

**Fairness Perceptions of Work-Life Balance Initiatives:  
Effects on Counterproductive Work Behaviour**

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**FAIRNESS PERCEPTIONS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE INITIATIVES:  
EFFECTS ON COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR**

**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the impact of employees' fairness perceptions regarding organizational work-life balance initiatives on their performance of counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). Moderating effects of adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism were also explored. Quantitative data collected from 224 public sector employees demonstrated significant main and moderating effects of informational justice, adaptive perfectionism and maladaptive perfectionism on CWB. Adaptive perfectionism weakened the link between informational justice and CWB, while maladaptive perfectionism strengthened it. Qualitative data collected from 26 employees indicate that both the social exchange and job stress models are useful frameworks for understanding CWB in the context of work-life balance initiatives; CWB emerged as both a negative emotional reaction to unfairness, and as a tool used by employees to restore equity in the exchange relationship with their employer. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:**

Work-life balance

CWB

Deviance

Personality

Perfectionism

Justice

In response to growing workforce concerns regarding work-life balance (WLB), organizations increasingly offer initiatives intended to facilitate the combination of employees' work responsibilities with their non-work commitments (Kersley et al., 2005; US Bureau of Labor, 2011). Research shows that providing initiatives valued by employees enhances perceptions of organizational support, affective commitment to the organization, and reciprocation in the form of increased task and contextual performance (Muse et al., 2008). However, imperfect implementation of WLB initiatives often results in employees having little knowledge of the provisions on offer (Bond and Wise, 2003), and/or unequal access to the programs within organizations (Duxbury, Higgins, and Coghill, 2003; McDonald et al., 2005). Another unintended effect of initiative implementation is the potential for 'backlash' from childfree employees, who may believe that WLB initiatives target parents and result in increased workloads for those not using them (de Janasz et al., 2013; Kirby and Krone, 2002; Nord et al., 2002). Consequently, the benefits of WLB initiatives, such as increased organizational commitment, improved performance, and reduced turnover (see review by Beauregard and Henry, 2009), may only be realized if staff are aware of the initiatives on offer and feel able to use them (Eaton, 2003; Ryan and Kossek, 2008).

The research reviewed above implies that the ability of WLB initiatives to enhance employee attitudes and performance depends to some degree on employees' perceptions of how fair those initiatives are. As yet, outcomes of such fairness perceptions have been under-researched. How might perceptions regarding access to and information about WLB initiatives influence employees' behaviour at work? Social exchange theory (Gould, 1979) and Spector's (1998) job stress framework would suggest that employees perceiving unfairness related to WLB initiatives might respond with counterproductive work behaviour (CWB). Using a mixed-

methods approach, the present study investigates the relationship between employees' fairness perceptions of organizational WLB initiatives and CWB, and explores the moderating role of individual differences. This study extends existing knowledge of WLB initiatives by demonstrating that employee reactions to their perceived unfairness are manifested in counterproductive behaviours that can have a detrimental effect on organizational functioning. The study also contributes to the organizational justice literature by showing that employee responses to unfairness depend on dispositional proclivities for emotional reactivity when faced with unfavourable outcomes.

The following sections explain the concept of CWB and its relevance to organizations, before outlining the theoretical and empirical justification for fairness perceptions of WLB initiatives as a predictor of CWB, and for personality traits as a moderator of this link.

### **COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIOUR AND FAIRNESS PERCEPTIONS**

CWB is defined as “any intentional behaviour on the part of an organization member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests” (Gruys and Sackett, 2003, p. 30). It can be targeted at the organization (CWB-O), as in theft, sabotage, or withheld effort, or at individual members (CWB-I), in the form of hostile interpersonal relations (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Both types of CWB can exert significant negative effects on organizational functioning, through financial costs due to theft and fraud, and in unquantifiable costs to productivity and performance (Dunlop and Lee, 2004; Hollinger and Davis, 2003; KPMG International Cooperative, 2011).

The prevailing theoretical framework used to explain CWB is based on social exchange (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). When treated favourably by others, individuals feel obliged to respond in kind, through positive attitudes or behaviours toward the source of the treatment. When treated poorly, employees will reduce or withdraw their positive attitudes and behaviours,

and may instigate negative ones in their place. One of the most prominent social exchange theories is Adams' (1965) equity theory, which posits that employees who feel unfairly treated will seek restitution. This suggests that employees who are dissatisfied with the fairness of their employer's procedures for allocating WLB initiatives, or with the honesty or comprehensiveness of the explanations provided regarding initiative use, may reciprocate with organizationally oriented CWB such as arriving late for work, reducing effort, and/or taking unauthorized breaks, or may engage in interpersonally oriented CWB such as making disparaging remarks about their managers, acting rudely toward others, and so on.

Another framework used to understand CWB derives from the work stress literature. Spector's (1998) model of the job stress process posits that when individuals perceive environmental stressors (e.g., unfair provision of WLB initiatives), they experience negative emotions such as anger or anxiety. These are followed by reactions to the stressors: psychological, physical, or behavioural job strains. Behavioural strains enable individuals to cope with stressors, either by decreasing the emotions elicited by the stressor (e.g., avoiding work) or by removing the stressor itself (e.g., talking to one's manager and creating a solution to the issue). Behavioural strains such as intentionally slowing down one's work output, taking longer breaks than permitted, or cursing at a co-worker can be considered CWB (Penney and Spector, 2005), and have been found to help employees cope with unfair outcomes at work by reducing the employees' emotional exhaustion (Krischer, Penney, and Hunter, 2010). Spector and Fox's (2002) model of voluntary work behaviour is based on this model, conceptualizing unfairness as a job stressor and CWB as a behavioural response to stress at work.

Three major forms of fairness perceptions have been studied. Distributive justice relates to the fairness of the outcomes employees receive, relative to their own contributions and the contributions and outcomes of others, while procedural justice refers to the fairness of an

organization's procedures for making decisions. The third form of fairness, interactional justice, involves the quality of interpersonal treatment experienced by employees, and includes assessments of the degree of respect and dignity with which employees are treated by authorities involved in implementing procedures or allocating outcomes, as well as the honesty and thoroughness of explanations provided by authorities for decisions or outcomes.

