

The Formation of the Desire for Retribution

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In this paper I examine how aspects of a person who commits an organizational violation affect a third-party observer's desire that the person be punished. Specifically I look at how the third party's desire for retribution is affected by the offending party's past behavior and offer of an apology. I further propose a model of desire for retribution in which observers rely on aspects of the violation (such as severity) and aspects of the violator (such as a previous history of the violation) to determine the strength of this desire. Using repeated measures ANOVAs I found that apologies reduce the desire for punishment ($F=8.55, p<.01, \eta^2=.09$), while a history of the offense increases it ($F=11.08, p<.00, \eta^2=.12$). Also, desire for punishment is highest when there is no apology with a previous history of the offense and is lowest when there is an apology and no history ($F=12.95, p<.00, \eta^2=.13$). Violation severity has a main effect on desire for retribution ($F=24.48, p<.00, \eta^2=.20$) and it also interacts with apology and history, with history making a difference regardless of severity, but apologies having no effect with severe violations ($F=12.95, p<.00, \eta^2=.13$).

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I. Introduction

People in organizations make mistakes, perform poorly, steal, cheat and do other things that are contrary to the interests of their organization (Vardi and Wiener, 1996). One of the responsibilities of managers in modern organizations is dealing with subordinates who engage in these behaviors. This often takes the form of administering some type of punishment (Butterfield *et al.*, 2005).

Most of the research on organizational justice has focused on the employer-employee dyad. For example, a number of punishment studies have been conducted looking at the manager's response to a subordinate's poor performance (Ashkanasy and Gallois, 1994; Crant and Bateman, 1993; Green and Mitchell, 1979; Kipnis and Cosentino, 1969; Klaas and Wheeler, 1990; Miner, 1976; Mitchell *et al.*, 1981; Mitchell and O'Reilly, 1983) or on the effects of punishment on specific subordinate behaviors that influence a punishment's effectiveness (Arvey and Ivancevich, 1980; Arvey and Jones, 1985). And a few studies have examined the experience of the recipients (Atwater *et al.*, 2001).

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Many of these studies have found negative consequences associated with punishment episodes. For example, a number of these studies have found that while punishment may be effective in changing an employee's behavior in the short term, recipients often experience resentment, hostility and can even engage in sabotaging behaviors in response to being punished (Arvey and Ivancevich, 1980; Arvey and Jones, 1985; Butterfield *et al.*, 1996). There also have been serious challenges raised about the effectiveness of punishment as a motivator of performance (Atwater *et al.*, 2001). These studies imply that perhaps managers should avoid punishment and look to other methods to influence employees to not engage in misconduct.

However, managers have more to be concerned about than just the direct effectiveness of punishment on the recipient's behavior. Researchers have extended findings beyond the recipient-centered approach to include looking at the experience of the manager (Butterfield *et al.*, 1996) and at punishment as a social experience, by including the reactions of observers (Treviño, 1992). For example, it may be that punishing an individual does indeed have the negative consequences that have been suggested by some and found in a few studies. However, it may be that avoiding punishment has negative outcomes for observers. If this is the case, then it would be the classic situation of the needs of the many outweighing the need of the few, or at a minimum, that managers would need to consider both perspectives in order to find a solution that minimizes the impact on all parties.

There is a growing amount of research on the importance of third parties in organizations. Darley and Pittman (2003) describe the psychological processes that cause third parties to take an interest in whether organizational members are treated fairly. Other studies have found that third parties actively assign blame to violators for actions that had no impact on the third party (Alicke, 1992; Shaver, 1970; Walster, 1966). And research shows that third parties will sanction violators even when the sanctions are costly to them and the violation itself had no affect on the third party (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2004; Turillo *et al.*, 2002). Research on observers' reactions has grown to include areas such as reactions to layoffs (Skarlicki *et al.*, 2008; Skarlicki *et al.*, 1998), and mistreatment of coworkers by managers (O'Reilly and Aquino, 2011; Skarlicki and Kulik, 2005). However, there is still little known about how third parties react to the punishment of other organizational members. This paper seeks to begin to fill that gap.

