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Justice and Trust Repair in Organizational Decision Systems

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Abstract

Organizational decisions are increasingly produced through infrastructures that combine managerial judgment, datafication, algorithmic recommendation, monitoring, and automated classification. This expansion complicates conventional fairness analysis because a decision may be explained yet remain difficult to challenge, formally reviewable yet practically irreversible, or corrected without repairing the trust damaged by the original process. This Original Conceptual Framework Article develops a proposed Justice-and-Repair Framework for analyzing such conditions. The framework integrates organizational justice, explainability as procedural information, contestability and employee standing, moral accountability after error, and trust repair and remediation. It proposes that legitimate repair requires more than favorable outcomes or explanatory disclosure: affected employees must have meaningful routes to consequential review, responsible organizational actors must remain identifiable after technological delegation, and remedies must be capable of addressing relational, substantive, and structural dimensions of harm. The article further proposes that decision-system evaluation should distinguish formal voice from substantive influence, technological capability from legitimate authority, and restored confidence from demonstrated correction of injustice. These relationships are conceptual rather than empirically validated and are expected to vary with decision stakes, reversibility, hierarchy, workload, prior trust, and violation characteristics. The framework therefore functions as a theory-building architecture and testable research agenda, not as a universal prescription or deployment standard. Its principal contribution is to connect justice at the decision stage with accountability and repair after error.

Keywords: Justice in organizational decision infrastructures, Organizational justice, Explainability as procedural information, Contestability and employee standing, Justice-and-repair framework, Evaluation criteria and organizational implications

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Introduction

Organizational justice scholarship provides a mature account of how employees evaluate fairness in outcomes, procedures, interpersonal treatment, and information, but contemporary decision systems increasingly distribute consequential judgment across managers, data infrastructures, and computational tools [1]. Algorithmic systems can alter how control is exercised, how tasks are allocated, how performance becomes legible, and how workers can contest managerial decisions, creating a setting in which justice is not located only in a single decision episode [2]. The central problem is therefore architectural: fairness judgments can emerge from an interconnected chain of data collection, classification, explanation, review, correction, and subsequent organizational response.

Digitization also changes what organizations can observe and what they treat as behaviorally relevant. Behavioral visibility can expand when digital systems capture, connect, and expose work activity, yet such visibility should not be treated as equivalent to accurate performance representation [3]. Algorithmic management can additionally act as a form of work design



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by shaping autonomy, task structure, feedback, and other job characteristics [4]. An employee may therefore encounter a decision as the visible endpoint of an infrastructure whose assumptions, data, authority relations, and review pathways remain partly hidden.

A deterministic account would nevertheless be inadequate. Algorithmic management can constrain autonomy while also creating new resources or forms of value, depending on how organizational actors enact the system [5]. The relevant question is how authority, information, standing, responsibility, and remedy are organized around technology. This article therefore develops an Original Conceptual Framework Article rather than an empirical validation study. Its objective is to connect justice before and during decision making with accountability and repair after error, while separating evidence-supported relationships from proposed cross-domain mechanisms.

The proposed contribution is the Justice-and-Repair Framework. It treats justice as temporally extended across five analytically connected problems: how decisions are produced, what procedural information affected employees receive, whether they possess standing to challenge decisions, who remains morally answerable when systems fail, and what forms of remediation can support trust repair. The framework does not assume that explanation produces fairness, that voice produces influence, or that correction produces restored trust. Instead, it specifies these links as conditional propositions requiring direct empirical testing and distinguishes individual experience from team- or organization-level governance characteristics.

Theoretical foundations of organizational justice

Organizational justice provides the normative and perceptual foundation for the framework, but justice must be treated as enacted rather than merely codified. Fairness at one organizational level can be shaped by unfairness experienced at another, and relational orientation can condition how actors reproduce or resist such treatment [6]. A standardized digital process can still be enacted differently through supervisors, reviewers, data practices, and escalation routines. Accordingly, the framework treats justice perceptions, justice-rule adherence, and organizational justice arrangements as related but nonidentical objects of analysis.