Theoretically, both the social exchange and the job stress frameworks account for a relationship between fairness perceptions and CWB. Empirically, research results support a strong link between these variables (see reviews by Berry, Ones, and Sackett, 2007; Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Dalal, 2005). For example, Colquitt et al.'s (2001) meta-analysis demonstrated that perceptions of distributive and procedural unfairness were related to work withdrawal and other negative reactions, and De Cremer and Van Hiel (2010) showed that perceptions of procedural injustice predicted intentions to display antisocial behaviour, mediated by negative emotions.

With regard to WLB initiatives, employees may be inclined to behave in a counterproductive manner if they believe that the procedures in place for allocating WLB initiatives are unfair (procedural injustice). In such a case, CWB may be a means of retaliating against the organization or of expressing the strain produced by unfair workplace procedures. Equally, employees who perceive that they are not being given fair access to WLB initiatives (distributive injustice) might respond by coming in to work late without permission, taking longer breaks than is acceptable, or otherwise creating their own flexibility in order to restore equity and repair the situation. Finally, if employees perceive that their organization is not providing candid and full explanations regarding the availability and use of WLB initiatives (interactional injustice), they might be inclined to react negatively toward the organization and/or its members.

*Hypothesis 1: Fairness perceptions of WLB initiatives are negatively related to CWB.*

The agent–system model of justice suggests that employees target their CWB at the perceived source of the unfair treatment (Bies and Moag, 1986; Masterson et al., 2000). This model assumes, however, that the source of informational and interpersonal unfairness is most often a supervisor (the agent), and that the source of procedural and distributive unfairness is most often the organization. This may be so when traditional indices of unfairness are studied, such as pay (see Jones, 2009), but the context of fairness in the present study is quite different. The perceived source of unfair treatment regarding WLB initiatives cannot readily be distinguished between the agent and the organization. Line managers often have discretion to implement WLB policy and allocate initiatives to their subordinates. Procedural and distributive unfairness are therefore just as likely to be attributed to supervisors as to the organization. For this reason, it is not hypothesized that particular types of unfairness perceptions would be more or less strongly related to particular types of CWB.

### **DISPOSITIONAL MODERATORS**

Not all employees respond similarly to stressors in the work environment. According to cognitive social theory (Mischel, 1973), personality influences the way in which individuals interpret and respond to situations, and because CWB is discretionary, personality is likely to have a strong influence (Martinko, Gundlach, and Douglas, 2002; Mount, Ilies, and Johnson, 2006). While researchers acknowledge the importance of an interactionist perspective in predicting employee behaviour, relatively little research explores both personality and justice in explaining CWB. Some exceptions include Bowling and Eschleman (2010), who demonstrated that work stressors were more strongly related to CWB among employees low in conscientiousness, or high in negative affectivity; Henle (2005), who found that socialization and impulsivity moderated the impact of interactional justice on CWB; and Burton, Mitchell and Lee

(2005), who showed that individuals high in self-esteem were most likely to respond to perceived interactional injustice with intentions to retaliate.

Dispositional characteristics appear to have the capacity to modify the social exchange relationship, by influencing employees' responses to environmental factors such as organizational justice. The standards people set for their behaviour have considerable potential to influence performance at work; Conscientiousness has consistently been found to predict decreased CWB (see review by Sackett and DeVore, 2001). Most research investigating main effects of dispositional variables on CWB has focused on factors from the Big Five personality taxonomy (e.g., Dalal, 2005; Sackett and DeVore, 2001). It has been argued, however, that using more specific personality trait measures may offer researchers greater precision and predictive ability than the use of broader measures based on the Big Five (Hough and Oswald, 2008; Rice and Stuart, 2010; Scott and Colquitt, 2007). For instance, several studies have found that lower-order facets of Conscientiousness are equally or more capable of predicting job performance than composite measures of the construct (e.g., Ashton, 1998; Moon, 2001). This suggests that using more general measures of personality may obscure potentially meaningful relationships between dispositional variables and workplace behaviour. The present study therefore examines the impact of two narrow personality traits – maladaptive and adaptive perfectionism.

There are two reasons to focus on these traits. First, there is strong theoretical justification for perfectionism influencing the link between fairness perceptions and CWB. Spector and Fox's (2002) emotion-centred model of voluntary behaviour, based on the job stress framework informing the present study's hypotheses, specifies that personality helps determine whether job stressors lead to CWB: given similar perceptions of a situation, some individuals will be more emotionally reactive than others. Perfectionism thus presents itself as a likely moderator, because its maladaptive and adaptive dimensions are characterized by their emotional responses to



disappointing outcomes. Second, maladaptive and adaptive perfectionism's empirical links to perceptions of stressors and to interpersonal behaviour suggest they have a key role to play in the prediction of CWB. The next section presents a brief review of these constructs, and explains how employees' propensities to set high personal standards for their performance, and to deal with an inability to meet those standards, may influence their reaction to fairness perceptions concerning WLB initiatives.

### **Perfectionism**

Perfectionism is defined as the disposition to reject any standard short of perfection (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2013). Research suggests that perfectionism is best construed as two chiefly independent dimensions differentiating between positive and negative aspects of the construct (Slaney et al., 2001; Stumpf and Parker, 2000). These are commonly referred to as adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism (e.g., Chang, Watkins, and Banks, 2004; Dunn, Whelton, and Sharpe, 2006). Both adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists set high personal standards for their work or behaviour, but respond differently when faced with a failure to achieve those standards. Adaptive perfectionists experience low levels of distress resulting from the discrepancy between their personal standards and their performance, while maladaptive perfectionists experience high levels of distress. Adaptive perfectionism has been identified as a lower-order facet of Conscientiousness, and maladaptive perfectionism has been related to Neuroticism (Hill, McIntire, and Bacharach, 1997; Rice, Ashby, and Slaney, 2007; Roberts et al., 2005).