II. Theory and Hypotheses

A. Third-Party Observers

In this paper I define third-party observers as individuals who become aware that an employee has committed an organizational infraction. This information may come from direct observation of the offense, or through other means such as hearing rumors or becoming aware that someone has been punished. Regardless of the source, the third party has become aware that the employee has violated the organization's rules. Third-party observers can be coworkers, part of the violator's social network, other organizational members, and even people outside of the organization (Skarlicki and Kulik, 2005).

This paper, however, is primarily concerned with third-party observers who are also coworkers. While many people might take an interest in an employee's violation, how the observer is related to the violator makes a difference in how they react. For example, Chi and Lo (2003) found that coworker's perceptions of justice were affected by the quality of their relationship to the violator. Simply liking a person more affected how they perceived the punishment. This suggests that, for

example, being a third party in a different department might result in different reactions than you would see from a coworker. Therefore, in this paper I will focus primarily on the coworker as the third party simply to eliminate the moderating effect of the observer's general relationship to the violator.

B. Retributive Justice – The Desire for Punishment

Third-party reactions are important because of the fact that as social beings, we are highly concerned about social norms, and the violation of important norms has been shown to influence the behavior of third-party observers (Fehr *et al.*, 2002). A key theory in examining the reactions of third parties is Folger's (2001) concept of deontic justice. The term deontic justice refers to the psychological state where people react emotionally to actions that violate social norms of conduct. This specifically includes the notion of how people should or ought to be treated. Therefore, these feelings of a desire for fairness come from a moral conviction about appropriate behavior. This is what provides the intensity behind third-party observer's reactions to events that do not impact them directly.

Fehr and Fischbacher (2004) offer an evolutionary explanation for why a person is so concerned with enforcing social norms even when the violations do not affect the individual directly. Essentially, for a given society to function, there must be a way for norms to be enforced, otherwise, interactions become chaotic and unpredictable. In any given interaction, it is possible for one party to take advantage of the other. If it were left only to the second party to ensure that things were fair, it becomes much easier for any given individual to take advantage. We would become subject to the whims of the powerful or deceitful. Societies where interested parties ensured that all members were treated fairly were more successful than those where certain individuals were able to manipulate other individuals. Over time, we have simply been shaped to care about maintaining the structure of societal norms. This is best accomplished by taking an interest in the situation of our fellow beings. While Fehr and Fischbacher (2004) argue that their research shows that people are not simply self-interested, one can also argue that it is actually in one's self-interest to prevent people from abusing societal norms. While the desire for retribution may have arisen from evolutionary pressures, what we now experience as human beings is a moral outrage of a certain degree when someone violates a norm and gets away with it, even if we were not directly harmed.

Because people care about how other people are treated even when the actions do not impact them directly, it is logical that witnessing someone commit a violation and seeing a manager punish the violator will result in emotional reactions from observers that will eventually result in important behaviors. However, to this point, little research has examined the ways that observers react and what factors moderate their reactions. One likely set of moderators are the various aspects of the violator. For example, how is the third party related to the violator? Did the violator express remorse? Does the violator have a history? Does it appear that the violation was done intentionally? Presumably, these variables will impact the strength of the third party's moral reaction to the violation. And a second likely set of moderators are the aspects of the violation. How severe was it? What was the outcome? Who was impacted? These also should impact the observer's moral reaction.

This paper proposes a basic model for the formation of the desire for retribution. When an observer sees a violation, they look at the aspects of the violation (how severe, the outcome, etc.) and aspects of the violator (is there a history of the violation, did the violator apologize) and then makes a judgment about how much punishment the violator deserves. First, this basic model needs to be explored to see if that is indeed how observers behave, and secondly the many aspects of violations and violators need to be explored to see which matter, which do not, and how they interact

with each other. To date we know very little about this area, and this paper seeks to begin the process of exploring this model. While the model is not particularly complex, it is possible that all of the many aspects could have very complex relationships and interdependencies.

