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Designing electronic use policies to enhance employee perceptions of fairness and to reduce cyberloafing: An empirical test of justice theory

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ABSTRACT

Organizations are attempting to curtail cyberloafing or employee use of company Internet and email systems for non-work purposes by implementing electronic use policies, but their design is based on anecdotal support instead of theory or empirical research. Using procedural justice theory, we propose policies containing signed versus implied consent, for cause versus periodic monitoring, zero tolerance or progressive discipline versus managerial discretion in disciplinary procedures, and appeals to peers or management versus no appeals will improve employee perceptions of policy fairness and thus, decrease cyberloafing. Results from two experiments and a field study found that zero tolerance, progressive discipline, and appeal processes were related to higher perceptions of policy fairness while periodic monitoring was related to less cyberloafing.

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1. Introduction

Technology has created a revolution in the workplace that is a double-edged sword. While many organizations use electronic systems as their primary tool for communication, collaboration, research, and information management, some employees have abused these systems. One survey found that, on average, employees waste a little over two hours per eight hour workday and that the most common distraction at work is surfing the Internet for personal use (Malachowski, 2005). Although the Internet has substantially changed how companies conduct business, there is a dark side to using the Internet at work that is often referred to as cyberloafing.

Cyberloafing is employees' use of company-provided Internet access and email for non-work related purposes during working hours (Lim, 2002). Examples of cyberloafing include emailing pictures or jokes, shopping online, downloading music, posting to newsgroups, participating in chatrooms, blogging, instant messaging, and online gaming. Researchers have estimated that cyberloafing reduces employee productivity by as much as 30–40% (Conlin, 2000), which translates into corporate America spending $759 billion annually on wages for which no work is done (Malachowski, 2005). Moreover, cyberloafing can result in clogged bandwidth and degraded system performance (Sipior & Ward, 2002) as well as increased legal liability for companies (e.g., harassment, copyright infringement, defamation; Young, 2004). Given its severity, it is important to research methods of managing cyberloafing in an effort to reduce its occurrence and minimize its negative outcomes.

One possible method for managing cyberloafing is the implementation of electronic use policies. Electronic use policies are designed to deter abuse of company-provided email and Internet systems by elaborating on what actions are appropriate and acceptable to an organization. They are also intended to protect employees and their employers from illegal or unethical behaviors stemming from the abuse of these technologies (Gaskin, 1998). These policies detail employee rights and responsibilities regarding such technologies and encourage ethical behavior by employees. Even though over 80% of employers have implemented electronic use policies (Flynn, 2005), the literature only offers anecdotal advice for constructing these policies, which is not based on theory and has not been empirically tested to determine its effectiveness. This may explain why a survey of human resource managers found that only 40% perceived that their policies are effective in reducing cyberloafing (Young & Case, 2004).

We address this disparity and expand upon the descriptive literature by drawing on procedural justice theory (Leventhal, 1980; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975) to identify the specific policy components that should be most influential on employees' perceptions of policy fairness and thus, their subsequent cyberloafing behaviors. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of the procedures and policies used by organizational representatives to make allocation decisions. If employees do not believe that organizational policies are fair, especially ones that can result in negative outcomes, such policies may

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not have their intended effect. Procedural justice theory will help organizations design electronic use policies that are perceived as fair by employees and are effective at reducing cyberloafing. Below we apply procedural justice theory to four policy components that should have a salient effect on employee reactions: consent, monitoring, discipline, and grievance procedures.

1.1. Consent procedures

The descriptive literature on electronic use policies emphasizes the importance of obtaining employee consent or an acknowledgement that employees understand and agree to abide by the policy. Employers can obtain consent by having employees sign an acknowledgement form after they have read the policy and before they access Internet and email systems (Overly, 1999; Towns & Girard, 1998). Conversely, consent can be implied (Donati & Hardgrove, 2002) by having a brief summary of the electronic use policy appear on the screen while the computer is booting up (Stewart, 2000) or when employees access the Internet or log on to their email accounts (Welebir & Kleiner, 2005). Consent to the electronic use policy is assumed if employees proceed to log on and use these systems. The current study examines both signed and implied consent to determine which type is viewed more favorably.

Lind and Tyler's (1988) group value model argues that employees value feeling that they are important to their employer. Employees look to company procedures and policies in an effort to ascertain how they are viewed by their organization. Signed consent can help ensure that employees feel valued and perceive the electronic use policy as just by increasing their awareness and understanding of the policy before they are held responsible for adhering to it. Conversely, implied consent can convey to employees that they are not valued members of the organization since they were not notified in advance of needing the technology to perform their jobs. Empirical research demonstrates that employees perceive procedures such as electronic monitoring as more just when they are given advance notice (Hovorka-Mead, Ross, Whipple, & Renchin, 2002). Further, advance notification also leads to increased employee perceptions of their value to their employers.