From a theoretical standpoint, individuals holding themselves to high standards of performance may be reluctant to engage in CWB as a response to perceptions of unfairness, either to restore equity or to express behavioural strain. CWB is inconsistent with the performance standards to which those high in adaptive perfectionism aspire, and may therefore

induce psychologically uncomfortable cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). From an empirical standpoint, individuals high in adaptive perfectionism appear less emotionally reactive when faced with unfavourable outcomes. Adaptive perfectionism has been associated with a more constructive approach to dealing with potential stressors, with adaptive perfectionists reporting more persistence in the face of adversity and a stronger belief in their ability to deal with other people effectively (LoCicero and Ashby, 2000). Individuals high in adaptive perfectionism have also been found more likely to perceive potential stressors as challenges, rather than threats or losses, and to prefer active coping strategies such as planning and seeking social support (Rice and Lapsley, 2001; Stoeber and Rennert, 2008). The achievement striving and resistance to adversity inherent to adaptive perfectionism may enable employees high in this construct to better withstand situational pressures such as perceptions of organizational injustice. This proposition is supported by research by Diefendorff and Mehta (2007), who found that personal mastery – a motivational trait reflecting the desire to achieve, learn, and perform at a high level - was negatively related to CWB. When faced with unfair access to WLB initiatives, or insufficient information about them, individuals high in adaptive perfectionism may therefore refrain from performing CWB.

*Hypothesis 2: Adaptive perfectionism moderates the relationship between fairness perceptions of WLB initiatives and CWB, such that this relationship is weaker when adaptive perfectionism is high.*

Maladaptive perfectionism, in contrast, is related to ineffective coping and a tendency to be more negatively affected by life stressors (Mitchelson and Burns, 1998; Wei et al., 2006). In a study of school teachers, Stoeber and Rennert (2008) found that individuals high in maladaptive perfectionism were more likely to perceive potential stressors as threats or losses, rather than challenges to be met, and reported greater use of avoidant coping measures such as

disengagement and alcohol or drug use. Research by Ali Besharat and Shahidi (2010) has linked maladaptive perfectionism to anger and anger rumination, which are in turn associated with dysfunctional coping strategies and increased aggression (Bushman, 2002). In a similar vein, research conducted among university professors found that maladaptive perfectionism was strongly related to hostility and interpersonal sensitivity (Dunn et al., 2006). Maladaptive perfectionists may thus be predisposed to anger; they also demonstrate a tendency to perceive that others are unwilling or unavailable to help them in times of stress (Dunkley, Zuroff, and Blankstein, 2000). This tendency to perceive and amplify greater pressures in their lives, and to favour unconstructive coping strategies, may lead them to engage in more CWB as a response to stressful events such as unfair access to or information about WLB initiatives.

*Hypothesis 3: Maladaptive perfectionism moderates the relationship between fairness perceptions of WLB initiatives and CWB, such that this relationship is stronger when maladaptive perfectionism is high.*

In order to test the ability of fairness perceptions of WLB initiatives and perfectionism to explain variance in CWB beyond that accounted for by known predictors of CWB, tenure and perceived organizational support (POS) are also assessed in this study. Tenure and POS have been established as key predictors of CWB (see meta-analyses by Lau, Au, and Ho, 2003, and Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). In addition, it is possible that low fairness perceptions of WLB initiatives operate as a proxy for low work-life balance, and that WLB itself predicts CWB. For this reason, work interference with home (WIH) is also included as a control variable.

## **METHOD**

To test the hypotheses and to explore the mechanisms linking fairness perceptions and CWB, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The study was conceptualized from a pragmatic theoretical paradigm (Teddle

and Tashakkori, 2009); the primary methodology was quantitative, with a lesser emphasis being placed on the qualitative component. The qualitative portion was designed to elicit more information about the assumptions underlying Hypothesis 1; namely, that perceptions of unfairness trigger negative emotions (job stress model) and/or a desire to restore equity in the employee-employer exchange relationship (social exchange theory).

### **Quantitative study**

*Sample.* Participants worked for a local government in the United Kingdom, whose services included tourism, health promotion, housing, economic development, and waste collection. Seasonal, temporary, and casual workers were excluded on the basis that their experience of the organization was insufficient to allow them to answer questions about WLB initiatives (e.g., teenaged lifeguards working at community swimming pools during the summer). A response rate of 29% was obtained, with an effective sample size of 224. Respondents hailed from all areas and levels of the organization; job titles included highway inspector, environmental health officer, graphic designer, and driver. Average tenure was 7.76 years, and participants reported working an average of 35.52 hours per week.

The majority of respondents were women (62.3%). Ages ranged from 17 to 68, with the mean just over 41 years. Sixty-nine men (82.1%) and 108 women (77.7%) lived with a spouse or partner; of these, 58.3% of men and 71.2% of women were members of dual-earner households. Sixty-one men (72.6%) and 79 women (56.8%) had children; the average age of the youngest child was 15.5 for men, and 13.6 for women. Thirteen men (15.5%) and 20 women (14.4%) undertook caregiving responsibilities for adult dependents (other than children).

The organization offered the following WLB initiatives: flexible working hours, working from home, job sharing, voluntary reduced hours, maternity returnees policy, and compassionate

leave. At the time of data collection, nearly 53% of respondents were using at least one of these, while 32% reported no current or past use of any of the initiatives.

*Measures.* For all measures, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each item on a seven-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 7.

*CWB* was measured using Bennett and Robinson’s (2000) self-report measure, which assessed the extent to which employees engaged in counterproductive behaviour targeted at individuals in the workplace (e.g., “Acted rudely toward someone at work”) and at the organization (e.g., “Discussed confidential company information with an unauthorized person”). Cronbach’s alpha in the present study was  $\alpha = .75$  for CWB-I, and  $\alpha = .81$  for CWB-O.

*Fairness perceptions* were measured with Colquitt’s (2001) multidimensional scale of organizational justice, adapted for this study to reflect perceived fairness of WLB initiatives rather than general organizational outcomes. The procedural justice subscale comprised seven items evaluating the presence of voice, consistency, accuracy, appeal processes, bias, and ethical treatment in the organization’s procedures for allocating WLB initiatives. Distributive justice was gauged using four items assessing the degree to which respondents felt that their access to WLB initiatives reflected their need for and desire to use them (e.g., “My access to work-life balance initiatives is justified, given my personal or family circumstances”). Deutsch (1975) explains that need, rather than equity, may be an important determinant of distributive justice perceptions, especially if personal welfare is at stake. Informational justice was composed of five items evaluating the extent to which respondents felt they had been provided with thorough and timely information regarding the WLB initiatives available (e.g., “My organization has explained its work-life balance initiatives thoroughly”). Interpersonal justice was measured by four items assessing the extent to which employees received respectful and courteous treatment from

supervisors with regard to WLB initiatives (e.g., “My supervisor has treated me with respect”). Reliability alphas in the present study were .89 for procedural justice, .91 for distributive justice, .89 for informational justice, and .95 for interpersonal justice.