C. Presence of an Apology

One important aspect of a violator is whether they are remorseful and specifically whether they offer an apology. Apology has been defined as an utterance intended to remedy a social disruption (Scher and Darley, 1997). Research has shown that when a violator apologizes, those they have offended behave less aggressively towards them (Ohbuchi *et al.*, 1989). Bisel and Messersmith (2012) examined how employees reacted to apologies from supervisors and from organizational representatives apologizing on behalf of an organization and found that employees were more forgiving when an apology was offered. However, while there is a strong consensus that apologies work in both private and organizational settings between the violator and the person who was wronged, the question remains as to whether an apology between two parties has an effect on the third-party observer. It makes sense however, that if an apology is meant to remedy a social disruption that it might also work on an observer. The presence of an apology should serve as a reducing factor in an observer's feelings about a violation. Therefore, I propose:

H1: When a violator offers an apology, coworkers will have less desire for retribution than they will when the coworker does not offer an apology.

D. History of Previous Violations

One issue related to retributive justice is the extent to which a violator can be held responsible for their behavior (Kidd and Utne, 1978). Niehoff *et al.* (1998) looked at a violator's past performance and found that when the violator was a good performer, observers had less desire for retribution than they did when the violator was a poor performer. However, they did not examine the case where the violator had committed the same violation before. Previous work has shown that a violator's history of committing a specific violation resulted in the observer making an attribution that the violator willingly engaged in the behavior (Klaas and Wheeler, 1990). A previous violation of the extract nature should indicate a greater level of culpability than situations where workers had not committed prior transgressions. If the violator has a previous history of committing the violation, that fact should be an additional aspect that should influence third-party evaluations. Therefore, I propose:

H2: When a violator has a history of the violation, coworkers will have more desire for retribution than they will when the coworker does not have a history of the violation

These two aspects of the violator, apology and previous history, should each contribute to the desire for retribution such that they will have an additive effect, meaning that the presence of an apology and the absence of a previous history should result in the least negative feelings towards the violator and the absence of an apology and the presence of a previous history should result in the most negative feelings, with the other two combinations being between the two extremes. This assumes that these two are relatively equal in strength. Therefore, I propose:

H3: Desire for retribution will be highest when the violator does not apologize and has a history of the violation, while desire for retribution will be lowest when the violator apologizes and has no history of the violation, with the other two combinations having intermediate values.

E. Violation Severity

While aspects of the violator are likely to be quite important in the context of an organizational violation, different violations carry with them differing levels of moral outrage regardless of who commits them. Research has shown that people are naturally able to assess the seriousness of different violations and that there is considerable consistency in the rank ordering of common violations (Warr *et al.*, 1983). Carlsmith *et al.* (2002) argue that observers have a desire to make punishment proportional to the violation. In other words, the punishment should fit the crime. If this is the case, more severe violations should result in a greater desire for retribution. Therefore I propose:

H4: Severe violations will result in a stronger desire for retribution than will mild violations.

While severity should be a strong factor in the desire for retribution, there is also the possibility that the violation's severity will interact with the aspects of the violator. For example, a mild violation might be amenable to an apology, where a sufficiently severe violation might render an apology meaningless. Therefore, I propose:

H5: For severe violations, desire for retribution will not be affected by the violator's apology or history of the violation.

H6: For mild violations, desire for retribution will be highest when the violator does not apologize and has a history of the violation, while desire for retribution will be lowest when the violator apologizes and has no history of the violation, with the other two combinations having intermediate values.

