“Misleading by Example: The Effects of a Manager’s Unfair Customer Treatment on Service Employee Performance and Trust”

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Abstract
We explore service worker reactions to a supervisor’s fair treatment of customers (i.e. customer-directed fairness), utilizing fairness heuristic theory to formulate two distinct predictions: 1) a character indictment effect, in which employees use customer-directed fairness to assess the trustworthiness of the supervisor’s character and 2), a social influence effect, in which employees simultaneously internalize the social cues inherent in the supervisor’s behavior, and adapt their own customer treatment to conform to that of the supervisor. Results from experimental and field data support both sets of predictions, providing evidence for these dual effects, and showing how each ultimately affects the employee’s in-role and extra-role customer service behavior. Implications are discussed with regard to fairness heuristic theory, alternative theories of fairness, and practical applications.