



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

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The present 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 supervisors and their 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 generally place similar weights on factors that are relevant to disciplinary decisions. Perhaps more importantly, a number of psychological and demographic differences between supervisors and subordinates related positively to discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.

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 important that supervisors and their subordinates see eye to eye on what is acceptable discipline in response to an employee transgression for particular circumstances. 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

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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 between how supervisors and subordinates view disciplinary decisions may signify a potential breakdown in this negotiated order, which is likely to result in increased 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).

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). In the case of disciplinary decisions, employees may perceive inequity when management sanctions differ from subordinate expectations. 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 absenteeism within work units.

On the basis of these concerns, two questions regarding disciplinary decisions warrant study. First, do supervisors and subordinates consider the same set of factors when making disciplinary decisions? Second, what are the possible antecedents of discrepancies between supervisors and subordinates in disciplinary decisions? We draw on past research on employee discipline systems, as they relate to absence in particular, to determine the factors that are most important in influencing disciplinary decisions. 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), Pfeffer's (1983) model of organizational demography (OD), and Tsui and O'Reilly's (1989) work on relational demography provided theoretical justification. 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). Managers and supervisors have a vested interest in minimizing absence levels. In addition to

imposing a financial burden on organizations (Martocchio, 1992a), absenteeism may disrupt an organization's work flow (Atkin & Goodman, 1984), and it may adversely affect employee performance (Bycio, 1992). 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.

Influences on Absence Disciplinary Decisions

It is important to assess whether absence disciplinary decisions can be accurately modeled before relational influences on discrepancies in disciplinary decisions between superiors and subordinates can be examined. On the basis of an elicitation study conducted by Martocchio (1992b), six decision making factors were hypothesized to influence absence disciplinary decisions. These consist of the following: (1) absentee absence history; (2) absentee job performance; (3) absentee criticality to the department; (4) absentee's ability to attend work; (5) absentee status; and (6) approved absence versus absence not approved. The rationale for each of these sets of influences follows.

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.

H1: *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 arbitrators 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 an employee'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.

H2: *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 this individual's willingness to take action. In a field context, Boise (1965) found that a worker's value to his or her 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.

H3: *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.

H4: *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).

H5: *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).

H6: *Unapproved absences will lead to more severe disciplinary decisions than approved absences by (a) supervisors and (b) subordinates.*

Discrepancies in Absence Disciplinary Decisions

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).

On the basis of 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 interactions 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 because 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 individuals within organizations influence behavioral patterns. Pfeffer's model considers demographic rather than psychological 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 (Ducheneon, 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.

Below, we advance several hypotheses that relate discrepancies in psychological and demographic factors to discrepancies in absence disciplinary decisions for supervisors and subordinates. To date, there is a dearth of conceptual research on the influence of psychological and demographic antecedents of disciplinary decisions (Arvey & Jones, 1985). Thus, our selection was guided by an a priori assessment of factors that we felt would fit well with the conceptualization of discipline that we presented earlier.

Relational Effects of Psychological Attributes

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 psychological factors are (1) attitudes toward discipline, (2) perceptions of organizational justice related to the organization's disciplinary procedures, (3) negative affectivity, and (4) 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.

H7: *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: (1) distributive justice, which describes the fairness of the outcomes an employee receives; and (2) 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.

H8: *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.

H9: *Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their negative affectivity will be positively associated with differences in disciplinary decisions.*

Subjective health. Illness is the most widely used attribution for absence (Hackett, Bycio & Guion, 1989; Judge & Martocchio, in press; 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 in poor health and absent a great deal as a result, yet 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).

H10: *Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their subjective health perceptions will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.*

Relational Effects of Demographic Attributes

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 demographic factors are (1) job tenure, (2) age, (3) education, (4) race and gender, (5) marital status and kinship responsibilities, and (6) absence history.

Job tenure. Consistent with the OD and ASA frameworks, job tenure should reflect a fit between an employee'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).

H11: *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). Thus, consistent with the OD model, we expect that similarity in age between supervisors and subordinates will lead to similar disciplinary decisions, and differences in age will lead to discrepant disciplinary decisions.

H12: *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 in their 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.

H13: *Differences between supervisors and subordinates in their educational attainment will be positively associated with discrepancies in disciplinary decisions.*

Race and gender. In 1994, more white men had supervisory and managerial jobs than women and racial minorities (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1995), yet, with few exceptions (Jackson et al., 1991; Lincoln & Miller, 1979), there has been little research on the influence of race and gender composition (e.g., the effects of differences in the mix of males and females across intact social units) 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 similarities and differences 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.