III. Methods

A. Study Design

This study used a nested repeated-measures design where each subject was measured on the dependent variable multiple times. The subjects were initially divided into two main groups based on the severity of the violation. They were then presented with multiple scenarios and given instructions to vividly imagine that the scenarios referred to a coworker. I chose this design because it required a smaller number of subjects as compared to alternate designs. The advantages of a within-subjects design are two fold. First, it increases power by requiring fewer subjects. Since the various treatments are applied to each subject, I needed many fewer subjects than I would have using a completely between-subjects design. A second reason for using a within-subjects design is that it reduces the error variance that is associated with individual differences. This makes it clearer that the difference between the treatments is caused by the treatment, rather than some difference that exists between characteristics of the subject.

There are also some inherent weaknesses of the within-subject design, namely what are known as “*carryover effects*.” Since a subject receives multiple treatments, it is more difficult to conclude that each treatment is completely independent. It is possible that the previous treatment has had an influence on the subject and therefore I cannot be as confident that any given treatment would be equally effective in isolation. However, to minimize this effect subjects had the four permutations of the vignette presented in a random order, which should reduce any order effect, but cannot completely compensate for the fact that each subject ultimately was presented with all four variations. Repeated-measures ANOVA attempts to compensate for this statistically.

B. Sample

I obtained subjects from the StudyResponse Project at Syracuse University. StudyResponse maintains a large panel of subjects who are interested in being research subjects for a modest payment. With their large base it is easy to request subjects who meet certain criteria, such as working adults, equally divided between men and women. I selected StudyResponse in order to quickly obtain subjects who were not students and had substantial work experience. StudyResponse sent an invitation via email to members of their database inviting them to participate. The invitation went to an equal number of male and female subjects. The invitation directed the subjects to a website which contained the survey. A total of 107 subjects completed the survey: 14 were discarded because of incomplete data and 9 were discarded for not following instructions properly. This resulted in 84 complete and usable responses.

Of the respondents 54.8% were male, 70.6% were Caucasian, 11.8% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 3.5% were African American, 2.4% were Hispanic, 2.4% were Multiethnic, 1.2 were Native American and 1.2% identified themselves as other. Age ranged from 19 to 72 years with an average of 38.3 years. Work experience ranged from 1 to 50 years with an average of 21.4 years. 84% reported having had some supervisory experience. Data on non-respondents was available for gender, race and age. Gender and race between responders and non-responders were non-significant, however age was significant ($F=12.56, p<.01$) with respondents being significantly older (34.2 years for non respondents and 38.3 for respondents).

C. Procedures

When subjects received the email invitation from StudyResponse, they clicked on a link to the survey page where they are assigned randomly to one of the two conditions. Subjects were told to imagine that person they are thinking of has been caught selling a stolen company laptop containing sensitive employee data. For the four apology and history conditions subjects were given four different scenarios in random order where the violator either did or did not apologize and did or did not have a history of doing the behavior previously. After each scenario the subjects were asked questions about their desire for retribution and then told to disregard all previous information for the next scenario, in essence asking them to “now imagine that instead your coworker did the following.” In the other condition, subjects were told to imagine that the person they are thinking of had called in sick when in reality they were taking a fishing trip, causing extra work for the remaining employees. Again the scenarios were manipulated with the four variations of apology and history.

D. Measures

D.1 Desire for Retribution

I measured the coworker's desire for retribution using a three-item measure consisting of two items developed by Niehoff *et al.* (1998), with a third item (question #3) added for this study. The two-item measure had a coefficient Alpha of .91 in the Niehoff *et al.* study. For the current study the modified measure had a coefficient Alpha of .90. Responses were measured using Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (7). The items were:

- 1) The actions of the worker should have been punished
- 2) The employee deserved to be disciplined
- 3) It would bother me if this person was not punished

The three questions were consolidated with simple averaging after confirming their relatedness with Cronbach's Alpha. All statistics were conducted using the consolidated measure.

