marital status and kinship responsibilities. Related to the rationale presented for race and gender, it seems reasonable to expect differences in marital status and kinship to be associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. One could argue that there are similarities in life experiences and priorities between individuals who are married and have kinship responsibilities, and differences between individuals who are not alike on these characteristics. As argued before, similarity is likely to promote communication, and dissimilarity is likely to degrade communication. Theories of career development (viz., Super, 1957) provide some basis for this expectation. An individual's career evolution is marked by stages that are intertwined with life issues (such as marriage and kinship). For example, whereas those married with children are likely to share common interests perhaps related to their children's school activities, unmarried individuals with no children are unlikely to have such an interest. Therefore, those alike may have more in common with each other due to their life circumstances than those who are not alike. This similarity may be particularly relevant with respect to absence disciplinary decisions because kinship responsibilities have been associated with absence (Rhodes & Steers, 1990). Those who have more children than others may be more likely to excuse absences due to an appreciation of the impact dependents can have on one's ability to attend work.

Hypothesis 15: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their (a) marital status and (b) kinship responsibilities will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

Absence history. Differences in estimates of the average days absent between the supervisor and subordinate were expected to vary positively with discrepancies in choice. Some researchers have argued that absence reflects an inherent and long-standing personality characteristic that accounts for the moderate stability of absence over time and

situations. This characteristic is referred to as absence proneness (Garrison & Muchinsky, 1977; Landy, Vasey, & Smith, 1984). Unlike most other personality characteristics which are measured through conventional psychological scales, absence proneness has been inferred from the relationship between absence for at least two periods where prior absence is a reliable predictor of future absence. For disciplinary procedures that require supervisory judgment in determining the appropriate severity of action, it is reasonable for a supervisor to rely on his or her absence history as a basis to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable levels of absence. Assuming that a subordinate would be absent more than his or her supervisor, discrepancies in prior absence between supervisors and subordinates will likely relate to discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. Furthermore, those who have been absent often in the past may view absences as an acceptable means of justifying their own past absences. Differences in past absences, then, should lead to differences in the perceived acceptability of absence.

Hypothesis 16: Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their prior absences will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

An additional factor, supervisor span of control, was expected to influence discrepancies in disciplinary choice. However, because this factor was not directly related to the theoretical framework advanced in this paper, but may relate to disciplinary decisions, it was included as a control variable. Problems of coordination and communication increase with the size of the group (Blau, 1970). Larger teams tend to be less cohesive (Shaw, 1976), which may be the result of communication and coordination problems. Also, it is reasonable to expect greater heterogeneity among members of a larger group than a smaller group at any point in time.

Method

Sample

Surveys were mailed to members of 27 work triads (1 supervisor and 2 subordinates) within a large Midwestern university. In exchange for returning a completed survey, each

recipient was paid a nominal honorarium, and this fact was communicated in advance. Respondents came from a variety of departments in the university, and they were not represented by a union. Of the 27 triads to which surveys were mailed, 24 surveys were completed by supervisors, representing a response rate of 89%. Forty-four useable surveys were returned by subordinates, representing a response rate of 81%. There were 19 complete triads available for analysis, which is an adequate sample size for policy capturing designs (Rynes & Lawler, 1983).

Average age of supervisors was 43.4 years ($SD = 11.7$). Half were male, and 62% were married. Twenty-five percent of supervisors had one or more children. Whites constituted 92% of the supervisory sample. Over half (54%) had some college or an associates degree. Supervisors were on their jobs an average 11.8 years ($SD = 8.9$). The average number of subordinates supervised by these supervisors was 10.9 ($SD = 8.5$). Supervisors reported being absent an average of 3.3 days in the last year ($SD = 2.2$).

Average age of subordinates was 36.3 years ($SD = 9.2$). Subordinates were on their jobs an average 5.4 years ($SD = 4.2$). Forty-one percent were male, and 57% were married. Fifty percent of subordinates had one or more children. Whites constituted 86% of the subordinate sample. Nearly half (48%) had some college or an associates degree. The average subordinate reported being absent 4.1 days in the last year ($SD = 2.1$).

Research Design

A mixed experimental design was used, which incorporates both within-subjects and between-subjects components (Keppel, 1982). The within-subjects design permits researchers to infer the relative importance of particular factors that are related to an individual's decision making. Each factor contained two levels (i.e., the factor was present or not).

The six within-subjects independent variables were completely crossed which permits assessment of the independent effects of each factor on disciplinary decisions. Crossing the factors resulted in 64 scenarios (2^6) which contained all possible

combinations. In addition, six scenarios were replicated at random as a basis to assess the reliability of the criterion variable. The scenarios were presented in the survey in random order to prevent order effects. Information within scenarios was ordered randomly for the same reasons. An example of a scenario is provided.

Hill is a status employee whose job performance is below average. Hill has unique skills that are scarce in your department. Today's absence was not approved. Hill has had less than 4 days absent in the past year. Hill is physically unable to attend work today.

Supervisors and subordinates were asked to make a disciplinary judgment based on each scenario (Hypotheses 1 - 6). The questionnaires were identical for supervisors and subordinates except subordinates were asked to assume the role of supervisor in their present work situation. The absolute value of the difference between the supervisor and subordinate scores were used for the analyses (Hypotheses 7 - 15).

Measures

Absence disciplinary decision. Disciplinary decision as a result of absence was operationalized in the following manner: "As this employee's supervisor, please indicate what you would do in response by choosing from among nine possible actions." The nine alternate disciplinary choices range from "Take no action" to "Discharge this employee." These choices reflect the actual options available to supervisors in this organization based on the university's policy and procedure manual, and they are consistent with successive steps in progressive discipline programs (Ballagh et al., 1987; Belohlav, 1985).

Reliability of this measure was .72 for the supervisors and .73 for the subordinates. This figure was calculated by computing reliability coefficients for each of the six replicated scenarios, and then averaging the six reliability coefficients. The reliability coefficients for supervisors ranged from .65 to .82; reliability coefficients for subordinates ranged from .62 to .83.