Managerial fairness is also constrained by organizational conditions. Evidence indicates that workload and reward structures can affect managers' adherence to justice rules, implying that fair treatment cannot be inferred from policy alone [7]. A review of principled leadership likewise shows that fair, ethical, and nonabusive behavior has multiple antecedent pathways rather than being reducible to a stable moral disposition [8]. Retained human oversight is therefore not automatically fair oversight; incentives, time pressure, and authority structures can shape enactment.

The justice literature also provides substantial evidence that fairness is associated with important employee attitudes and behaviors, although transfer across contexts requires caution. Meta-analytic evidence among criminal justice employees, for example, supports robust relationships between organizational justice and work outcomes while remaining bounded by a particular occupational domain [9]. Such evidence justifies treating justice as consequential without assuming identical effects across technologies, occupations, or national settings. It also cautions against moving directly from individual perceptions to claims about organization-level legitimacy, culture, or performance.

For the present framework, organizational justice therefore performs two functions. First, it provides established constructs for evaluating procedures and treatment. Second, it exposes the limits of a decision-centered model when errors unfold over time. A procedurally fair appearance at the moment of decision may coexist with weak review rights, ambiguous responsibility, or inadequate remedy. The proposed framework consequently extends—not replaces—organizational justice by asking how justice judgments interact with contestability, accountability retention, and post-error repair.

Explainability as procedural information

Explainability is often treated as a central response to opaque organizational decision systems, but explanation should be analytically separated from justice. In human-resource decisions, attempts to eliminate bias through algorithmic procedures can still reduce procedural-justice perceptions when people experience the process as reductionistic or insufficiently attentive to relevant individual qualities [10]. This does not make algorithmic decision making inherently unfair; it shows that consistency and bias reduction do not exhaust procedural evaluation.

User responses to algorithmically mediated decisions depend not only on computational output but also on how decision authority and explanatory features shape fairness- and trust-related perceptions [11, 12]. Experimental evidence shows that reactions to algorithmic versus human decision makers vary with the nature of the managerial task [11]. Related research connects explainability and causability with trust and acceptance [12]. These findings make explanation important without establishing that more explanation necessarily produces justice, better decisions, or legitimate authority.

This article therefore proposes the term procedural information for the information supplied to an affected person about how, why, or on what basis a decision was generated. Procedural information may include an explanation, relevant decision criteria, provenance information, or an account of the responsible process. Explainable-AI scholarship emphasizes that explanations

are audience-, model-, and task-dependent rather than universally interchangeable [13]. Procedural information is thus narrower than justice and broader than any single technical explanation method.

The critical boundary is that informational availability does not itself create standing, review rights, correction capability, or substantive fairness. An organization could provide a technically sophisticated explanation while leaving the employee unable to dispute incorrect data or obtain reconsideration. Conversely, a review process may allow correction even when the underlying model remains difficult to interpret. The framework therefore treats explanation as one possible input into procedural judgment and later contestability, not as a surrogate for either.

Table 1 clarifies the conceptual distinctions that prevent explanation, fairness, participation, and repair from being treated as interchangeable features of organizational decision systems.

Table 1. Definitions, constructs, and conceptual boundaries for Justice and Trust Repair in Organizational Decision Systems