IV. Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that when a violator offers an apology, coworkers will have less desire for retribution than they will when the coworker does not offer an apology. To test all the hypotheses simultaneously I ran a repeated-measures ANOVA with apology and history as within subjects factors and violation severity as a between-subjects factor. This allows me to see all of the various interactions in addition to the main effects of each of the variables. The main effect for apology was significant ($F(1, 83)=8.55, p<.01$). The estimated marginal means showed that desire for retribution was lower when the violator apologized ($M=5.14$) than when violator did not apologize ($M=5.34$). This shows that apologizing for a violation does reduce an observer's desire for retribution. Therefore, hypothesis 1 was fully supported. Analysis results are presented in Table 1, with the descriptive measures presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Effect of Apology on Desire for Retribution

Effect	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Apology	1	3.26	8.55	.01	.09

Table 2: Descriptives for Apology

Apology	Mean	Std. Error
Apology	5.14	.140
No Apology	5.34	.146

Hypothesis 2 stated that when a violator has a history of the violation, coworkers will have more desire for retribution than they will when the coworker does not have a history of the violation. Using the same repeated-measures ANOVA described above I found that the main effect of history was significant ($F(1, 83)=11.08, p<.01$). When the violator had a history of the violation, subjects reported more desire for retribution ($M=5.38$) than when the violator had no previous history ($M=5.09$). This shows that a history of the violation increases the desire for retribution. Thus hypothesis 2 was fully supported.

Table 3: Effect of History on Desire for Retribution

Effect	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
History	1	7.30	11.08	.00	.12

Table 4: Descriptives for History

History	Mean	Std. Error
No History	5.09	.140
History	5.38	.146

Hypothesis 3 stated that desire for retribution will be highest when the violator did not apologize and has a history of the violation, while desire for retribution will be lowest when the violator apologized and had no history of the violation, and when a violator apologizes but has a history of the violation or when a violator did not apologize but had no history of the violation, desire for retribution will be greater than when there is an apology and no history, but lower than when there is no apology and a history. This relationship is more difficult to test since it represents gradations of values. It is unlikely that each cell would be significantly different than the other cells. Therefore, I ran a repeated-measures ANOVA between the condition with no apology and a history of the violation and the condition with an apology and no history (the two combinations representing the extremes). The difference between the means for desire for retribution was significant ($F(1, 83)=12.95, p<.01$) When the violator had a history of the violation and did not apologize, subjects reported more desire for retribution ($M=5.46$) than when the violator had no previous history and did apologize ($M=4.96$). The two intermediate conditions returned intermediate values ($M=5.32$) and ($M=5.22$). This relationship suggests that there is a simple additive effect taking place rather than a more complex moderating relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was fully supported.

Table 5: Mean Difference Between Extreme Conditions

Effect	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Apology and No History vs. No Apology and History	1	10.05	12.95	.00	.13

Table 6: Descriptives for Permutations of Apology and History

History	Mean	Std. Error
Apology and No History	4.97	.177
Apology and History	5.32	.149
No Apology and No History	5.22	.161
No Apology and History	5.46	.160

Hypothesis 4 stated that severe violations will result in a stronger desire for retribution than will mild violations. To test this I ran the same repeated-measures ANOVA as in hypotheses 1 and 2 using the four scenarios made up of the permutations of history and apology (e.g. history and apology, history and no apology, etc.) with severity (severe or mild) as a between-subjects factor. This resulted in 42 subjects for the mild condition and 42 subjects for the severe condition. The between-subjects factor of severity was significant ($F(1, 83)=24.48, p<.01$). When the violation was severe, subjects reported more desire for retribution ($M=5.93$) than when the violation was mild ($M=4.55$). Therefore, hypothesis 4 was fully supported. The statistical results are presented in Table 7, and the descriptive results are presented in Table 8.