*Adaptive perfectionism* was measured with the AP/high standards subscale of Slaney et al.’s (2001) Revised Almost Perfect Scale. Seven items assessed the extent to which respondents set high personal standards for their performance (e.g., “I expect the best from myself”). One item was dropped after factor analysis (“If you don’t expect much out of yourself, you will never succeed”), as its factor loading was less than .40. The reliability alpha for this scale was .89 in the present study.

*Maladaptive perfectionism* was measured with the MP/discrepancy subscale of Slaney et al.’s (2001) Revised Almost Perfect Scale. Seven items assessed the extent to which respondents experienced distress resulting from the discrepancy between their personal standards and their performance (e.g., “I hardly ever feel that what I’ve done is good enough”). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .93.

*Control variables:* tenure was measured in years. POS was measured with Eisenberger et al.’s (1997) eight-item scale, which had a reliability alpha of .89 in the present study. WIH was measured using the six time-based and strain-based items from Carlson, Kacmar, and Williams’s (2000) multidimensional measure of work-family conflict, modified to apply to respondents with and without family responsibilities. The reliability alpha for this scale was .92 in the present study.

***Measurement models.*** In order to examine the distinctiveness of the measures used in this study, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using Amos software and maximum-likelihood estimation. Goodness of fit was interpreted using the comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and commonly accepted cutoff values (CFI

> 0.90 and RMSEA < 0.08) were taken as indicative of poor fit (e.g., McDonald and Ho, 2002).

The hypothesized ten-factor model (in which all measures loaded on distinct factors) was compared with a one-factor model, in which all items in each of the measures loaded on a common factor. The hypothesized model produced better fit ( $\chi^2 = 2604.48$ ,  $df = 1607$ ; CFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.05) than the one-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 8308.91$ ,  $df = 1652$ ; CFI = 0.25, RMSEA = 0.13), and all factor loadings were significant.

Discriminant validity was assessed for the distinction among procedural, distributive, informational, and interpersonal justice by comparing the ten-factor measurement model to a seven-factor model in which all justice items loaded onto a single factor. The fit of the single fairness perceptions model ( $\chi^2 = 4792.9$ ,  $df = 1689$ ; CFI = 0.66, RMSEA = 0.09) was poorer than that of the measurement model. The same held true for two other comparison models, one in which all CWB items loaded onto one factor ( $\chi^2 = 2890.12$ ,  $df = 1674$ ; CFI = 0.87, RMSEA = 0.56), and one in which all perfectionism items comprised a single factor ( $\chi^2 = 3837.66$ ,  $df = 1674$ ; CFI = 0.76, RMSEA = 0.08).

To explore the prevalence of common method variance in the data, the common latent factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) was conducted. This adds a latent common methods factor to the hypothesized ten-factor measurement model, enabling the potential increase in model fit obtainable by accounting for the common methods factor to be identified, as well as the variance extracted by this common factor. The fit of this model was similar to that of the hypothesized ten-factor model ( $\chi^2 = 2529.85$ ,  $df = 1558$ ; CFI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.05), but the average variance extracted by the common methods factor was only 0.09, which falls substantially below the 0.50 cutoff suggested by Hair et al. (1998) as indicating the presence of a latent factor representing the manifest indicators. Accordingly, although the possibility of common method variance in the data

cannot be eliminated, it does not appear that common method bias was a serious issue hindering the testing of the study's hypotheses.

*Analysis.* Hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses. Predictor variables were centred before forming interaction terms, to reduce the multicollinearity often associated with regression equations containing interaction terms (Aiken and West, 1991). Changes in  $R^2$  were used to evaluate the ability of the interaction terms to explain variance beyond that accounted for by the main effects in the equation. Significant interactions were plotted using the simple effects equation (Cohen et al., 2003), using values for the moderators at one standard deviation above and below the mean.

### **Qualitative study**

At the end of the survey, respondents were invited to contact the researcher if they were willing to participate in a follow-up interview regarding the organization's WLB initiatives. Thirty-five participants registered their interest initially, but only twenty-six interviews were conducted due to difficulties in scheduling and attrition. Semi-structured interviews took place two months after the survey data collection, and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Eighteen (69%) of the participants were female, 22 (85%) reported living with a spouse or partner, all of whom were also employed, and 20 (77%) had dependent children, of which the average age of the youngest was 8 years. All participants worked in office-based positions, and their average age was just under 43 years.

The primary purpose of the interviews was to collect more detailed information on employees' experiences of the WLB initiatives for the organization's use in amending its policy and procedures. Participants were asked to describe the initiatives offered, their personal experience (if any) of requesting and/or using these initiatives, and their experience (if any) of



working with others who used these initiatives. Probes were used to clarify or to elicit further information (e.g., “What was that experience like for you?”; “What did you do then?”).

A thematic analysis approach was employed to interpret the interview data, as it allows for both a realist and a constructivist approach to the variables being explored (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Fairness, emotions, and CWB can be conceptualized as rooted in both a measurable reality and a socially constructed experience, in which they have personal and social meaning to the study participants. Thematic analysis consists of a search for themes that are identified as being important to describing the topic of interest; through reading and re-reading of the data, researchers engage in a form of pattern recognition in which recurrent themes are identified and become categories for analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). After the interview data were transcribed, the researcher read through the first transcript and generated initial codes based on snippets of text that represented a particular construct or idea (e.g., frustration with supervisor). The second transcript was then read with an eye to recognizing text that fit the same codes generated from Transcript 1. New codes were also generated from Transcript 2. The third transcript was then read and coded, using the codes generated from the first two transcripts as well as new ones based on constructs or ideas not yet encountered in the previous transcripts. This cumulative process continued for all 26 transcripts.