We also draw on work by Leventhal (1980) that argues that individuals use certain criteria to determine the presence or absence of procedural justice. Employees will perceive procedural justice when policies satisfy certain procedural justice rules, one of which is ethicality. The ethicality rule proposes that policies should be in compliance with employee standards of ethics in order to be perceived as fair. Research indicates that organizational policies or practices entailing deception are typically perceived as unethical (Lewicki & Robinson, 1998). For example, implied consent may be viewed as deceptive because it is obtained as employees are using electronic technology. Providing employees with a copy of the policy and requiring that they sign a consent form before using electronic systems can eliminate perceptions of deception regarding their rights and responsibilities under the policy.

Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of policy procedural justice will be greater when electronic use policies contain signed employee consent versus implied consent.

1.2. Monitoring

Monitoring software that tracks Internet and email activity is an important aspect of any electronic use policy as it is the method by which employers can determine policy compliance. Organizations can monitor all employees on a random or periodic basis or they can only monitor those who have violated the policy in the past or who are suspected of violating the policy (Donati & Hardgrove, 2002). Suspicion of policy violations may be aroused due to a decline in employee productivity or observations of inappropriate online activity by supervisors or coworkers. The current study investigates employee perceptions of fairness concerning periodic monitoring of all employees and monitoring only for cause.

Thibaut and Walker's (1975) process control construct supports the notion that employees should perceive for cause monitoring as fairer than periodic monitoring of all workers. These authors argue that the degree of influence individuals have over evidence collection and presentation affects fairness perceptions. Thus, the more control employees have over when they are monitored for policy violations, the more likely they are to perceive the policy as fair. With a policy stressing for cause monitoring, employees can control the extent to which they are monitored through their personal behavior. Thus, employees have the ability to avoid monitoring, which results in higher perceptions of personal control (Stanton & Barnes-Farrell, 1996) and control over the monitoring process which is, in turn, linked to greater perceptions of procedural justice (Stanton, 2000).

Leventhal's (1980) procedural rule of ethicality also supports the contention that for cause monitoring should be perceived as fairer than periodic monitoring. Typically, employees do not perceive policies that invade their privacy as just (Eddy, Stone, & Stone-Romero, 1999). Monitoring only those who have violated the policy in the past or who are suspected of violating the policy is not as intrusive as monitoring all employees. For cause monitoring, therefore, will protect employees' privacy unless they have demonstrated that they are not trustworthy. The drug testing literature supports these arguments as research has found that drug testing for reasonable cause is perceived more positively (Murphy, Thornton, & Reynolds, 1990) and as more effective (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1987) than periodic or random drug testing.

Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of policy procedural justice will be greater when electronic use policies contain monitoring for cause versus periodic monitoring.

1.3. Disciplinary procedures

Disciplinary procedures are a crucial component of electronic use policies because without sanctions, the policies are largely meaningless. Electronic use policies can incorporate one of three different disciplinary methods. First, companies can implement zero tolerance programs, which result in immediate termination of those caught violating the policy even if it is their first offense (Young & Case, 2004). Second, companies can use more graduated systems like progressive discipline in which the penalties for violations increase as employees repeatedly engage in inappropriate behavior (Young & Case, 2004). Finally, organizations can use managerial discretion so that managers can ensure that sanctions match the severity and circumstances of the offense (Stewart, 2000; Welebir & Kleiner, 2005).

Leventhal's (1980) procedural rules offer guidance as to which disciplinary methods should generate greater fairness perceptions. First, the consistency rule argues for consistent treatment across employees and over time, which can result in a predictable work environment and a greater acceptance of policies (Leventhal, Karuza, & Fry, 1980). Past research indicates that inconsistency within disciplinary procedures negatively affects employee perceptions of discipline, which increases the likelihood of employees filing unjust discharge claims (Youngblood, Trevino, & Favia, 1992). Formal disciplinary procedures, like zero tolerance and progressive discipline, can fulfill this rule by ensuring that policies are applied uniformly across employees and over time. These types of standardized procedures clearly outline what will happen to anyone caught violating the policy whereas managerial discretion opens up the possibility of inconsistent treatment among employees. Indeed, researchers have found a large amount of variability in the

decision rules used by managers to make disciplinary decisions (Klaas & Dell'omo, 1991; Klaas & Wheeler, 1990), thus supporting the contention that managerial discretion is likely to be inconsistent.

Similarly, the bias-suppression rule advocates for disciplinary policies that concretely state the consequences of violations. This rule argues that policies must be free of self-interest and advocacy of personal doctrines on the part of decision makers if they are to be perceived as just (Leventhal, 1980). Zero tolerance and progressive discipline prevent personal beliefs or feelings from influencing the consequences associated with violations and aid in the neutral application of electronic use policies. Conversely, if managers are allowed discretion in deciding penalties, personal interests or biases could factor into the process. For example, Hendrickson and Harrison (1998) found that managerial discretion was perceived as using irrelevant information when it was used in connection with disciplinary actions regarding positive drug test results. Thus, managerial discretion could result in arbitrary or biased decisions while zero tolerance and progressive discipline reduce personal biases through the use of standardized sanctions.

Hypothesis 3: Perceptions of policy procedural justice will be greater when electronic use policies contain progressive discipline or zero tolerance versus managerial discretion.