Table 7: Effect of Severity on Desire for Retribution

Effect	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Severity	1	161.01	24.48	.00	.23

Table 8: Descriptives for Severity

Severity	Mean	Std. Error
Illness	4.55	.198
Laptop	5.93	.196

Hypothesis 5 stated that for severe violations, desire for retribution will not be affected by the violator's apology or history of the violation. Proposing the null is not a common practice, but combining this with hypothesis 6 provides theoretical justification for this procedure. To test this I selected only subjects who were presented the severe scenarios and then ran the same repeated-measures ANOVA as in hypotheses 1 and 2. This results in 42 subjects. Apology was not significant ($F(1, 41)=.48, p=.49$). However, history was significant ($F(1, 42)=4.95, p <.05$). When the violation was severe and the violator had a history, subjects reported more desire for retribution ($M=6.05$) than when the violator did not have a history ($M=5.81$). This means that it didn't make a difference whether the violator apologized, but it did make a difference if the violator had a history. Therefore, hypothesis 5 was partially supported with apologies not influencing desire for retribution, but history still making a difference. Statistical and descriptive results of these analyses are presented in tables 9, 10, and 11.

Table 9: Effect of Apology on Desire for Retribution for Severe Violations

Effect	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Apology	1	.13	.48	.49	.011

Table 10: Effect of History on Desire for Retribution for Severe Violations

Effect	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
History	1	2.48	4.95	.03	.11

Table 11: Descriptives for History for Severe Violations

History	Mean	Std. Error
No History	5.81	.178
History	6.05	.164

Hypothesis 6 stated that for mild violations, desire for retribution will be highest when the violator did not apologize and has a history of the violation, while desire for retribution will be lowest when the violator apologized and had no history of the violation, and when a violator apologizes but has a history of the violation or when a violator does not apologize but has no history of the violation, desire for retribution will greater than when there is an apology and no history, but lower than when there is no apology and a history. To test this I ran the same repeated-measures ANOVA that I ran in hypothesis 3 after selecting only those subjects who had a mild violation. This resulted in 42 subjects. Since hypothesis 3 was confirmed and hypothesis 5 was partially confirmed it is not surprising that the variance is coming mostly from the mild condition. The difference between the means for desire for retribution was significant ($F(1, 41)=10.11, p<.01$) When the violator had a history of the violation and did not apologize, subjects reported more desire for retribution ($M=4.88$) than when the violator had no previous history and did apologize ($M=4.20$). The two intermediate conditions both returned intermediate values ($M=4.56$). This relationship again suggests that there is a simple additive effect taking place rather than a more complex moderating relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 6 was fully supported. The pertinent analytic results are presented in tables 12 and 13.

Table 12: Mean Difference Between Extreme Conditions for Mild Violations

Effect	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Apology and No History vs. No Apology and History	1	9.78	10.11	.00	.20

Table 13: Descriptives for Permutations of Apology and History for Mild Violations

History	Mean	Std. Error
Apology and No History	4.20	.243
Apology and History	4.56	.240
No Apology and No History	4.56	.267
No Apology and History	4.88	.246

V. Discussion

The first thing that this study does is to reconfirm that employees do indeed care about the violations of their coworkers. I also found support for the proposition that the desire for retribution comes from assessments of the aspects of the violation and the violator. As they are given information about the violation and the violator, their desire to see that justice takes place and their feelings towards the violator are significantly impacted. Not surprisingly, there is a strong link between the seriousness of a violation and how much coworkers want to see the violator punished. This was true when there was no other information than the basic details of the violation, as well as when they were given information about different aspects of the violator. Severity matters on top of other variables, showing that this is a key part of the evaluation of observers. Serious violations result in more desire for retribution and more negative feelings toward the violator regardless of other factors. This would suggest that a manager should first take into account the overall seriousness of the violation before considering other factors. It also appears that severity may be prone to anchoring and adjustment bias, where any subsequent information is used to adjust the initial anchor of severity. So, observers first decide on a level of desire for retribution based on the severity and then make minor adjustment based on other relevant factors.

