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## **A RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PERSPECTIVE OF GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

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Grievance procedures are a fundamental part of systems for ensuring justice in the workplace for unionized employees, and increasingly for nonunion employees as well (Blancero, 1992). Most studies of grievance procedures have focused on operational issues, such as grievance filing rates, levels of settlement and arbitration. Only a limited number of studies have focused on justice perceptions of employees relating to the grievance procedures. Also, there is an extensive body of literature on organizational justice (for a review, see Colquitt and Greenberg, 2003), but virtually none of these studies focus specifically on employee perceptions of justice related to the grievance procedure. In other words, there is very little research that evaluates grievance procedures on their critical purpose of ensuring justice for employees in the workplace. This is surprising given the critical role of grievance procedures as a justice system in the workplace.

When an employee believes they have been treated unfairly, there are two related violations experienced by the employee. First, is the tangible *outcome*. The employee has received an outcome that is contrary to what they believe they deserve. This may be a tangible reward they have been denied or a decision outcome that is seen as unfair and/or inconsistent with the collective agreement. The role of the grievance procedure in this regard is to ensure the employee's contractual rights are protected. Second, the employee's *sense of justice* in the workplace is violated. This violation regards the psychological damage employees experience as a consequence of unfair treatment. This study focuses on the latter psychological aspects of justice by addressing questions about the extent to which the grievance procedure restores employee perceptions of justice in the workplace after experiencing what they perceive as unjust treatment. Our approach draws from the restorative justice models and studies in the criminology literature. The next section will briefly review related research on grievance procedures. This is followed by a brief explanation of restorative justice and an analysis of the restorative justice properties inherent in grievance procedures.