Conceptual domain	Core question	What the construct captures	What it does not establish	Proposed function in the framework	Key boundary
Decision infrastructure	How is the decision produced and governed?	Data flows, decision rights, technological roles, review authority, and organizational arrangements	That the visible decision reflects every upstream influence	Locates the institutional setting in which justice is experienced	Technology is part of the decision arrangement, not an autonomous authority
Organizational justice	Was the decision and its treatment experienced as fair?	Fairness judgments concerning procedure, outcome, treatment, and information	Objective legality, accuracy, or universal legitimacy	Provides the evaluative foundation of the framework	Individual fairness perceptions cannot automatically be generalized to the organization
Procedural information	What does the affected person know about the decision process?	Reasons, criteria, provenance, timing, and decision-relevant information	Fairness, correctness, or an enforceable right to challenge	Proposed informational bridge between decision production and evaluation	More information does not necessarily produce greater justice
Explainability	Can relevant aspects of the decision be made intelligible?	Understandability of outputs, reasoning, inputs, or process features	That the explanation is complete, useful, or sufficient for review	Contributes to procedural information when matched to stakeholder needs	Explainability is not equivalent to procedural justice
Voice opportunity	Can the employee communicate concerns or additional information?	Access to channels for speaking, questioning, or objecting	That anyone with authority will respond	Represents procedural access before consequential review	Permission to speak is not substantive influence
Employee standing	Is the challenge entitled to consequential consideration?	Proposed organizational recognition that an affected employee has legitimate status to trigger review	That the challenge will succeed	Converts voice opportunity into a potentially consequential governance relation	Standing must be distinguished from courtesy, consultation, and symbolic participation
Accountability retention	Who remains answerable when a decision produces error or harm?	Proposed preservation of identifiable responsibility despite delegation	Personal blame for every system failure	Connects delegation to review, justification, and correction	Delegation of execution does not automatically transfer responsibility
Remediation	What changes after a recognized problem?	Relational response, substantive correction, and structural modification	That trust has been restored	Provides the post-error corrective domain	Correction of one decision does not prove recurrence prevention
Trust repair	Has confidence in the relationship or decision system been meaningfully restored?	Reassessment of reliability, integrity, fairness, or benevolence following violation	That the original injustice has been fully corrected	Represents one possible outcome of remediation	Restored trust must not be used as proof of objective justice

Table note. Constructs marked as proposed are original conceptual components introduced by this article. The table distinguishes informational access, procedural fairness, consequential challenge, answerability, correction, and trust so that they are not collapsed into a single notion of responsible decision making.

Contestability and employee standing

A justice-oriented decision system requires more than an opportunity to express concern. Employee voice research shows that voice is a heterogeneous organizational phenomenon shaped by motives, relationships, hierarchy, and contextual conditions rather than a simple count of speaking acts [14]. A suggestion channel, appeal form, or nominal reviewer can create speaking

opportunities without ensuring examination by an actor able to alter the decision. The framework therefore treats formal voice access as a necessary but insufficient condition for consequential contestability.

Voice and silence should also not be treated as opposite indicators of the same underlying condition. Evidence distinguishing them shows that perceived impact is particularly relevant to voice, whereas psychological safety is more strongly connected to silence [15]. Employees may feel safe enough to speak yet expect little impact, or perceive impact while still facing interpersonal risk. Neither perception, however, demonstrates actual decision reversal, remedy, or institutional review.

Contestability is defined here as the capacity of an affected employee to question, challenge, or request reconsideration of a consequential decision through a process capable of responding to that intervention. Scholarship on contestable AI emphasizes responsiveness to human intervention across the system lifecycle, supporting the view that contestability is more than post hoc explanation [16]. The article extends this reasoning by proposing employee standing as the recognized organizational status from which a challenge is entitled to consequential consideration. Standing is therefore not inferred from the presence of voice technology, grievance policy, or human oversight alone.

The proposed distinction creates a testable governance problem. A system may permit explanation requests but not review; permit review but assign it to an actor without authority; or permit reconsideration while leaving data, criteria, or prior decisions unchanged. Empirical evaluation should therefore trace whether challenges are received, interpreted, escalated, and capable of changing the decision or its governing process. Until such evidence exists, formal permission must remain analytically separate from substantive power, and conceptual plausibility must remain separate from demonstrated organizational effect.

Moral accountability after error

Accountability becomes especially difficult when decision authority is distributed across managers, designers, vendors, data practices, and computational recommendations. Ethical analysis of algorithms argues that organizational actors retain responsibility for choices embedded in algorithmic design and deployment rather than transferring that responsibility to the technical artifact [17]. Here, moral accountability means answerability for authority allocation, foreseeable risks, error investigation, and corrective authority. This is an organizational responsibility claim, not an attribution of human moral agency to an algorithm.