A second and somewhat surprising result was that severity interacts differently with different aspects of the violator. It seems logical to suppose that severe violations might have a different structure than do mild violations. For example, one might assume that with severe violations, the characteristics of the violator would be swamped by the magnitude of the violation. For example, when someone steals a laptop with sensitive employee data on it, it would not matter if it is a first violation or a repeat violation, this act is so serious that the outrage makes other details irrelevant. However, I did not find that here. Apologies do not make any difference when a violation is serious, but a history still does. It is likely that each aspect of the violator interacts with severity in an idiosyncratic factor, meaning that we need to understand which factors when combined with severity will add to an observer's desire for retribution, and which will be discarded as irrelevant. And while it was not observed here, it may be that for mild violations some things matter and some do not.

The model proposed that the formation of the desire for retribution takes place by examining both aspects of the violator and the violation. The results support this assertion. The results also support the idea that these aspects seem to work in a complicated way. Sometimes they are simply additive, where each contributes a small amount of variance and in other cases they exert large amounts of influence and other times no influence. The mental calculus of desire for retribution may present some interesting twists and turns, even if it is completely invisible even to the person who seemingly without effort comes up with a final judgment of how much the violator is deserving of punishment.

VI. Implications for Practice

If an observers' desire for retribution is driven both by the seriousness of the violation and characteristics of the violator, then managers would need to take this into account when deciding on what punishment is appropriate. We can assume that if an observer has a strong desire for retribution and a manager does not punish or give a slap on the wrist to the violator, then the observer will experience feelings of injustice that could have negative implications. Managers may also need to manage the perceptions of their employees. Because of the strength of the effect, managers should clearly elucidate the seriousness of a violation. If observers assume a mild violation and see a strong

response, or they assume a severe violation and see a weak response, they will likely feel that the punishment is unjust. And severity seems to matter regardless of what other information is obtained.

Second, after punishment has taken place, if a manager perceives that observers have concerns about the response, providing additional details could alter the observer's perceptions. For example, if an observer concludes that a punishment was too severe, a manager could explain that the violator had a history of the violation. Or, on the other hand, if a coworker felt the punishment was too lenient, the manager could explain that an apology had been offered, or that the violation did not result in a negative outcome.

And third, is simply a confirmation that observers do indeed have significant reactions to the violations of coworkers. Managers would be well served to keep in mind that a punishment episode is not just between the manager and the violator, but if the violation is publicly known, then the manager does need to think about how the observers will react. At the very least they will have more negative attitudes about the violator, and if there is high interdependence in a group or team these attitudes could negatively affect performance. This presents a bit of a quandary at this point. Most HR departments would not react well to the idea of sharing with coworkers the details of a violation and punishment of another employee. However, studies like this can help to demonstrate the need to make others aware of the punishment and the aspects involved in a violation when the violation itself is already widely known.

VII. Limitations

Because I was asking subjects to imagine, they may not have been able to accurately assess their true desires and feelings. For example, it may be difficult for them to actively imagine a close coworker committing a violation if that person is of high integrity. Additionally, this study only examined the formation of the desire for retribution and not what happens after the fact. Presumably, upon administration of a punishment the observer's attitudes would be adjusted to take into account the new information. Additional research may reveal that some of these aspects are not relevant once punishment has taken place, or they could continue their effect even after punishment.

Another issue is the potential for demand characteristics. This issue often occurs in a repeated-measures design. Each time the subjects get a new scenario, they see a variation on what they previously saw. It is not hard to imagine that subjects could infer the point of the study by observing what was being changed at each stage. This may have influenced their responses so that they answered as they thought the question should be answered, according to their implicit theories of punishment (or according to the researcher's theory), rather than exactly how they felt. The only way to avoid this would have been to give each subject only one situation, which would have required many more subjects. And lastly, since this was done using a survey panel, it is possible that subjects did not take the study as seriously as would employees in their actual workplace.

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