1.4. Grievance

Grievance or appeal procedures are designed to give employees a means to voice their disagreements or concerns without fear of retaliation from their employer (Gaskin, 1998), thus protecting them from unfair disciplinary decisions (Lewin & Peterson, 1988). Unfortunately, the descriptive literature on electronic use policies does not strongly advocate for the inclusion of appeal processes. When companies do allow employees to appeal organizational decisions, these appeals are often made to committees, which can be composed of higher management or peers (Klaas & Dell'omo, 1997; Klaas & Feldman, 1994; Stratton, 1988). The current study compares employee fairness perceptions of electronic use policies that do not have appeal processes and those that offer appeals made to either higher management or peers.

Electronic use policies that include an appeal mechanism should be perceived as fairer than policies lacking such a mechanism. First, much research shows that grievance procedures enhance procedural justice perceptions by giving individuals a chance to voice their opinions, have those opinions considered, and influence decisions (Folger, 1977; Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Shapiro & Brett, 1993). Second, Leventhal's (1980) correctability rule emphasizes the importance of incorporating into policies a method to reevaluate decisions and, if necessary, change them should an error occur. Grievance procedures should also facilitate the accuracy rule by ensuring that sound and reliable decisions are made based on the policy (Leventhal, 1980). In summary, appeal processes should allow employees to express their concerns regarding disciplinary actions stemming from electronic use policy violations and increase accountability by forcing managers to document evidence supporting their decisions.

Haraway (2002) found that employees are often leery of grievance procedures that are dominated by management. Managers are perceived as upholding administrative discretion, maintaining the status quo, and supporting lower level decisions instead of independently determining if a fair decision was made. Thus, management may not be viewed as unbiased decision makers, which is a critical component of an effective grievance procedure (Lewin & Peterson, 1988) and one of Leventhal's (1980) procedural rules. Conversely, Klaas and Dell'omo (1997) argue that peer review boards increase the neutrality of grievance procedures more than appeals heard by managers. They found that when a peer review board was used, managers were less willing to terminate employees in situations where just cause was questionable. Peer reviews should also embody the procedural rule of representativeness, which argues that it is important to integrate the beliefs, opinions, and needs of those who will be affected by policies. Likewise, appeals to peers uphold Leventhal's (1980) bias-suppression rule by balancing out any one decision maker's personal beliefs and biases. Although the literature suggests that appeals to peers might be perceived as fairer than appeals to higher management, both should be viewed as fairer than not having an appeal process because they offer voice and recourse to employees.

Hypothesis 4: Perceptions of policy procedural justice will be greater when electronic use policies contain appeals to peers or higher management versus no formal appeal process.

1.5. Electronic use policies, procedural justice, and cyberloafing

The ultimate goal of electronic use policies is to reduce inappropriate Internet and email use. One way to attain this goal may be through the design of policies that are perceived by employees as fair. Thus, procedural justice perceptions associated with the policy should mediate the relationship between policy characteristics and behavioral reactions to it (i.e., cyberloafing). Meta-analytic studies offer evidence for this relationship by demonstrating that procedural justice is negatively related to counterproductive work behaviors (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Further, theoretical work on employee monitoring argues that fairness perceptions associated with monitoring are a crucial predictor of employees' behavioral responses to monitoring (Ambrose & Alder, 2000; Kidwell & Bennett, 1994). More specifically, a study by Lim (2002) found that employees' perceptions of procedural justice, in general, were negatively related to their cyberloafing. Therefore, those perceiving electronic use policies as procedurally fair should be less likely to violate them by engaging in cyberloafing.

Hypothesis 5: Procedural justice of the electronic use policy will mediate the relationship between policy characteristics and cyberloafing.

To test the preceding hypotheses, we conducted a series of three studies. Study 1 manipulated the consent and monitoring components of a hypothetical electronic use policy and gathered participant responses regarding their perceptions of policy procedural justice (Hypotheses 1 and 2). Study 2 also used a scenario experiment, but this time disciplinary and grievance procedures were manipulated (Hypotheses 3 and 4). Finally, Study 3 attempted to replicate our findings from the scenario-based studies in a field study using a sample of working adults whose employer has an electronic use policy. We also examined the role of policy procedural justice as a mediator of the relationship between policy characteristics and cyberloafing (Hypothesis 5).

2. Study 1

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Procedure and sample

Participants consisted of 138 undergraduate business students who were surveyed during their regularly scheduled classes. Participation was voluntary, but a raffle for a $25 gift certificate was used as an incentive. No identifying information was collected to ensure participants' anonymity. Using a 2×2 between-subjects design, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions, with approximately 32 participants in each condition. Participants were asked to read the electronic use policy

of a hypothetical company and complete items measuring their perceptions of policy fairness and demographic characteristics. The first two sections of the policy were consistent across all participants. Section one outlined the purpose of the policy (i.e., promote ethical and responsible conduct in all online activities) and appropriate uses for computing resources (i.e., use Internet and email to support company mission and objectives). Section two discussed inappropriate uses of computing resources such as using the Internet for harassing or discriminatory communication.