The automation–augmentation paradox further complicates simple responsibility allocation because automation and human augmentation can coexist rather than operate as clean substitutes [18]. A manager may remain formally “in the loop” while relying heavily on a recommendation, while another system automates screening but leaves consequential interpretation to a person. The framework accordingly proposes accountability retention: whenever computation is delegated, a traceable organizational actor or role should remain answerable for review and remedy. This proposed principle does not imply that every error is individually blameworthy.

Responsibility can also be displaced strategically. Evidence indicates that decision makers may delegate difficult choices to artificial intelligence partly to avoid responsibility under some conditions [19]. This finding does not mean that AI delegation is inherently evasive, because efficiency, expertise, consistency, or workload may offer rival explanations. It does, however, justify examining whether responsibility becomes harder to locate precisely when an adverse decision requires explanation or repair.

Table 2 presents the proposed justice-and-repair process as a sequence of organizational vulnerabilities, corrective mechanisms, and observable consequences rather than as a presumed causal pathway.

Table 2. Proposed mechanisms, relationships, and organizational consequences in Justice and Trust Repair in Organizational Decision Systems

Decision-system vulnerability	Proposed mechanism	What must occur organizationally	Possible consequence if mechanism functions	Possible consequence if mechanism fails	Critical contingency
Opaque or reductionistic decision process	Procedural interpretation	The affected person receives relevant, intelligible, and timely decision information	Greater capacity to evaluate the procedure	Confusion, perceived arbitrariness, or distrust	Information quality and task relevance
Formal voice without review authority	Consequential contestability	A challenge reaches an actor capable of reconsidering the decision	Genuine review and possible correction	Symbolic participation or learned futility	Hierarchy and distribution of decision rights
Employee challenge without recognized status	Employee standing	Organizational rules treat the affected person's challenge as legitimate input	Greater likelihood that objections enter decision review	Dismissal, delay, or procedural containment	Power asymmetry and employment vulnerability

Human–AI delegation with ambiguous ownership	Accountability retention	Responsibility for explanation, review, and remedy remains identifiable	Clearer answerability after failure	Responsibility diffusion or blame shifting	Degree of automation and role clarity
Recognized interpersonal violation	Relational repair	Harm is acknowledged and the affected person is treated with dignity	Possible recovery of relational confidence	Persistent resentment or distrust	Violation severity and perceived intentionality
Incorrect or harmful decision outcome	Substantive remediation	The decision is reconsidered, corrected, or materially remedied where possible	Restoration of an opportunity, entitlement, or fairer outcome	Continuing material harm despite communication	Reversibility and available corrective authority
Recurrent or systemic failure	Structural remediation	Rules, data, controls, escalation routes, or system design are modified	Proposed reduction in recurrence and stronger learning	Repeated failures despite case-by-case correction	Organizational learning capacity
Successful individual case resolution	Recursive learning	Lessons from the challenge and repair process feed back into future decision design	Proposed institutional improvement over time	Isolated repair without broader change	Ability to collect, interpret, and act on repair information

Table note. The rows identify analytically separable mechanisms rather than a validated causal chain. “Possible consequence” denotes an outcome requiring empirical examination, not an established organizational effect. The model permits multiple rival explanations, including decision favorability, managerial quality, workload, prior trust, technology novelty, and organizational culture.

Trust repair and remediation

Trust repair begins after a violation but cannot be reduced to restoring a positive attitude. Trust-repair research portrays recovery as a heterogeneous process in which tactics operate through different mechanisms and depend on the character of the violation, relationship, and organizational context [20, 21]. An explanation suitable for an understandable mistake may be inadequate for biased data, denied opportunity, ignored challenge, or intentional misuse. The framework therefore treats repair as a response to a diagnosed justice problem rather than as generic reputation management.