H14: *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 individuals who are 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 who are 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.

H15: *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). Unlike most other personality characteristics which are measured through conventional psychological scales, absence proneness has been inferred from prior absences. 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.

H16: *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.

Methods

Sample

Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 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. 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 ($SD = 2.2$) in the last year.

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 ($SD = 2.1$) in the last year.

Within-Subjects Design

Overview and measures. This within-subjects design permits researchers to infer the relative importance of particular factors that are related to an individual's disciplinary decision making. Each factor contained two levels (i.e., the factor was present or not). The six within-subjects independent variables

(listed and described in the Appendix) 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 reason. 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.

The dependent variable was a disciplinary judgment based on each scenario (Hypotheses 1-6) by supervisors and subordinates. Subordinates were asked to assume the role of supervisor in their present work situation. This judgment 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 responses were listed as follows: (1) Take no action; (2) Monitor this absence activity, but take no remedial action; (3) Conduct a counseling session with this employee; (4) Administer a verbal warning to this employee; (5) Administer a written warning to this employee; (6) Suspend this employee without pay for 3 days; (7) Suspend this employee without pay for 10 days; (8) Suspend this employee without pay for 30 days; and (9) Discharge this employee. These choices reflect the actual options available to supervisors in this organization, and they are consistent with successive steps in progressive discipline programs (Ballagh et al., 1987; Belohlav, 1985; Klaas & Wheeler, 1990).

Reliability of this measure was .72 for the supervisors and .73 for the subordinates. This estimate 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.

Analysis. To determine the influence of the hypothesized factors on disciplinary decisions for supervisors and subordinates, and to determine the degree to which supervisors and subordinates differed in their disciplinary decisions, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) model was estimated. The main effects in the model were the 6 within-subjects factors and a dichotomous variable representing the role of the respondent (whether the respondent was a supervisor or subordinate). Also included in the model were role by within-subject factor interactions to determine whether or not supervisors and subordinates placed different weights on the discipline-inducing events. Hypotheses 1-6 also were tested using within-subjects multiple regression analysis (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) to assess the effects of the six independent factors on disciplinary decisions for supervisors and subordinates separately.

One regression equation was calculated for each supervisor and subordinate. Orthogonal contrast coding was used (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Between-Subjects Design

The between-subjects design permits assessment of inter-individual differences based on personal attributes (e.g., negative affectivity, experience). The between-subjects factors were assessed separately for supervisors and subordinates with the exception of supervisory span of control. The psychological and demographic attribute variables were measured in the following manner.

Attitudes toward discipline. Seven items were constructed to assess subjects' specific attitudes toward discipline. Subjects were asked to respond to questions on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' that assessed the degree to which they believed that absences should be disciplined. A high score is associated with a stronger endorsement that absence should be punished compared to a low score. Internal consistency reliability was .71 for the supervisors and .72 for the subordinates.

Perceptions of organizational justice. Moorman's (1991) 24-item Organizational Justice Scale was used. It was modified to have respondents focus on the perceived fairness of the sponsoring organization's absence control policy and disciplinary procedures related to absence occurrences. A high score was associated with a greater degree of perceived fairness. Internal consistency reliability was .91 for the supervisors and .94 for the subordinates.

Negative affectivity. Negative affectivity was measured with the negative affectivity sub-scale of the PANAS scales (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988). Internal consistency reliability was .69 for the supervisors and .84 for the subordinates.

Subjective health. Subjective health was measured by the health ladder (Suchman, Phillips & Strieb, 1978), an often used measure of subjective health. The item consists of a description of a ladder; the top of the 7-step ladder represents perfect health (coded 7) and the bottom of the ladder represents total and permanent disability (coded 1). The respondent indicates which step is most descriptive of their present overall health. The mean for this item was 5.92 for supervisors and 5.80 for subordinates.

Prior absenteeism. Prior absence was based on a self-report question on both the supervisor and subordinate questionnaires. Each respondent was asked to estimate as accurately as possible how many days he or she was absent in the past year for any reason except for vacations and scheduled days off.

Other characteristics. Age, race, gender, education, job tenure, marital status, and kinship responsibilities were assessed through specific items on the questionnaires. The measure of kinship responsibilities was limited in that it focused only on the number of children under eighteen years of age who live with the respondent. Of course, supervisor span of control was asked only on the supervisor questionnaire.