The last section of the policy contained the manipulations. The signed consent manipulation read, "XYZ, Inc. asks employees to sign a consent form attesting that they have read and that they will follow the electronic use policy standards at XYZ. The company believes that by signing the consent form employees will follow the policy." The implied consent manipulation read, "XYZ, Inc. believes that when employees use the electronic systems available to them, they are automatically agreeing to the rules as spelled out in their electronic use policy." The periodic monitoring condition was manipulated in the following manner: "Because of the electronic use policy at XYZ, all employees have their email and Internet use periodically monitored by the company. This ensures that they will use the systems appropriately." Finally, the for cause monitoring condition stated, "Employees who have violated or are suspected of violating the electronic use policy at XYZ are monitored to identify whether they are continuing to use electronic systems (email and the Internet) for inappropriate purposes. Otherwise, the company believes that employees will use the systems appropriately."

Nine surveys were omitted due to missing data, which resulted in a final sample of 129. The sample consisted of 54% males and participant ages ranged from 19 to 52 with an average age of 23.31 years. The majority was Caucasian (68%), followed by Asian American (16%), African American (11%), Latino (3%), and other (2%). Fifty-six percent of the participants worked part-time while 18% worked full-time and 26% were unemployed. Of those working, the average tenure was slightly over two years.

2.1.2. Dependent measure and manipulation checks

2.1.2.1. Procedural justice. The fairness of the electronic use policy was assessed using Colquitt's (2001) procedural justice scale. The scale was modified to assess the fairness perceptions of the electronic use policy in particular versus organizational procedures in general (e.g., "XYZ's policy is free of bias," "XYZ's policy upholds ethical and moral standards"). Three items were dropped because they were difficult to determine from the scenario (e.g., "Employees are able to express their views and feelings regarding the policy") or duplicated one of the manipulations (e.g., "Employees are able to appeal the decisions or outcomes arrived at using the policy"). Respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each of the four statements using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

2.1.2.2. Manipulation checks. As a validity check on the consent manipulation, we included the following question, "Employees at XYZ are required to sign a consent form after reading the electronic use policy." A single item was also used as a manipulation check for the monitoring condition, "XYZ periodically monitors all employee email and Internet use." Participants used a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to respond to both items.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Manipulation checks

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the consent and monitoring manipulations of the electronic use policy. The ANOVA for the consent condition was significant, $F(1,127) = 121.36$, $p < .001$. Results indicate that participants in the signed consent condition were more likely to agree that the electronic use policy required signed consent than those in the implied consent condition (Ms = 6.11 versus 2.86, respectively). The one-way ANOVA conducted for the monitoring condition was also significant, $F(1,127) = 119.95$, $p < .001$. This suggests that individuals in the periodic monitoring condition were more likely to agree that the electronic use policy entails periodic monitoring ($M = 5.60$) than those in the monitoring for cause condition ($M = 2.53$). Thus, the manipulations were successful.

2.2.2. Hypothesis tests

A 2×2 ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of consent and monitoring procedures on participants' perceptions of policy procedural justice. The ANOVA indicated no significant interaction between the consent and monitoring conditions ($F(1,125) = .04$, $p = .840$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$) and no significant main effects for either consent ($F(1,125) = .32$, $p = .572$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$) or monitoring ($F(1,125) = .56$, $p = .454$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$). The means and standard deviations for each condition across the dependent variable are shown in Table 1. In summary, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were not supported as consent and monitoring procedures were not related to policy procedural justice.

2.3. Discussion

Contrary to our predictions, consent and monitoring procedures did not affect perceived procedural justice associated with the electronic use policy. Although unexpected, these results provide some interesting insights into the design of electronic use policies. Employees may not consider consent or monitoring procedures when forming their evaluation of these policies. Thus, employers may be able to select among the types of procedures examined here without worrying about how employees will react to them. However, while experiments allow researchers to control for extraneous factors and determine causality, the results may not generalize to the workplace. We will reexamine consent and monitoring procedures in a field study (Study 3) to determine the generalizability of these results. Next, Study 2 explores the effects of disciplinary and grievance procedures on employee perceptions of procedural justice.

3. Study 2

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Procedure and sample

This study used the same procedure as Study 1 except that the last section of the electronic use policy contained the disciplinary

Table 1
Means and standard deviations for consent and monitoring procedures (Study 1).

	Procedural justice
Consent	
Signed	
M	4.74
SD	1.02
Implied	
M	4.65
SD	.95
Monitoring	
Periodic	
M	4.76
SD	1.01
For cause	
M	4.64
SD	.96

Note. Means are based on a 7-point scale.

and grievance procedure manipulations. The discipline condition had three levels and the first, zero tolerance, read, "In terms of enforcing the electronic use policy at XYZ, Inc., there is zero tolerance for employees caught using electronic systems (email and the Internet) for inappropriate purposes." The managerial discretion condition stated, "In terms of enforcing the electronic use policy at XYZ, Inc., managers have discretion concerning how employees are disciplined when they are caught using electronic systems (email and the Internet) for inappropriate purposes." Finally, progressive discipline was manipulated in the following manner, "In terms of enforcing the electronic use policy at XYZ, Inc., managers *must* adhere to a specific, progressive process (for example, first offense: give a warning; second offense: revoke privileges; third offense: terminate the employee) when employees are caught using electronic systems (email and the Internet) for inappropriate purposes."