Apology illustrates why this distinction matters. Evidence from leader–follower trust violations indicates that apology quality can influence forgiveness and subsequent trust, while violation severity and intentionality condition that process [22]. An apology may therefore contribute to relational repair, but it does not demonstrate that a decision was corrected or that a lost opportunity was restored. Trust recovery and remediation must remain separate empirical outcomes.

The framework proposes three repair layers. Relational repair concerns acknowledgment, explanation, apology, and treatment of the affected person. Substantive remediation concerns correction or reconsideration of the decision and, where applicable, restoration of a lost opportunity or another proportionate remedy. Structural repair concerns changes to data, rules, decision rights, review pathways, or system design intended to reduce recurrence. The first layer closely follows established trust-repair mechanisms [20]. The second is consistent with workplace repair concerns [21]. The third is an original cross-domain extension and should be tested rather than presumed effective.

This tripartite distinction guards against a potentially misleading outcome: confidence may recover while the underlying decision process remains unchanged. Conversely, a technically corrected system may not restore trust when the organization fails to acknowledge experienced harm. Evaluation should therefore examine relational response, material correction, and recurrence-oriented redesign separately before making claims about successful repair.

Proposed justice-and-repair framework

The proposed Justice-and-Repair Framework integrates the preceding domains as a temporal architecture rather than a validated causal chain. Existing fair-AI scholarship already connects organizational justice with design and redress considerations for employee-facing systems [23]. The present contribution extends that premise by locating repair after the decision encounter and by treating contestability, accountability retention, and remediation as analytically distinct stages.

Figure 1 presents the original conceptual synthesis for justice-and-repair framework, showing how the article’s principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