Analyses. An overall model was specified to estimate possible differences between individuals on the basis of the attribute variables (Hypotheses 7-16).

Multiple regression was the method of analysis. Because directionality of differences were not considered relevant (e.g., differences in NA were expected to lead to differences in disciplinary decisions regardless of whether the supervisor or subordinate was higher in NA), the absolute value of the difference between the supervisor and subordinate scores were used for the antecedent variables and absence disciplinary decision (Johns, 1981). For example, if in a particular scenario a supervisor indicated his disciplinary decision by circling a 6, and the 2 subordinates' decisions were indicated by circling a 2 and a 4, the difference score would be 6. The difference scores for the nominal variables (i.e., race, gender, and marital status) were calculated as follows. For example, a supervisor who is of the same race (1 = white; 0 = minority) as both subordinates receives a "0" on the race difference score. A supervisor who is of the same race as one subordinate but of a different race from another receives a "1". A supervisor who is of a different race than both subordinates receives a "2".

Only complete triads were used for this analysis in order to insure comparability across supervisor-subordinate groups. This choice resulted in a sample size of 1,225 disciplinary decisions (70 scenarios x 19 triads, less cases deleted due to missing values).

As noted by Johns (1981), the potential unreliability of difference scores threatens their usefulness. Accordingly, we computed the reliability of the difference scores of the multiple-item scales used in the analysis. In all cases, the reliabilities of the difference scores were acceptable (α , NA Scale = .74; α , Organizational Justice Scale = .94; α , attitudes about discipline system = .72). Reliability of the discrepancy in discipline decisions was calculated by averaging the correlations in discrepancies in disciplinary decisions among the replicated scenarios. The estimated α for this difference score was .71.

The data set used for the analysis that contained between-subjects factors was constructed by duplicating between-subject variables (e.g., the variables that were the subject of Hypotheses 7-16) and then appending these to the within-subject manipulations and discipline decisions (70 for each individual). Statistically, this is appropriate since each discipline decision is an independent event; each event becomes a dependent variable (Hays, 1981). Conceptually, duplicating between-subject factors was appropriate because a between-subject factor can affect the respondent's reaction to each scenario (Judge & Bretz, 1992). For example, age or age differences may influence a discipline decision each time an individual is confronted with a hypothetical discipline situation, much like age could influence disciplinary decisions over time (e.g., each time an individual is presented with an actual disciplinary decision).

The problem created when duplicating variables is that observations are no longer independent from one another. This means that there will likely be a positive correlation between error terms (autocorrelation), violating an assumption of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression (Kennedy, 1985). The consequences of this violation are that while OLS is still an unbiased estimator of regression coefficients, it is no longer the maximum efficiency estimator, nor is it an unbiased estimator of the variance of regression coefficients (standard

errors). Given the problem of autocorrelation, OLS estimation of standard errors is not appropriate. Therefore, generalized least squares (GLS) was used to estimate the effect of the independent variables on disciplinary decisions. GLS produces unbiased estimates of regression parameters and error terms, and thus is well-suited to deal with autocorrelated errors (Hanushek & Jackson, 1977).

Results

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the relational variables used in the analysis are presented in Table 1. The correlation tables for the influences on absence disciplinary decisions for supervisors and subordinates are not reported because the design of the study made for orthogonal relations among the within subjects factors. Thus, their intercorrelations were zero.

Test of Hypotheses 1-6 (Results of the Within-Subjects Analyses)

The ANOVA results are presented in Table 2. As the table indicates, more severe discipline was given to subordinates with greater absence history than subordinates with less absence history, supporting Hypothesis 1. For job performance (Hypotheses 2 a,b), discipline in response to absence was more severe for employees whose performance was below average compared to employees whose performance was above average. For employee criticality (Hypotheses 3a,b), few of the coefficients were significant; however among the significant coefficients, more severe discipline was administered to less critical employees than for critical employees. The pooled results were not significant for the supervisor sample, and only marginally significant for the subordinates. However, overall the effect was very weak, as revealed in Table 2. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was not supported by the results. For ability to attend (Hypotheses 4a,b), more severe discipline for absence was chosen for employees who were physically able to attend work. For status (Hypotheses 5a,b), more severe disciplinary action was chosen for probationary employees than full status employees. For absence approved versus not approved (Hypotheses 6a,b), more severe discipline was chosen when the absence was not approved than when it was approved.