Using NVIVO software, codes were then analysed and sorted into themes, with overarching themes categorized as ‘organizing themes’ and sub-themes as ‘basic themes’ (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The primary set of coding categories was based on constructs central to the social exchange and job stress models, in the context of unfairness (types of injustice; negative emotions; behavioural responses). Similar statements among the interviews were identified and used as the basis for a secondary set of coding categories, which were nested within the first set (e.g., anger vs. disappointment; interpersonal vs. organizational CWB).

Themes were then reviewed for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990), in an effort to ensure that data within themes fit together in a meaningful way, and that there were clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. A summary of these themes is presented in Table 5.

## RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for each of the study variables are shown in Table 1, with the results of the hierarchical regression analyses presented in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 was only partially supported: informational justice was a significant, negative predictor of CWB-I ( $\beta = -.39, p < .01$ ). None of the other justice variables had significant relationships with CWB.

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Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here

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No main effects of perfectionism on CWB were hypothesized, but as Table 2 demonstrates, several were found. Adaptive perfectionism had a significant, negative relationship with CWB-O, and maladaptive perfectionism had a significant, positive relationship with CWB-I.

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 2: adaptive perfectionism moderated the link between informational justice and CWB-I, such that low levels of fairness perceptions were less likely to be associated with high levels of CWB when levels of adaptive perfectionism were high. This relationship is depicted in Figure 1. Hypothesis 3 also received partial support. Maladaptive perfectionism moderated the relationship between informational justice and CWB-I, such that low levels of fairness perceptions were more likely to be associated with high levels of CWB when levels of maladaptive perfectionism were high (depicted in Figure 2). Simple slopes were calculated using the web utility described by Preacher, Curran and Bauer (2006) and are shown in

Tables 3 and 4. To ensure that moderation was not taking place only for a small subset of employees who were both high in maladaptive perfectionism and low in adaptive perfectionism, a post-hoc, three-way interaction between adaptive perfectionism, maladaptive perfectionism, and informational justice was also tested; no significant result was obtained.

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Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

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Support for both theoretical perspectives – the job stress framework, and social exchange - was derived from the qualitative analyses, which yielded evidence of employees using CWB to express negative emotions arising from perceived unfair treatment, as well as to restore equity or retaliate against the source of the unfair treatment.

With regard to the types of injustice experienced, twelve participants specifically referenced instances of informational injustice (not being informed about full range of initiatives; not having procedures for allocating initiative use and subsequent decisions explained), while four cited experience of procedural injustice (management prioritizing employees with young children when approving requests to use initiatives). Only one participant reported experiencing interpersonal injustice (manager brusque and dismissive during conversation about potential initiative use by employee). While half the participants were not granted the WLB initiative they had requested, only one reported this in a way that suggested that distributive injustice was perceived. The other participants appeared more concerned with the way in which the decision had been taken and/or conveyed to them by their supervisors.

*Behavioural strains.* Sixteen interview participants mentioned negative emotions resulting from perceptions of unfair treatment from the organization with regard to WLB initiatives. These emotions were largely mild in nature, with thirteen participants citing annoyance, disappointment, and frustration. One participant described herself as furious, one described himself as upset, and another described herself as feeling betrayed. The unfair treatment generating these emotional responses seemed to be mostly of an informational and/or procedural nature. According to the job stress framework, expression of negative emotional arousal can take the form of behavioural strains, such as CWB. Not all the interview participants who reported negative emotions went on to report how, or if, they expressed these emotions. When probed (“What did you do then?”), one participant (female, accountant, 40) laughed and said, “I seethed quietly.” Another participant (male, graphic designer, 34) repeated that “it was very disappointing”, but did not elucidate as to whether this affected his subsequent actions. However, seven participants specifically referred to deteriorating interpersonal relationships as a result of perceived unfair treatment and the negative emotions this generated. Five of these appeared to be cases of informational injustice, in which resentment manifested itself toward managers who had not made employees’ options regarding the initiatives clear. For instance, a library technician (female, 38) spoke of feeling betrayed by her line manager, who had permitted two colleagues to work from home on certain days of the week and then told her “the quota is full” when she asked to use this initiative as well:

“If I had known it was first come, first served and there was a quota, I would have rushed in there the day we got the leaflet [describing the WLB initiatives, included with the employees’ pay slips]. But [the line manager] didn’t say anything. And she knows I’ve got the school run and it’s a long commute here. ... I do think it’s soured our relationship.

I don't put in the effort to be pleasant anymore. I used to pop in, we'd have a chat, have a laugh. Now I can't be bothered. She can't be bothered, so why should I?"

***Retaliation / Restitution.*** Four interview participants made reference to taking action in response to perceived unfair treatment from a supervisor. One, a parks and countryside service officer (male, 33), spoke of being treated discourteously when discussing with his line manager the possibility of taking voluntary reduced hours. In the parks officer's view, the line manager cast aspersions on the officer's ability to withstand the rigours of a full-time job. The parks officer then stated that he had "got [the line manager] back" by spreading false rumours concerning his sexual orientation and proclivity for illegal sexual activities conducted in the local government's public parks (a relatively unambiguous example of CWB-I).

Another employee, an office administrator (female, 46), described learning that a colleague in another department had entered a job sharing arrangement, and approaching her manager to discuss a similar arrangement for herself. She spoke of being "fobbed off" and attributed this to her manager's lack of knowledge regarding the organization's policies:

"He means well, but he's not exactly on the ball all of the time, d'you know what I mean? He didn't have the faintest [idea]." She went on to describe creating her own schedule flexibility by extending her break times or leaving early without permission. "It was basically a case of, 'If you aren't going to help me out, then I'll help myself.'"

This would appear to be a case of CWB-O motivated by the desire to restore equity in the social exchange relationship.

There were some accounts of behaviours that could be classified both as efforts to restore equity, as per social exchange theory, and as behavioural strains, as per the job stress framework. For example, a payroll clerk (female, 38), whose request for flexible work hours was denied by her supervisor without explanation, reported deliberately working more slowly than necessary.

After describing herself as annoyed by her supervisor's behaviour, she went on to say that she no longer put the same amount of effort into her work:

“I do the work, but I take my time about it. I guess I feel like he's not putting himself out there for me, so...two can play that game. That sounds really childish, doesn't it? [laughs] I'm still getting the job done, let me be clear. But there's no point in throwing myself into it if at the end of the day, no one's going to take a blind bit of notice, is there?”