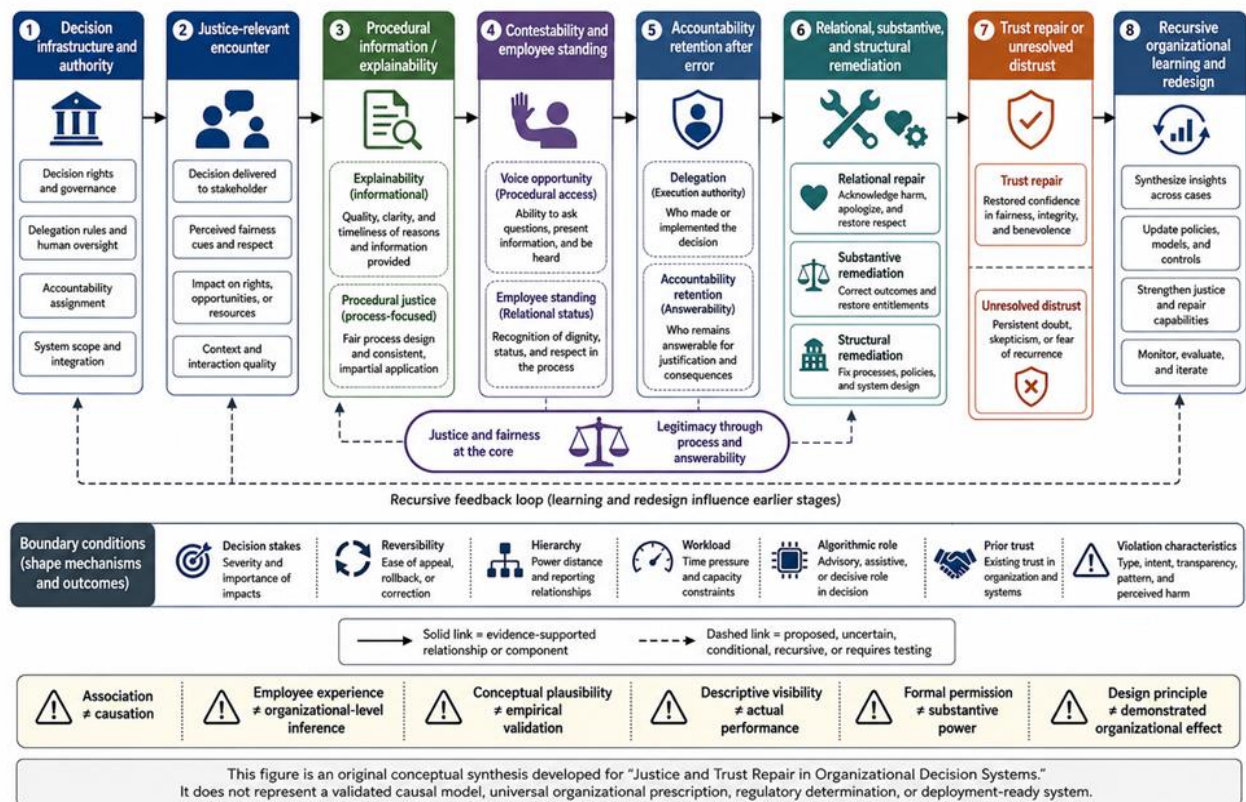


Figure 1. Justice-and-Repair Framework

Algorithmic management remains embedded in organizational arrangements rather than constituting a self-contained technical mode of governance [24, 25]. The same tool can operate differently depending on configuration, interpretation, challenge rights, and corrective authority. The framework therefore begins with decision infrastructure and authority, proceeds through the justice-relevant encounter and procedural information, and then asks whether contestability is supported by employee standing.

After an error, the framework moves from challenge to accountability retention and then to relational, substantive, and structural remediation. It also proposes recursive learning in which challenges and repair inform later decision design; no retained source validates the full sequence. Critical scholarship also cautions against assumptions that algorithms possess autonomous managerial agency or that algorithmic management can be understood through a single economic-control logic [26]. The framework therefore locates authority and responsibility in organizational arrangements rather than in technology alone.

A further implication concerns levels of analysis. An employee may experience a particular review as fair while coworkers encounter different reviewers, escalation thresholds, or remediation opportunities. A uniform appeal policy may also produce heterogeneous local experiences. The framework therefore does not aggregate individual justice judgments into an organizational property without evidence. Empirical tests should identify the unit at which procedural information, standing, accountability, and repair are measured and should examine whether cross-level relationships are actually observed rather than assumed.

Table 3 translates the proposed framework into testable propositions and organizational evaluation questions while preserving clear boundaries between conceptual relevance and demonstrated effectiveness.

Table 3. Testable propositions, evaluation criteria, and practical responsibilities

Proposed proposition or criterion	Central question	Observable evidence	Evidence that would challenge the proposition	Organizational responsibility	Main misuse risk
P1. Procedural-information adequacy	Does useful explanation improve evaluation only when it addresses the employee's actual procedural concern?	Differences in comprehension, perceived procedural adequacy, or challenge quality across explanation conditions	Equivalent responses regardless of explanation relevance or quality	Provide decision-relevant rather than merely technical information	Treating disclosure volume as proof of fairness