Table 2 also indicates that the role of the respondent, whether the respondent was a supervisor or subordinate, explained significant variation in discipline decisions. Specifically, subordinates tended to render more lenient discipline decisions than did supervisors, although the differences were not dramatic (the average disciplinary decision was 2.68 for subordinates versus 2.89 for supervisors). Also, 2 of the 6 role by within-subjects factor were significant. In deciding the appropriate level of discipline, supervisors placed more weight on the absentee's work history and on the status of the employee than did subordinates (e.g., for supervisors the average disciplinary decision for probationary employees was 3.26 but only 2.54 for regular status employees; for subordinates the average disciplinary decision for probationary employees was 2.89 and 2.48 for regular status employees).

Table 1. Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), and Correlations of Discrepancy Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Experience	14.32	12.11	—													
2. Education	1.00	0.86	-12	—												
3. Gender	0.21	0.52	46	-47	—											
4. Race	0.26	0.55	01	-22	-01	—										
5. Age	28.47	18.27	-02	11	02	-41	—									
6. Marital Status	0.74	0.64	-26	-19	01	20	40	—								
7. Number of Children	1.79	1.40	60	31	-08	-13	-05	-59	—							
8. Subjective Health	2.16	1.69	24	-29	14	-22	-27	-40	10	—						
9. Attitudes About Discipline	12.67	6.84	30	41	-09	01	19	-21	41	-42	—					
10. Prior Absenteeism	4.68	2.70	06	-41	23	16	-20	41	-48	06	-37	—				
11. Span of Control	10.92	8.52	69	-05	09	10	07	-00	43	18	38	04	—			
12. Organizational Justice	75.95	49.11	51	00	06	-07	-35	-58	50	38	17	-15	34	—		
13. Negative Affectivity	10.16	6.12	-01	33	02	-15	-12	-23	22	-10	12	-05	-24	05	—	
14. Disciplinary Action	2.43	2.05	08	03	-02	-01	-08	-09	00	22	-00	08	06	23	07	—

Note: With the exception of span of control, all variables are discrepancies, and reflect the sum of the absolute value of the differences between the supervisor and subordinate scores within triads. Decimals from correlations are omitted. Correlations greater than .06 are significant at the .05 level (two-tailed). $N = 1,225$ disciplinary decisions (70 scenarios x 19 triads, less cases deleted due to missing values).

Table 2. Analysis of Variance Results

<i>Source of Variation</i>	<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>DF</i>	<i>F</i>
Main Effects			
Absence History	555.06	1	310.26**
Prior Job Performance	360.04	1	201.25**
Criticality to Department	5.06	1	2.83*
Ability to Attend Work	115.11	1	64.34**
Full Time Status	436.53	1	244.00**
Unapproved Absence	1998.95	1	1117.33**
Subordinate versus Supervisor (Role)	50.69	1	28.33**
Interaction Effects			
Role by Absence History	17.58	1	9.83**
Role by Prior Job Performance	2.85	1	1.59
Role by Criticality to Department	0.99	1	0.55
Role by Ability to Attend Work	1.70	1	0.95
Role by Full Time Status	22.14	1	12.38**
Role by Unapproved Absence	0.02	1	0.01
Explained	3566.72	13	
Error	8256.43	4615	
Total	11823.15	4628	

Notes: * $p < .10$; ** $p < .01$

To capture the flavor of these within-subjects analyses, we presented the percentages of statistically significant coefficients for each hypothesis because they are useful to report in showing how individuals differ in the weight given to these characteristics. However, the results for the pooled sample of supervisors and subordinates are also presented because describing percentages of statistically significant coefficients is not a formal test of an hypothesis. These results are displayed in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3, both supervisors and subordinates viewed the same variables as significant, except for criticality to the department, which was only marginally significant for supervisors, and not significant for subordinates. Thus, but for Hypotheses 3(a,b), the hypotheses received support. Adjusted R^2 for the pooled sample of supervisors was .26. Adjusted R^2 for the pooled sample of subordinates was .35.