The grievance condition had three levels and the following wording was used for the no appeal condition, "Employees at XYZ have no opportunity to formally appeal grievances concerning possible violations of the firm's electronic use policy." The formal appeal to peers read, "Employees at XYZ have the opportunity to formally appeal grievances to peers concerning possible violations of the firm's electronic use policy." Similarly, the formal appeal to higher management stated, "Employees at XYZ have the opportunity to appeal grievances to higher management concerning possible violations of the firm's electronic use policy."

Using a 3×3 between-subjects design, 291 undergraduate business students were randomly assigned to one of nine experimental conditions, with approximately 32 participants in each condition. Seven surveys were omitted due to missing data, which resulted in a final sample of 284. Gender was evenly distributed and participants' ages ranged from 18 to 45 with an average age of 23.46 years. Sixty-five percent of the sample was Caucasian, 15% African American, 9% Asian American, 8% other, and 3% Latino. Over half the sample worked part-time (53%) while 24% worked full-time and 23% were unemployed. Of those working, the average tenure was 2.44 years.

3.1.2. Dependent measure and manipulation checks

The same measure of procedural justice was used as in Study 1. The manipulation check for the disciplinary condition consisted of three questions, "XYZ uses a progressive discipline policy for violations of their electronic use policy," "Managers are given discretion in terms of disciplining employees who have violated the electronic use policy," and "There is a zero tolerance policy for violations of the electronic use policy at XYZ." The manipulation check for the grievance condition also had three questions, "XYZ does not allow employees to appeal violations of the electronic use policy," "XYZ allows employees to appeal any violations of the electronic use policy to a group of peers," and "XYZ allows employees to appeal any violations of the electronic use policy to higher management."

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Manipulation checks

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to determine the validity of the disciplinary and grievance manipulations of the electronic use policy. The ANOVA test for the zero tolerance condition was significant, $F(2,275) = 119.80$, $p < .001$. Participants in the zero tolerance condition were more likely to agree that the policy used zero tolerance ($M = 5.88$) than those in the progressive discipline ($M = 2.66$) or managerial discretion ($M = 2.88$) conditions. The one-way ANOVA conducted for the progressive discipline condition was also significant, $F(2,277) = 104.35$, $p < .001$. Individuals in the progressive discipline condition were more likely to agree that the policy entails progressive discipline ($M = 5.35$) than those in the zero tolerance ($M = 2.13$) or managerial discretion ($M = 2.92$) conditions. Next, the ANOVA for the managerial discretion condition was significant ($F(2,276) = 87.44$, $p < .001$) suggesting that those in this condition were more likely to agree that the policy used managerial discretion ($M = 5.06$) than those in the zero tolerance ($M = 2.13$) or progressive discipline ($M = 2.66$) conditions.

The manipulations for the grievance conditions were also successful. The one-way ANOVA for the appeals to higher management condition was significant, $F(2,275) = 41.13$, $p < .001$. Those in this condition were more likely to agree that the electronic use policy allowed employees to appeal to management ($M = 5.53$) than those in the appeals to peers ($M = 3.51$) and no appeals ($M = 3.10$) conditions. Next, the ANOVA for the appeals to peers condition was significant ($F(2,275) = 25.12$, $p < .001$) indicating that those in this condition were more likely to agree that the policy used appeals to peers ($M = 4.50$) than those in the appeals to higher management ($M = 2.49$) and the no appeals ($M = 3.10$) conditions. Last, the ANOVA for the no appeals condition was significant, $F(2,276) = 34.21$, $p < .001$. Participants in this condition were more likely to agree that the policy did not allow for appeals ($M = 4.86$) than those in the appeals to higher management ($M = 2.49$) and the appeals to peers ($M = 3.51$) conditions.

3.2.2. Hypotheses tests

A 3×3 ANOVA was conducted to test the effects of discipline and grievance procedures on electronic use policy fairness. Results indicated that the interaction between disciplinary and grievance procedures was not significant ($F(4,275) = .14$, $p = .968$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$), but that the main effects for both the discipline ($F(2,275) = 8.73$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$) and grievance ($F(2,275) = 4.09$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$) conditions were significant. Post hoc analyses using the Tukey HSD procedure were used to determine which type of disciplinary and grievance procedures had the greatest effect on policy procedural justice. As shown in Table 2, participants reported higher procedural justice in the zero tolerance and progressive discipline conditions than those in the managerial discretion condition, which supports Hypothesis 3. Also, individuals reported more procedural justice in the formal appeal to higher management condition than in the no appeal pro-

Table 2
Means and standard deviations for discipline and grievance procedures (Study 2).

	Procedural justice
Discipline	
Zero tolerance	
M	4.84[a,**]
SD	.95
Managerial discretion	
M	4.34[b]
SD	.96
Progressive discipline	
M	4.80[a,**]
SD	.83
Grievance	
No appeal	
M	4.47[a]
SD	.92
Appeals to peers	
M	4.72[a,b]
SD	.95
Appeals to higher management	
M	4.84[b,*]
SD	.93

Note. Means are based on a 7-point scale. Means with different superscripts are significantly different.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

cess condition (the mean for appeals to peers was not significantly different than the means for appeals to higher management or no appeals), which partially supports Hypothesis 4.