This response functions both as an expression of the participant's annoyance with the informational injustice demonstrated by her supervisor, and as an attempt to restore equity in the social exchange relationship, where the supervisor's inputs have been perceived as reduced.

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Insert Table 5 about here

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## **DISCUSSION**

The quantitative and qualitative findings of this study highlight the pre-eminence of informational justice in predicting CWB (Aquino, Galperin, and Bennett, 2004; Skarlicki, Barclay, and Pugh, 2008). Informational justice was the only type of fairness perception to predict CWB, echoing the finding of previous studies that interactional justice was a stronger predictor of CWB than either distributive or procedural justice (e.g., Aquino, Lewis, and Bradfield, 1999; Henle, 2005). When deciding whether or not to perform CWB, fair treatment regarding information about organizational services appears to be more important to employees than the fairness of service allocation or the procedures used to determine that allocation, and this holds true in the context of WLB initiative provision. Being unable to use a desired service is undoubtedly frustrating, but a thorough explanation of what services are available, how decisions regarding use are made, and/or why permission to use a particular service was denied can

partially compensate for unfavourable treatment and forestall negative reactions (e.g., Greenberg, 1993; Skarlicki and Folger, 1997). Not receiving full or honest explanations regarding the availability of and decisions made about WLB initiatives triggers, according to the job stress framework, negative emotions that are expressed as CWB. Social exchange theory would posit that employees receiving this unfavourable treatment respond either with retaliation or attempts to restore equity. This has important repercussions for organizations providing WLB initiatives; while they are designed to facilitate employees' work-life balance, and improve recruitment, retention, and job-related attitudes, such benefits may be neutralized by a corresponding increase in CWB arising from poor implementation.

Although no main effects of perfectionism on CWB were hypothesized, it was found that adaptive perfectionism was linked to fewer instances of CWB-O, while maladaptive perfectionism was linked to greater CWB-I. High performance standards set by adaptive perfectionists, in conjunction with a demonstrated ability to engage with stressors in a constructive manner (LoCicero and Ashby, 2000), may be incompatible with the dysfunctional behaviours that exemplify CWB-O: tardiness, theft, low work effort, and so on. Maladaptive perfectionists, meanwhile, are disposed to criticize and put pressure upon both themselves and others (Hewitt and Flett, 2002). This, combined with the perception that other people are unwilling to provide assistance to them in times of stress (Dunkley et al., 2000), and the tendency toward both hostility and interpersonal sensitivity (Dunn et al., 2006), places maladaptive perfectionists in a position whereby engaging in CWB-I - discourteous or hostile interpersonal behaviour in the workplace - may come more easily to them. The correlations between perfectionism and justice obtained in the present study (see Table 1) also suggest that those high in adaptive perfectionism are more likely to perceive higher levels of fairness, whereas individuals high in maladaptive perfectionism are more likely to perceive lower levels of fairness;

this is consistent with established links between maladaptive perfectionism and neuroticism, and with a tendency to perceive potential stressors as threats rather than challenges (Mitchelson and Burns, 1998; Stoeber and Rennert, 2008; Wei et al., 2006). The perfectionism research reviewed earlier in this paper suggests that maladaptive perfectionism may have a stronger interpersonal component than adaptive perfectionism, which helps to explain why there was no main effect of the former on CWB-O and no main effect of the latter on CWB-I.

Examination of Table 1 reveals no significant correlation between maladaptive perfectionism and CWB-I, but significant beta-values emerged after controlling for the variables included in the first step of the regression equation. It is therefore possible that maladaptive perfectionism is only associated with CWB when accounting for environmental triggers such as injustice. Faced with poor information provision concerning WLB initiatives, employees appear more likely to respond with outbursts of rude or aggressive behaviour toward other organizational members when the employees themselves score highly on maladaptive perfectionism. These employees may be more sensitive to situational perceptions, and respond to those perceptions more vigorously than individuals who experience less distress over failed attempts to attain high personal standards for performance. Viewed through the job stress framework, maladaptive perfectionism predisposes individuals to experience negative emotions, rendering them more likely to engage in CWB under stressful conditions. Because they are both more interpersonally sensitive and more hostile (Dunn et al., 2006), individuals high in maladaptive perfectionism may interpret actions made on behalf of the organization in a more negative light, perhaps attributing to them deliberately harmful purposes. These interpretations then result in greater negative emotional arousal, followed by behavioural strains such as CWB.

Individuals high in adaptive perfectionism appear less likely to jeopardize their high personal standards for performance and interpersonal relationships by responding to poor



treatment from their employer with CWB-I. As Bieling et al. (2004) suggest, adaptive perfectionism seems to lead to fewer self-defeating behaviours. In this study, employees high in adaptive perfectionism appear able to respond to perceived unfairness with greater restraint than their counterparts scoring low on this construct.

According to Spector and Fox (2002), successful organizations require employees who respond constructively to negative situations. Although it is well known that employee perceptions of unfairness often result in CWB, the present study demonstrates that individuals may react to unfairness in dissimilar ways, depending on their dispositional characteristics. The study's results support the position of Colbert et al. (2004), who suggest that the norm of reciprocity be modified to include the role of personality.

### **Practical implications**

Understanding predictors of CWB is important for organizations, because CWB has such negative consequences (see Robinson, 2008). An important lesson to be learned from this study is that full disclosure of information regarding the availability of and decision-making about WLB initiatives for employees is essential to avoid increased CWB. Informational justice is a more attainable goal for organizations than distributive justice; it may be difficult to ensure that all employees perceive the allocation of WLB initiatives as fair, but it is much less difficult to explain the availability and distribution of initiatives in a forthright and comprehensive manner.

To this end, a clear policy regarding the availability and allocation of WLB initiatives is necessary: what initiatives are offered, how do they operate, how will they help employees and the organization, and which employees will be able to use them? Policies will of course vary by organization; not only will available initiatives be different, but eligibility to use them will differ according to job role, organizational culture, available technology, etc. Some organizations may allocate initiatives on the basis of equality (first-come, first-served); others according to equity

(top performers will be more readily accommodated), or to need (caregivers will receive priority). In all cases, training for line managers in how to apply the organization's policy consistently and fairly must be conducted.