Test of Hypotheses 7-16 (Results of the Between-Subjects Analyses)

Hypotheses 7-16 examined antecedents to discrepancies in disciplinary choices between supervisors and subordinates. Table 4 shows the results for these hypotheses. For the control variable, supervisory span of control was a significant predictor of discrepancies in disciplinary choices. With the exceptions of Hypotheses 14b (gender), and 15a,b (marital status and number of children), all hypotheses were supported in the predicted direction. The coefficients for gender and number of children factors were statistically significant, but in the

Table 3. Individual and Pooled Results for the Factors Influencing Absence Disciplinary Decisions for Subordinates and Supervisors

	Supervisors			Subordinates		
	Range of Betas	% Significant	Pooled Estimate ^a	Range of Betas	% Significant	Pooled Estimate ^a
Absence History	.00 to +.63	79	.23 (.02)**	-.04 to +.70	74	.20 (.01)**
Prior Job Performance	-.42 to .00	58	-.14 (.02)**	-.63 to +.01	81	-.22 (.01)**
Criticality to Dept.	-.23 to +.09	8	-.01 (.02)	-.27 to +.11	16	-.03 (.01)*
Ability to Attend Work	-.05 to +.42	46	.10 (.02)**	-.18 to +.50	49	.10 (.01)**
Full Time Status	-.65 to +.30	63	-.21 (.02)**	-.52 to +.06	70	-.17 (.01)**
Unapproved Absence	+.12 to +.95	100	.37 (.02)**	+.13 to +.91	98	.46 (.01)**
R		.52**			.59**	
Adjusted R ²		.26			.35	
N ^b		1,674			3,067	

Notes: ^a Standard errors are in parentheses.

^b Since each of the 24 supervisors and 44 subordinates made 70 discipline decisions, the sample sizes used for the analyses were 1,674 (70 x 24 less cases deleted due to missing values), and 3,067 (70 x 44, less cases deleted due to missing values), respectively.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

Table 4. Factors Influencing Discrepancies Between Supervisors and Subordinates in Absence Disciplinary Decisions (Generalized Least Squares)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Coefficient Estimate</i>
<i>Psychological Variables</i>	
Attitudes About Discipline System	.12 (.04)**
Organizational Justice Perceptions	.16 (.04)**
Negative Affectivity	.11 (.03)**
Subjective Health	.22 (.04)**
<i>Demographic Variables</i>	
Job Tenure	.23 (.08)**
Age	.09 (.05)*
Education	.11 (.04)**
Race	.11 (.04)**
Gender	-.13 (.05)**
Marital Status	.03 (.06)
Number of Children	-.25 (.06)**
Prior Absenteeism	.11 (.04)**
<i>Control Variable</i>	
Supervisor Span of Control	-.17 (.05)**
R^2	.12
N	1,225

Notes: Standard Errors are in Parentheses. With the exception of supervisor span of control, all variables are discrepancies.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

opposite direction than hypothesized. The coefficient for marital status was not statistically significant.

Relational differences among supervisors and subordinates with respect to all the psychological variables significantly predicted differences in disciplinary decisions as a result of absence. Specifically, differences between supervisors and subordinates with respect to attitudes about the discipline system significantly predicted disparities in discipline, supporting Hypothesis 7. Similarly, Hypothesis 8 was supported in that the more supervisors and subordinates differed with respect to their perceptions of the justice of the absence discipline system, the more discrepancies that existed in their disciplinary decisions. Hypothesis 9 also was supported; relational differences between supervisors and subordinates with respect to the dispositional construct of negative affectivity significantly predicted differences in absence disciplinary decisions. As predicted by Hypothesis 10, differences in subjective health significantly predicted differences in disciplinary decisions as a result of absence.

Overall, although not complete, support also was indicated for the efficacy of relational differences in demographic attributes in predicting disciplinary discrepancies. Specifically, Hypothesis 11 was supported in that the more supervisors and subordinates differed in job tenure, the more likely they were to discipline subordinates differently as a result of absence. Age differences

between supervisor and subordinates also led to significant differences in disciplinary decisions as a result of absence. This provides support for Hypothesis 12. Similarly, differences in education between supervisors and subordinates significantly predicted discrepancies in absence disciplinary decisions, supporting Hypothesis 13. Supervisors and subordinates of a different race were more likely to reach different absence disciplinary decisions, supporting Hypothesis 14a. Finally, the degree to which supervisors and subordinates were differentially absent in the past significantly predicted discrepancies in absence disciplinary decisions, supporting Hypothesis 16. In sum, the preponderance of significant results provides support for the utility of the ASA and OD models as a basis to explain discrepancy in disciplinary decisions.

Discussion

Antecedents of Absence Disciplinary Decisions

Initially, we examined six hypothesized antecedents of disciplinary decisions for supervisors and subordinates. Although the combined model estimation revealed some differences between supervisors and subordinates with respect to the severity of, and weight placed on factors leading to, disciplinary decisions, these differences were offset by the similarities. Specifically, approved versus unapproved absence influenced disciplinary decision for all but one subject. Employee criticality was the least considered factor. The findings for this supervisor sample replicate those for another sample found in Martocchio (1992b). The present study also demonstrated that both supervisors and subordinates consider the same set of factors as relevant to disciplinary decisions.