3.3. Discussion

Participants reported higher levels of procedural justice related to the electronic use policy when it contained zero tolerance or progressive discipline in comparison to managerial discretion as well as appeals to higher management versus no appeal. These findings offer support for our hypotheses as well as guidelines for organizations. Employers seeking to develop fair electronic use policies should consider implementing progressive discipline or zero tolerance procedures while minimizing the use of managerial discretion. Managerial discretion violates Leventhal's consistency and bias-suppression rules and often leads to arbitrary decision making by management, which, in turn, can lower employee perceptions of procedural justice. Likewise, organizations should use appeal mechanisms in their policies in an effort to give employees voice, which enhances perceptions of procedural justice. In particular, the results of this study advocate for the use of appeals to higher management. Although past research suggests that appeal committees composed of management are often viewed as biased, managers may be perceived as having more power than peers to change the outcome under appeal.

While the current study offers support for our hypotheses, it is important to investigate whether these effects, as well as those from Study 1, can be replicated in a field sample. In Study 3 we surveyed employees regarding their employer's electronic use policy to determine when they are more likely to perceive the policy as procedurally just. We also test Hypothesis 5, which proposes that procedural justice will mediate the relationship between the policy components and cyberloafing. This was accomplished by asking employees to describe their employer's policy in terms of its consent, monitoring, disciplinary, and grievance procedures and then measuring their perceptions of procedural justice and frequencies of cyberloafing.

4. Study 3

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Procedure and sample

Employees (N = 116) from various companies were surveyed during an MBA course in which they were enrolled. Participation was voluntary, but like the previous studies, we held a raffle for those who agreed to participate for a $25 gift certificate. No identifying information was collected to guarantee participants' anonymity. Participants completed measures regarding their demographics, characteristics of their employer's electronic use policy, their perceptions of policy fairness, and the frequency that they cyberloaf.

Three surveys were omitted due to large amounts of missing data, which resulted in a final sample of 113. Sixty-nine percent of the sample was male and ages ranged from 20 to 50 with an average of 30.23 years. Seventy-two percent of the sample was Caucasian while 11% were African American, 8% other, 7% Asian American, and 2% Latino. The majority worked full-time (85%) while the rest worked part-time (15%) and the average tenure was 4.13 years. Participants held a variety of jobs including managerial or supervisory (33%), financial (27%), technology (14%), sales (9%), education (5%), consulting (5%), and clerical (3%).

4.1.2. Measures

All measures of the electronic use policy characteristics were created for this study and used a 7-point response scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. The same measure of policy procedural justice was used in this study as in the previous ones.

4.1.2.1. Consent. Consent procedures were measured with three items (e.g., "Employees at my company are asked to sign a consent form attesting that they have read and that they will follow the electronic use policy."). Items were scored so that higher scores represent signed consent while lower scores indicate implied consent.

4.1.2.2. Monitoring. Three items were used to assess monitoring procedures (e.g., "My company monitors everyone's email and Internet use regardless of whether they have violated or are suspected of violating the policy."). Higher scores reflect periodic versus for cause monitoring.

4.1.2.3. Discipline. Discipline was measured using three items (e.g., "The electronic use policy at my company clearly outlines what will happen to those who use email or Internet for inappropriate uses."), which were coded so that higher scores represent formal disciplinary procedures while lower scores indicate that managerial discretion is used. We combined progressive discipline and zero tolerance to represent formal discipline because Study 2 found no difference between them in terms of perceived fairness.

4.1.2.4. Grievance. Grievance procedures were assessed using three items (e.g., The electronic use policy at my company allows employees to formally appeal grievances concerning possible violations of the policy."). Higher scores indicate the presence of formal appeal processes while lower scores represent the lack of appeal mechanisms. We collapsed appeals to peers and management because we did not have differential predictions regarding them.

4.1.2.5. Cyberloafing. We used the 22-item cyberloafing measure by Henle and Blanchard (2008) to determine how often employees engage in email and Internet activities such as receiving and sending personal email, downloading music, instant messaging, and surfing non-work related websites such as sports, news, financial, and travel. Respondents used a 7-point scale to specify the frequency that they engaged in cyberloafing (1 = never, 2 = once a year, 3 = twice a year, 4 = several times a year, 5 = monthly, 6 = weekly, 7 = daily).

4.1.2.6. Control variables. Certain respondent characteristics were measured to ensure that the relationships between the policy components and cyberloafing were not confounded. First, past research suggests that males and individuals in their late 20s to early 30s are more likely to abuse the Internet than females and older individuals (Morahan-Martin, 2001). Also, Hollinger, Slora, and Terris (1992) found that employees with less tenure are more likely to commit counterproductive behaviors directed at organizations (e.g., theft). Finally, research indicates that those who are more skilled at using the Internet use it more frequently, for longer periods of time, and with greater ease at work (Anandarajan, Simmers, & Igbaria, 2000). Thus, we controlled for gender, age, tenure, and Internet experience.