Further efforts to reduce CWB may be helped by providing alternative routes by which employees can express their discontent; for instance, strengthening grievance procedures or introducing other mechanisms for employee voice. Employees who are able to "speak up" regarding unfavourable treatment, or who can take a complaint to a higher-level manager, may be less likely to respond with CWB. This may, however, only be effective in organizations whose culture does not victimize those who make complaints about their line managers, or where there is an existing policy regarding WLB initiatives that managers have failed to observe. In any case, structural changes must take precedence over individual-level solutions; making it incumbent upon employees to find an appropriate means by which to rectify incidences of unfairness absolves the organization of responsibility for preventing injustice in the first place, which compounds the injustice.

Attending to employees' dispositional characteristics may also help to prevent or reduce CWB. Personality testing can identify individuals high in maladaptive perfectionism, who can be offered training interventions to help reduce the ruminative thinking on discrepancies between personal standards and performance common to maladaptive perfectionists. For example, there is consistent evidence from experimental studies that creating an interruption can divert ruminative thinking and improve the quality of thinking and problem-solving (see review by Nolen-Hoeksema, Wisco, and Lyubomirsky, 2008). Employees can be taught to engage in short periods of neutral or pleasant distractions, such as exercise or conversation with friendly colleagues, when they find themselves occupied in ruminative thinking about discrepancies (Melrose, 2011). Once their moods are improved by these distractions, they may be able to engage in problem

solving or cognitive reappraisal to address the sense of discrepancy they are experiencing. Mindfulness training (Teasdale et al., 2000) can also be employed to help affected employees gain attentional control and allow negative thoughts about discrepancies to enter and leave their consciousness without escalating into maladaptive rumination. Finally, cognitive therapy can help teach maladaptive perfectionists ways to challenge their ruminations on discrepancies, instead of replaying or accepting them, and to actively replace negative patterns of thinking with more rational or adaptive thoughts (Barber and DeRubeis, 1989).

### **Limitations and Future Research**

There are several limitations to the present study. The cross-sectional design of the quantitative study does not permit firm conclusions regarding causality. Research employing a longitudinal design would better assess issues of directionality: do perceptions of unfairness lead to CWB, or does performance of CWB produce, over time, assessments of the workplace environment as being unfair, as self-perception theory might suggest (Bem, 1972)?

While evidence exists to support the accuracy of self-report measures of CWB, and their convergence with others' ratings (e.g., Berry et al., 2007, reported a .89 correlation between self- and non-self-reported CWB; see also Fox et al., 2007; Mount et al., 2006), it is possible that CWB was under-reported in the present study due to social desirability bias. Although the use of supervisor or peer-reports can offset this potential issue, other-reports of CWB generate their own problems (e.g., Penney and Spector, 2005). Peers' and supervisors' assessments are based on limited information, as they are able to observe only a subset of employees' behaviour, and social desirability is likely to constrain the degree to which employees perform CWB in front of others. In addition, supervisor ratings are frequently influenced by halo effect (Mount et al., 2006; O'Brien and Allen, 2008). No one way of measuring CWB is unproblematic.

Limitations of the qualitative data include the sample size, which was only 12% of the quantitative survey sample. Interview participants were self-selected rather than randomly or purposively chosen, and therefore cannot be considered representative of the organizational population.

As the design of the present study treated perfectionism as a moderator, adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism were assessed as continuous variables, using the AP/high standards subscale to represent adaptive perfectionism and the MP/discrepancy subscale to represent maladaptive perfectionism (e.g., Ashby, Rice, and Martin, 2006; Gnilka, Ashby, and Noble, 2013; Rice, Ashby, and Slaney, 1998). Given that maladaptive perfectionists also fixate on high standards, which were found in the present study to have positive effects on the link between informational justice and CWB, further exploration of the depth of the relationship between maladaptive perfectionism, CWB and informational justice may be warranted. Future research may wish to employ cluster analysis, categorizing participants as adaptive perfectionists (high standards, low discrepancy), maladaptive perfectionists (high standards, high discrepancy), and nonperfectionists (low standards, low discrepancy) according to the technique of Rice and Ashby (2007) and Wang, Slaney, and Rice (2007). This approach could also be employed in conjunction with structured interviews; comparing findings from different categories of perfectionist may yield informative results concerning perceptions of injustice and motivations to engage in CWB.

Future research may also wish to investigate the moderating role of an organization's WLB culture in the fairness-CWB relationship. A supportive WLB culture has been linked to lower levels of employee stress (Beauregard, 2011), and research has shown that informal WLB support is a stronger predictor of job satisfaction, stress, and turnover intentions than formal supports such as organizational WLB initiatives (Behson, 2005). To what extent will informal

support counteract the effects of fairness perceptions? For instance, if employees enjoy considerable job autonomy (an informal support) and are able to create their own flexibility, will a lack of adequate information provision about WLB initiatives be as salient as it would for individuals with little autonomy? Knowing where to focus their efforts may assist managers in reducing CWB within their organizations.

Finally, employee performance of CWB in response to informational injustice may vary depending on whether perceptions of unfairness are related to mandatory organizational offerings (e.g., provision of a safe workplace), or supplemental benefits, such as WLB initiatives. Is injustice more impactful when it concerns benefits an organization is legislated to provide, versus benefits an organization is only legislated to consider providing (as with flexible working practices in the UK)? Again, future research in this area may help organizations determine where they may best focus their efforts to ensure lower levels of CWB.