The findings pertaining to whether absence was approved and prior absence history in disciplinary decisions make sense in the framework of a progressive discipline system, where these factors are often considered as principal determinants of disciplinary decisions. However, the fact that the absentee's criticality to the department was not a significant factor for any of the supervisors is unexpected in light of recent research which found that employee criticality had a significant impact on both line managers' and personnel managers' disciplinary decisions (Klaas & Wheeler, 1990). In the Klaas and Wheeler study, managers were responding to scenarios that depicted employee insubordination whereas employee absenteeism was the focus of this study. An explanation for this finding is based on the argument that an employee with a significant absence problem likely would not be promoted to a job where his or her absence would cause a definite hardship to the employer (Ballagh et al., 1987); however, recent evidence indicates that there may be no relationship between absence and promotion in unionized settings (Bycio, 1992). Bycio (1992) suggests that where employees are represented by a union, some level of absence may be tolerated, compared to non union settings. Thus, careful consideration must be given to possible differences in the provisions of the employment contract regarding promotion criteria that may be found between union and non union settings.

Our *a priori* rationale for the criticality factor was based on the assumption that supervisors would cut some slack for a critical employee. Another alternative explanation is that some supervisors would render more severe punishment to critical employees in order to encourage them to attend work because these employees are essential to work operations¹ Thus, any differences in perspective among our subjects may explain the weak effects for the criticality factor.

Prior job performance and employee status were significant factors among more than half the supervisors. For the prior job performance results, one might interpret these findings to suggest that whereas half of the managers consider absenteeism as related to job performance, the other half does not. Although there is cumulative evidence which indicates that absenteeism and job performance are inversely related in the short-run (Bycio, 1992), some argue that absence may, over time, positively influence job performance (Staw & Oldham, 1978). It is possible that those managers for whom prior job performance was not a significant factor subscribe to the latter belief, and are less likely to punish an employee for being absent.

Finally, an interesting result pertains to the moderate importance placed on prior job performance and ability to attend among supervisors' disciplinary decisions. In unionized settings, arbitrators have deemed both excellent prior job performance and family demands as mitigating circumstances (Ballagh et al., 1987). These findings raise questions regarding whether in a nonunion environment, prior contributions and extenuating circumstances matter. It is possible that the bottom-line criterion of minimizing immediate costs to management is central, which fits with a utilitarian perspective regarding discipline decisions (Arvey & Jones, 1985; Klaas & Dell'Omo, 1991). Thus, instances of absence, regardless of prior excellent job performance or extenuating circumstances, may be discounted. This interpretation is somewhat speculative, however, and requires evidence to directly substantiate it.

Relational Effects of Personal Attributes on Absence Disciplinary Decisions

This study also examined differences between supervisors and their subordinates in disciplinary choices for absence given a particular set of circumstances. Relying on Schneider's (1987) ASA and Pfeffer's OD models, we hypothesized that differences between supervisors and subordinates in psychological and demographic attributes would explain discrepancies in absence disciplinary decisions between these individuals. With few exceptions, we found strong support for our hypotheses. At a theoretical level, one would expect such findings. According to the ASA and OD models, both psychological and demographic attributes are powerful determinants of person-organization fit. Based on the idea that disciplinary procedures establish the context for maintaining boundaries of acceptable behavior in the work place (Arvey & Jones, 1985), psychological- and demographic-attribute similarity is likely to represent adequate fit that is manifested in congruent disciplinary decisions between supervisors and subordinates. Logically, dissimilarity is likely to represent poor fit that is manifested in incongruent decisions between

supervisors and subordinates. The results also point to the utility of the ASA and OD models at the relational level, and adds further support for examining relational effects between individuals within social units who engage in regular work place interactions (Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989).

Clearly, there are specific practical implications for managing discipline related to these factors, which we discuss in a later section. At a theoretical level, the links between the individual attributes and disciplinary decisions provide a greater understanding of the psychological and demographic antecedents of agreement between supervisors and subordinates in a disciplinary context. But for a recent exception (Klaas & Dell'Omo, 1991), the literature on disciplinary decisions has been without an examination of theoretically-based antecedents (Arvey & Jones, 1985). Thus, this study helps to fill an important gap in the employee discipline literature.