4.2. Results

As shown in Table 3, there were significant positive correlations between procedural justice of the electronic use policy and discipline and appeal procedures. As found in Study 1, consent and monitoring procedures were not significantly related to policy fairness. In addition, cyberloafing was negatively related to

Table 3
Correlations among study variables (Study 3).

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender[a]	1.31	.46										
2. Age	30.23	6.08	.00									
3. Tenure	4.13	3.99	.07	.56***								
4. Internet experience[b]	3.14	.62	−.06	.04	−.04							
5. Consent	4.76	1.99	−.10	.06	−.05	−.04	(.82)					
6. Monitoring	4.67	1.64	−.05	−.06	.06	.06	.22**	(.76)				
7. Discipline	3.82	1.52	−.10	.00	.17*	.08	.21*	.41***	(.61)			
8. Appeal procedures	4.00	1.15	−.02	.00	.10	.12	.13	.22**	.38***	(.57)		
9. Procedural justice	4.60	1.09	.09	−.02	−.03	.10	−.01	.08	.33***	.35***	(.68)	
10. Cyberloafing	3.03	.75	−.29**	−.21*	−.08	.13	.03	−.18*	−.05	.05	−.07	(.83)

Note. $N = 113$. [a]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [b]Internet experience: 1 = beginner, 2 = intermediate, 3 = advanced, 4 = expert. Scale reliabilities are reported in the diagonal.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.

monitoring, gender, and age. In summary, employees perceived greater policy fairness when their companies used formal disciplinary procedures versus managerial discretion or allowed employees to appeal policy violations. Likewise, employees were less likely to cyberloaf when their company's electronic use policy contained periodic monitoring, they were female, or they were older.

Next, we used regression analyses to test the effects of policy characteristics on procedural justice perceptions and cyberloafing as well as the ability of procedure justice to serve as a mediator of the relationship between policy characteristics and cyberloafing. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) method for testing for mediation, we first tested the relationship between the independent variables (policy characteristics) and the mediator (procedural justice). Results indicated that the electronic use policy characteristics had a significant overall effect on the perceived procedural justice of the policy ($R^2 = .18$, $F(4,108) = 5.98$, $p < .001$). As shown in Table 4, disciplinary policies and appeal procedures positively predicted procedural justice while consent and monitoring procedures were not significant predictors.

The second step in testing for mediation assesses the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable (cyberloafing). The policy characteristics had a significant effect on cyberloafing after accounting for the control variables ($F(8,102) = 3.67$, $p < .01$). The control variables explained 16% of the variance in cyberloafing with gender and age driving this effect. The policy characteristics accounted for an additional 6% of the variance, but the only significant predictor of cyberloafing was monitoring. The final steps in testing for mediation involve showing that there is a relationship between the mediator and the dependent variable and that the independent variables have no effect on the dependent variable when the mediator is controlled. Thus, we regressed the control variables (step 1), procedural justice (step 2), and the policy characteristics (step 3) on cyberloafing. Procedural justice did not significantly predict cyberloafing, and thus is not a mediator.

Table 4
Regression analyses for effects of policy characteristics on procedural justice and cyberloafing (Study 3).

	Procedural justice			Cyberloafing		
	B	*SE*	*β*	*B*	*SE*	*β*
Gender[a]				−.48	.15	−.30**
Age				−.04	.01	−.29**
Tenure				.00	.00	.11
Internet experience[b]				.15	.11	.12
Consent	−.04	.05	−.08	.03	.04	.09
Monitoring	−.05	.06	−.07	−.12	.05	−.26*
Discipline	.19	.07	.27**	−.02	.05	−.03
Appeal procedures	.26	.09	.28**	.06	.06	.09

Note. $N = 113$. [a]Gender: 0 = male, 1 = female. [b]Internet experience: 1 = beginner, 2 = intermediate, 3 = advanced, 4 = expert.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

5. General discussion

Given the potentially detrimental effects of cyberloafing, it is imperative that managers pay closer attention to this phenomenon. More organizations are implementing electronic use policies in an effort to prevent employee cyberloafing. Unfortunately, these policies are largely developed from anecdotal evidence versus theory and empirical research and thus, generally are not viewed as being very effective. We used procedural justice theory to determine which policy components should enhance employee fairness perceptions associated with the policy. Employees who perceive the policy as fair should be more likely to adhere to its requirements. Thus, this study will assist organizations in developing sound policies.