P2. Consequential standing	Does formal voice matter only when employees can activate authorized reconsideration?	Challenge receipt, escalation, review, and documented reconsideration	Formal voice produces the same outcomes whether or not review authority exists	Specify who may hear, escalate, reconsider, and overturn decisions	Creating symbolic appeals with no decision consequence
P3. Accountability retention	Does clearer responsibility allocation reduce ambiguity after human–AI decision failure?	Identifiable answerable roles, response ownership, and correction authority	Accountability remains equally clear without explicit allocation	Define responsibility before technology-mediated delegation	Naming a nominal human reviewer while real authority remains diffuse
P4. Repair completeness	Are relational responses insufficient when a violation also creates correctable material harm?	Separate measures of acknowledgment, correction, and subsequent trust	Apology or explanation alone produces equivalent outcomes after material loss	Match remedy to the type of harm	Using improved sentiment as evidence that injustice was corrected
P5. Structural repair	Does redesign following repeated failure reduce recurrence more effectively than isolated case correction?	Changes in rules, data, escalation design, or recurring error patterns over time	Recurrence remains unchanged after genuine structural modification	Convert repeated failure into system-learning input	Cosmetic redesign without changing decision conditions
P6. Context dependence	Do the framework's mechanisms vary with stakes, reversibility, hierarchy, and violation characteristics?	Meaningful variation across decisions, occupations, authority structures, and harm conditions	Stable relationships across materially different contexts	Evaluate local conditions before generalization	Treating one setting as universally representative
Evaluation criterion: traceability	Can the organization reconstruct how a consequential decision was made and reviewed?	Decision provenance, role clarity, review record, and correction history	Important decision stages remain untraceable	Preserve auditable decision and review pathways	Confusing documentation quantity with accountability quality
Evaluation criterion: repair capacity	Can the organization actually correct what can be corrected?	Authority, procedures, resources, and timing for remediation	Errors are acknowledged but cannot be meaningfully remedied	Establish realistic corrective pathways	Advertising remediation that lacks operational authority
Evaluation criterion: learning capacity	Does information from challenge and repair alter future practice?	Evidence of redesign, policy revision, or changed review arrangements	Similar failures recur without organizational modification	Connect repair cases to governance review	Treating closed cases as evidence of institutional learning