The preponderance of supported hypotheses provides insights into the various sources of differences between supervisors and subordinates. Looking beyond the broad psychological and demographic classifications, there are noteworthy differences within each classification. Among the psychological factors, differences in specific attitudes about discipline and stable personality traits such as negative affectivity influenced discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. Among the demographic attributes, differences in variable job-related factors such as job tenure, and permanent characteristics, such as race, influenced discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. Taken together, it appears that the array of factors that have an impact on agreement in disciplinary decisions is quite broad, coming from sources that originate both inside and outside the work place.

Surprisingly, the hypotheses related to gender, marital status, and number of children were not supported. For the gender and number of children hypotheses, we found the opposite to that which we predicted: similarity between supervisors and subordinates on these factors was inversely related to discrepancies in disciplinary decisions. For marital status, the relationship was positive, but not statistically significant. The rationale advanced *a priori* for these hypotheses was based on social distance between individuals on these demographic characteristics that have typically covaried with distinctions in traditional social roles within and outside the work place (Hayghe, 1990; Wetzel, 1990). However, more recent changes in environmental factors may have influenced these social roles.

For the gender hypothesis, the cumulative effects of protective labor legislation and human resources management innovations designed to reduce barriers to mobility within organizations may have reduced gender-based social distance (Schuler, 1992). Similarly, innovations in child care programs may have minimized barriers to participation among employees with children (Kossek, 1990). For marital status, the distinction between traditional "bread winner" and "home maker" roles in married couples is becoming blurred as both spouses are increasingly sharing the responsibility for generating income (Hayghe, 1990).

The implications of these changes is that the range of differences between supervisors and subordinates becomes restricted, at least in the context of social

distance within organizations. Taken together, these explanations suggest that discrepancies in disciplinary decisions would not be predicted from objective demographic differences in gender, marital status, and number of children. However, recognizing that demographic attributes are also proxies for developmental, social, and environmental influences (Pfeffer, 1983), future research should investigate the specific issues that co-vary with these factors, particularly in light of the obtained inverse relationships for the gender and number of children factors.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of our study lies in the use of an extensive set of theoretically-derived variables and reliance on employees who are familiar with an actual disciplinary system in their employment context. Furthermore, collecting responses from both supervisors and their subordinates allowed investigation of factors that cause them to differ in their beliefs and actions relating to employee discipline. Finally, our methodology does not suffer from mono-method bias as predictor and criterion data were provided by different methods, and for the relational tests, different sources as well. However, this study is not without limitations.

One possible limitation relates to the use of the ASA and OD models to explain discrepancies. These frameworks focus on the effects of personal attribute similarity-dissimilarity on work place outcomes. We recognize the importance of considering other factors that may influence the design of disciplinary procedures such as precedents set by prior arbitration rulings within- and between-organizations (Ballagh et al., 1987). Nevertheless, we feel that the ASA and OD models are useful for studying the decision making process in a single organization within which the more macro factors do not vary.

Our relatively small number of subjects may raise concerns about statistical power (Cohen & Cohen, 1983) and the representativeness of the subjects' demographic characteristics. The effective sample sizes for the analyses were substantially larger than a simple count of subjects would indicate. As discussed earlier, the basis for assessing sample size was the number of decisions made by each person. Given the preponderance of support for our hypotheses, statistical power was not a limitation in the present study. Further, we feel that our sample is sufficiently representative because the selection of supervisors and subordinates was random, and we achieved a substantially higher response rate than what is typically attained for mail surveys (Dillman, 1978).

A possible lack of external validity is also a concern because actual disciplinary decisions that are made in the field would be based on more complete information that include, for example, the alleged transgressor's testimony. Recently, Olson, Dell'Omo, and Jarley (1992) evaluated the external validity of experimental studies by comparing the decision made in a policy capturing experiment with those made in actual cases by the same arbitrators. These researchers did not find a substantial difference in decision models derived from the experimental and field settings when the decision involved a single

issue, as is the focus here. Thus, we feel that it is reasonable to examine the absence disciplinary decision making processes of employees based on an experimental design.

Another potential limitation is that the generalizability of the obtained effects to other violations may be limited. As noted earlier, whereas Klaas and Wheeler (1990) found employee criticality to be an important influence on disciplinary decisions related to employee insubordination, we found this factor to be a relatively trivial influence on absence disciplinary decisions. Furthermore, the effects found in this study for discrepancies in psychological and demographic attributes also may not apply to other types of violations. For example, compared to a drug abuse violation, it could be argued that the causes underlying an absence violation are quite ambiguous. In the case of negative affectivity, it is unlikely to expect similar effects for absence violations compared with substance abuse violations due to the differences in the underlying causes of these violations.