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**TABLE 1**

**Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>
1. Interpersonal CWB	2.03	0.81	-										
2. Organizational CWB	1.73	0.62	.32***	-									
3. Distributive justice	4.31	1.16	-.06	-.04	-								
4. Procedural justice	4.09	1.08	-.19*	-.17	.46***	-							
5. Informational justice	3.73	1.26	-.37***	-.22*	.48***	.59***	-						
6. Interpersonal justice	5.56	1.34	-.04	-.08	.17	.16	.20*	-					
7. Adaptive perfectionism	5.74	0.81	-.03	.21***	.07	.19*	.21*	.05	-				
8. Maladaptive perfectionism	3.46	1.32	.05	.05	.00	-.22*	-.01	-.04	.10	-			
9. Tenure	7.96	7.49	.04	-.02	.12	-.11	-.11	-.06	-.02	.10	-		
10. POS	3.89	1.26	-.08	-.06	.36***	.59***	.53***	.30***	.07	-.16*	-.04	-	
11. Work interference with home	4.01	1.62	.16*	.06	.10	-.31***	-.18	-.26***	.14*	.30***	.09	-	.47***
12. Presence of young children	n/a	n/a	.08	.02	-.07	-.05	-.16	-.03	-.01	-.07	-.03	-.05	.13*

*Note.*  $N = 224$ .  $p < .05$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**TABLE 2**

**Hierarchical Regression Analyses predicting CWB**

	CWB-I				CWB-O			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Tenure	.03	.02	.03	-.02	-.09	-.09	-.08	-.08
POS	-.12	-.02	.03	.01	-.06	.11	.16	.12
Presence of dependent children	.06	.04	.08	-.09	-.02	-.02	.00	.04
Work interference with home	.23*	.22*	.18	.18 <sup>†</sup>	.16	.08	.08	.08
Distributive justice (DJ)		.08	.04	.15		.11	.07	.24 <sup>†</sup>
Procedural justice (PJ)		.14	.26 <sup>†</sup>	.23 <sup>†</sup>		-.10	.00	-.02
Informational justice (InfJ)		-.39**	-.43***	-.60***		-.25 <sup>†</sup>	-.25 <sup>†</sup>	-.14
Interpersonal justice (IntJ)		-.07	-.05	-.04		-.17	-.14	-.23*
Adaptive perfectionism (AP)			-.09	-.23*			-.22*	-.24*
Maladaptive perfectionism (MP)			.26*	.28*			.16	.03
AP x DJ				.11				.09
AP x PJ				-.01				.04
AP x InfJ				.44***				.20
AP x IntJ				-.03				-.16
MP x DJ				.08				.07
MP x PJ				-.17				-.01
MP x InfJ				-.33*				.20
MP x IntJ				.05				.04
F	2.54*	2.65*	2.95**	3.75***	0.85	1.41	1.85	2.52**
ΔF	2.54*	2.61*	3.56*	3.83***	0.85	1.94	3.33*	2.96**
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.09*	.09*	.06*	.20***	.03	.07	.06*	.18**
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.06*	.12*	.16**	.33***	-.01	.03	.08	.21**

Note.  $N = 224$ . <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**TABLE 3**

**Test of Simple Slopes of Regression for Interaction between Adaptive Perfectionism and Informational Justice in Predicting Interpersonal CWB**

Level of Adaptive Perfectionism	Simple Slope	SE	<i>t</i> (221)
High	-.08	.12	-.72
Medium	-.39	.08	-4.68***
Low	-.70	.12	-6.00***

*Note.* *N* = 224.

\*\*\* *p* < .001.

**TABLE 4**

**Test of Simple Slopes of Regression for Interaction between Maladaptive Perfectionism and Informational Justice in Predicting Interpersonal CWB**

Level of Maladaptive Perfectionism	Simple Slope	SE	<i>t</i> (221)
High	-.64	.18	4.47***
Medium	-.39	.08	3.99***
Low	-.14	.11	1.29

*Note.* *N* = 224.

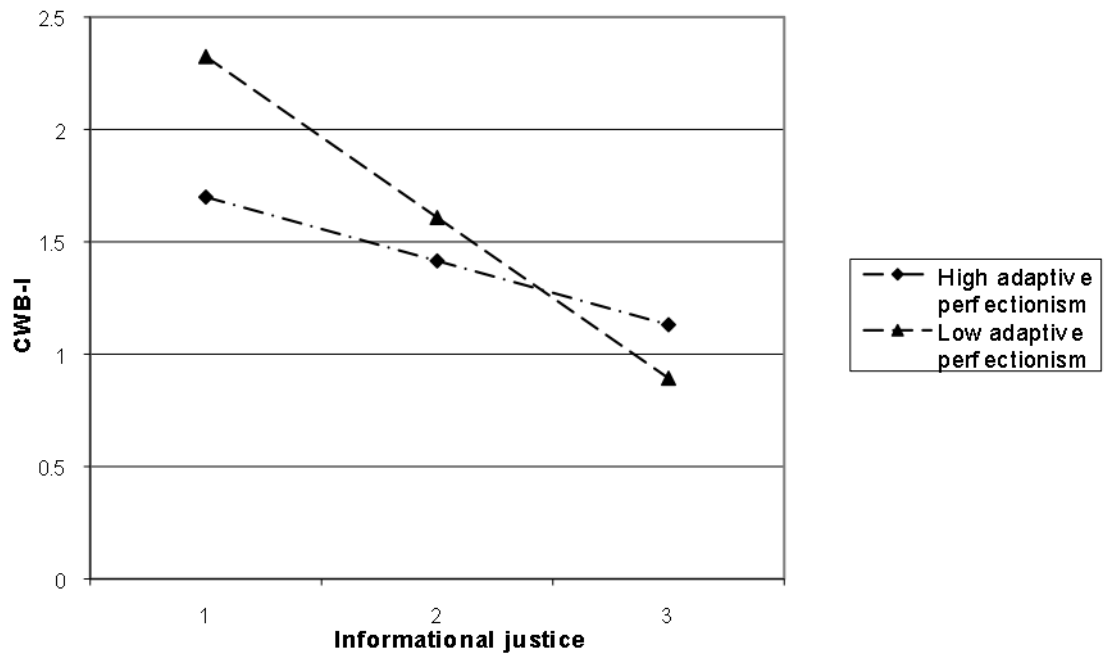
\*\*\* *p* < .001.

**TABLE 5****Basic, Organizing, and Global Themes**

<i>Basic themes</i>	<i>Organizing Themes</i>	<i>Global Theme</i>
Procedural injustice Distributive injustice Informational injustice Interpersonal injustice	Types of injustice	Unfairness
Annoyance / Irritation Disappointment Frustration Anger Betrayal	Negative emotions	
Did nothing Reduction in quality of interpersonal relationships Retaliation (interpersonal CWB) Restoration of equity (organizational CWB)	Behavioural responses	

**FIGURE 1**

**Adaptive perfectionism x Informational justice in Predicting CWB-I**



**FIGURE 2**