Table note. Every proposition and criterion in this table is proposed. Observable evidence indicates what future research or organizational evaluation could examine; it does not constitute a validated threshold, certification standard, legal requirement, or implementation-readiness test.

Evaluation criteria and organizational implications

Evaluation should begin with the person affected by a decision but should not end with self-reported acceptance. Algorithm-based HR decision making can create challenges for personal integrity, supporting attention to participation, literacy, and the conditions under which employees can understand and respond to consequential decisions [27]. The framework therefore evaluates usable procedural information, consequential standing, identifiable accountability, and proportionate remedy as objects of inquiry rather than certified standards.

Figure 2 presents the original conceptual synthesis for mechanisms, boundary conditions, and organizational consequences, showing how the article's principal constructs, mechanisms, uncertainties, and decision boundaries are connected.

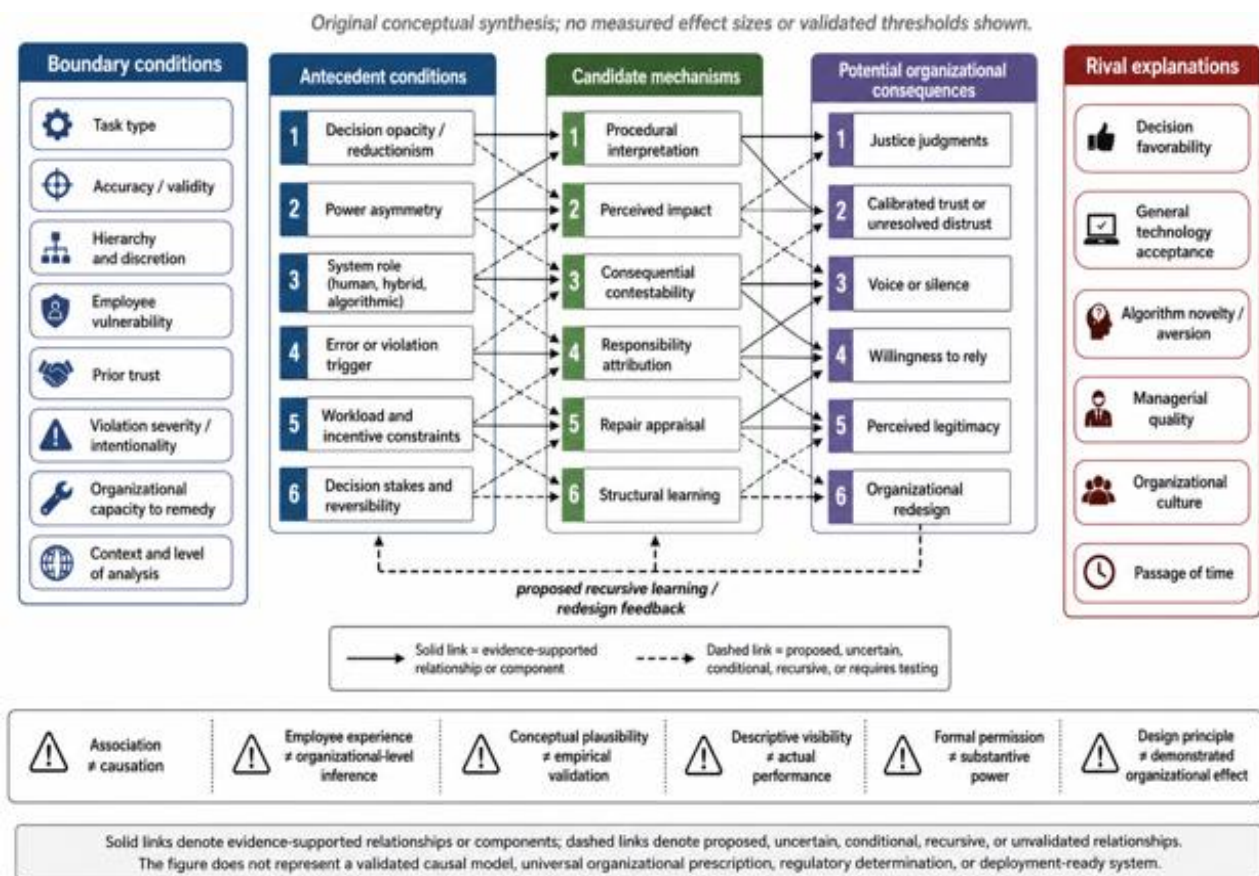


Figure 2. Mechanisms, Boundary Conditions, and Organizational Consequences

Evaluation must also distinguish predictive performance from causal reasoning and organizational legitimacy. Work on AI in human-resource management emphasizes challenges involving data, causal inference, accountability, employee reactions, and experimentation [28]. An accurate prediction cannot by itself establish fairness, morally relevant data, or meaningful redress. These components should be evaluated independently.

Technology should likewise be evaluated as a configuration rather than a binary intervention. Research on electronic performance monitoring shows that effects depend on technological characteristics and contextual or psychological conditions [29]. Relevant boundaries include stakes, reversibility, hierarchy, discretion, vulnerability, prior trust, workload, and violation severity; rival explanations include decision favorability, technology acceptance, novelty, managerial quality, culture, and time.

Testing also requires temporal separation. Cross-sectional trust measured immediately after an explanation cannot establish successful repair because subsequent review, material correction, and recurrence remain unobserved. Stronger designs could follow cases from notification through challenge, review, remedy, and redesign; independently vary explanation, review authority, and remedy; and compare formal appeals with realized changes. Multilevel studies could test whether repeated individual experiences accumulate into shared justice climates. Such designs must permit the proposed mechanisms to fail empirically.

Organizational implications are therefore diagnostic rather than prescriptive. Organizations can map where explanation, review authority, accountability, and remediation are located and identify gaps between formal policy and enacted practice. Whether changing those arrangements improves justice or trust remains an empirical question requiring longitudinal, experimental, process-tracing, and multilevel research.

Conclusion

Justice in organizational decision systems cannot be evaluated solely at the moment an output is produced. Decisions are embedded in infrastructures of data, authority, explanation, human judgment, review, and remediation. The proposed Justice-and-Repair Framework connects these elements by treating procedural information, employee standing, accountability retention, and repair as distinct but potentially interacting domains.

Its central contribution is temporal and institutional: a decision that appears explainable may remain uncontestable; a formally reviewable decision may lack an accountable actor; and a corrected decision may leave relational or structural harm

unresolved. The framework therefore proposes that justice analysis extend from decision formation through challenge, error, remedy, and organizational learning.

These connections remain conceptual. Their direction, strength, temporal order, and applicability may vary across technologies, occupations, power structures, decision stakes, and organizational contexts. The framework is consequently neither a validated causal model nor a universal governance prescription. Its value lies in making distinct mechanisms and boundaries visible enough to test, challenge, refine, or reject through future research.

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