Finally, subjects were asked to make disciplinary decisions in a contrived setting rather than in the context in which such decisions are made. In particular, there was only indirect resemblance between the context in which this study was conducted and the context in which a supervisor makes an actual disciplinary decision (i.e., the subjects took time from their jobs to respond to a survey which contained hypothetical, but realistic scenarios versus responding to actual cases of employee absenteeism). In spite of these issues, the results are generally consistent with the expectations deduced from the literature. Therefore, generalizations to the "real-life" setting are appropriate (Mook, 1983).

Implications for Practice

Our results indicate that psychological and demographic diversity among an organization's members may challenge the ability of disciplinary policies to maintain acceptable behavioral boundaries. Failure of disciplinary procedures could potentially result in increased grievance activity as well as other productivity-inhibiting employee reactions (Ichniowski, 1986; Klaas et al., 1991). Thus, examining the relational effects of psychological and demographic attributes on disciplinary choices is important, particularly in light of the increasing demographic diversity of the American work force (Johnston & Packer, 1987).

If, as the literature review suggests, failure to see eye to eye on discipline results in increased grievances and productivity-inhibiting behaviors among employees, it is in the interest of both management and employees reach some common frame of reference regarding alternate discipline (Klaas et al., 1991). As the results indicate, differences in what is considered fair and one's outlook on life influence disciplinary choices. In the case of organizational justice, clearer communication about standards of procedural and distributive fairness to supervisors and subordinates may be necessary. One possible avenue for achieving these objectives is the implementation of cooperative labor-management training programs (Banas, 1988).

Lastly, demographic dissimilarity between supervisors and subordinates may diminish the effectiveness of disciplinary procedures. As Pfeffer (1983) pointed out, differences in life experiences, for which demographic characteristics are proxies, may hamper effective communications between individuals. Therefore, investment in diversity training programs (see Schuler, 1992) may be useful for raising awareness of how demographic dissimilarity reflects social differences, which are likely to influence norms of acceptable behavior.²

In conclusion, this study provided evidence regarding the antecedents of absence disciplinary decisions, and some relevant predictors of these decisions between supervisors and subordinates. Clearly, not seeing eye to eye can be attributed in part to differences between supervisors and subordinates in psychological and demographic attributes. Future research is needed to assess the stability of these effects over time, which may have implications for the types of interventions that are used to minimize discrepancies.

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Appendix Within-Subjects Factors and Levels

- A. *Absentee's Criticality to your Department*
 - 1. Hill has common skills that are plentiful in the department.
 - 2. Hill has unique skills that are scarce in the department.
- B. *Absentee's Ability to Attend Work*
 - 1. Hill is physically *unable* to attend work today.
 - 2. Hill is physically *able* to attend work today.
- C. *Absentee's Job Performance*
 - 1. whose job performance is *below average*.
 - 2. whose job performance is *above average*.
- D. *Approved Absence versus Not Approved Absence*
 - 1. Today's absence was an approved personal day.
 - 2. Today's absence was *not* approved.
- E. *Absentee Status*
 - 1. Hill is a *probationary status* employee (i.e., employed *less* than 6 months).
 - 2. Hill is a *status* employee (i.e., employed *more* than 6 months).
- F. *Absentee's Absence History*
 - 1. Hill has had less than 4 days absent in the past year (or five months if Hill is a *probationary status* employee).
 - 2. Hill has had 4 or more days absent in the past year (or one year if Hill is a *status* employee).

Notes

1. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this alternative explanation.
2. Given the relatively small effect sizes revealed by the analyses, questions about the practical significance of the results are warranted. For example, one of the largest effects on discrepancies in disciplinary decisions was subjective health (see Table 4). The average discrepancy in disciplinary decisions between supervisors and subordinates when there was no discrepancy in subjective health (as rated by the health ladder) was 1.73. The average discrepancy in disciplinary decisions was 3.31 when the cumulative difference between supervisors' and subordinates' subjective health was 3 steps. A 5-step difference in subjective health yielded an average discrepancy in disciplinary decisions of 4.13. While these differences are not trivial, the moderate effect sizes suggest caution in implementing the actions we have discussed on the basis of the results.

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