Hypothesis 1 stated that perceptions of procedural justice would be greater when electronic use policies contain signed rather than implied consent. However, neither the scenario-based experiment nor the field study found a relationship between either type of consent and procedural justice. Today, the employee–employer relationship is regulated by many workplace policies. Employers not only attempt to control employees' behavior at work, but also their off-duty activities such as illicit drug use, cigarette smoking, and interpersonal relationships. Due to the prevalence of organizational policies and the limited legal protection of employees' privacy (Pearce & Kuhn, 2003), it is not surprising that consent procedures had no effect on fairness perceptions. Employees may have little choice but to accept the right of their employer to implement such policies and feel they have no recourse if they refuse their consent. Thus, consent procedures, whether signed or implied, are accepted as a condition of employment. In summary, employers may use either type of consent in their electronic use policies without affecting employee perceptions of fairness.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that policy procedural justice would be enhanced when electronic use policies included for cause versus periodic monitoring. Contrary to our prediction, procedural justice was not related to either type of monitoring in the scenario-based or field study. The majority of companies are currently monitoring employees' electronic activities (Flynn, 2005) and this practice is unlikely to subside. Given that most employees have been exposed to electronic monitoring, it may be regarded as a standard workplace practice and thus, is accepted by employees regardless of the type of monitoring that is used. Therefore, employers may

use periodic or for cause monitoring without worrying about the impact the decision will have on employees' perceptions of fairness. However, as we discuss below, this decision may impact the frequency of cyberloafing.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that procedural justice would be greater when electronic use policies emphasize progressive discipline or zero tolerance instead of managerial discretion. The scenario-based study found that procedural justice perceptions were higher in the progressive discipline and zero tolerance conditions versus the managerial discretion condition. Likewise, the field study found support for a positive relationship between formal disciplinary procedures, like zero tolerance and progressive discipline, and procedural justice. Taken together, employees are more likely to perceive formal disciplinary mechanisms as enhancing policy fairness because such mechanisms treat employees in a consistent manner, regardless of the circumstances.

Although our findings suggest that companies should consider zero tolerance for policy violations, we offer the following caveats. Companies may not want to react so extremely to behavior that might contribute to employees' well-being. For example, Henle and Blanchard (2008) proposed that cyberloafing is a coping mechanism for workplace stressors and in support of this contention, they found that stressors positively predicted cyberloafing. In addition, cyberloafing may be a way for employees to balance their work and personal lives and to make long work hours tolerable (Oravec, 2002). Thus, employers might be willing to allow or at least tolerate some types of cyberloafing (e.g., online banking, shopping for a child's birthday) in exchange for employees working long hours as long as it does not significantly interfere with their work, harm the organization, or disturb or offend other employees.

Next, Hypothesis 4 predicted that policy procedural justice would be higher when electronic use policies contain appeals to peers or higher management versus no formal appeal process. The scenario-based study found that policies that included appeals to higher management were perceived as fairer than those with no appeals. Likewise, the field study found that formal appeal processes positively predicted procedural justice. Thus, companies should incorporate some type of appeal in their policy as the lack of one is seen as unjust by employees.

Finally, Hypothesis 5 stated that the procedural justice of the electronic use policy would mediate the relationship between the policy components and cyberloafing. That is, policies perceived as fair should result in a lower frequency of cyberloafing. No support for this hypothesis was found as policy fairness was not a mediator of the aforementioned relationship. However, we did find that employees were less likely to cyberloaf when policies contain periodic monitoring. Thus, employers may be able to lower the incidence of cyberloafing by periodically monitoring employees' Internet and email use.

Although fairness of the electronic use policy was not a mediator, future research should explore whether procedural justice in general may be. Justice perceptions associated with a single policy may not be enough to elicit reactions by employees. Instead, employees may gather information about the fairness of many different policies and procedures in their organization before deciding whether or not to cyberloaf. Indeed, Lim (2002) found that procedural justice and cyberloafing were negatively correlated. Further, the procedural justice – cyberloafing link may be qualified by a third variable. Recent work by De Lara (2007) found that this negative link was stronger for employees with a low work anomia (i.e., a lack of integration into the workplace). Thus, future research should examine if individual difference factors predispose certain employees to react to procedural injustice with cyberloafing.

The strengths of this paper include multiple studies using different methodologies (scenario experiment versus field study) and samples (students versus employees). However, like any study, the current one has limitations that we must acknowledge. First, we measured the study variables via self-reports, thus common method bias may be an issue. However, researchers have found that self-reports are accurate measures of behavior (Spector, 1992) and that individuals are more likely to underreport participation in sensitive behaviors in order to impression manage or out of fear of getting caught (Lee, 1993). Thus, our findings regarding cyberloafing may be understated. Nevertheless, researchers should consider using objective measures of cyberloafing (e.g., monitoring software). Likewise, the data were cross-sectional, which precludes statements regarding causality. Although our model is supported by theory and previous research, future studies should use longitudinal designs to confirm the direction of the causal assumptions made regarding policy components, procedural justice, and cyberloafing. For instance, researchers could measure justice perceptions and cyberloafing before and after electronic use policies are introduced to determine which components affect employee reactions.

6. Conclusion

Although the majority of organizations have implemented electronic use policies, their development is based on anecdotal advice rather than theoretically driven empirical research. Using procedural justice theory, the current paper demonstrates how electronic use policy design can affect employee fairness perceptions and cyberloafing. The results of these studies indicate that if organizations design their policies to include progressive discipline or zero tolerance and appeals to peers or management, employees will be more likely to perceive them as fair. Likewise, they will be less likely to cyberloaf if the policy includes periodic monitoring. Conversely, employers should avoid implementing policies with disciplinary procedures allowing for managerial discretion or lacking appeal processes. Thus, this research can be used to help organizations develop fair and effective electronic use policies.

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