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Resolution Tactics of Supplier-Induced Disruptions: A Configurational Approach

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ABSTRACT

Supplier-induced disruptions can severely damage buyers' trust. While research underscores the importance of both procedural justice (PJ) and distributive justice (DJ) in trust repair, these approaches are often studied in isolation despite their combined use in practice. This research examines under what conditions using one justice tactic versus both can lead to successful repair. Two theoretical lenses offer alternative predictions: Fairness heuristics theory suggests a single justice tactic may suffice, whereas motivation-hygiene theory posits that the combined use of both PJ and DJ may be more effective. Juxtaposing the two theoretical lenses and taking a configurational approach, we (a) propose uncertainty as a key construct dictating each lens' applicability and (b) identify a set of uncertainty-driven boundary conditions—related to both individual buyers' traits and the focal disruption—to form configurations. We collected our data from two vignette-based experiments with 553 purchasing managers and supplemented the experiment data with qualitative insights gathered from 105 additional managers. In doing so, we uncover three configurations leading to successful trust repair and four resulting in failed repair. Our findings offer guidance for supplier managers in devising portfolios of disruption resolution tactics.

1 | Introduction

Buying firms have increasingly experienced *supplier-induced disruptions*—unplanned delays or stoppages of planned product flows caused by suppliers (Craighead et al. 2007; Wang et al. 2014)—which can create a sense of injustice (Blessley et al. 2018), damage relationship trust (Wang et al. 2014), reduce satisfaction (Cheng et al. 2020), and potentially lead to relationship termination (Polyviou et al. 2018). Previous studies have framed such supplier-induced failures as trust violations (i.e., “the failure of one party to perform in line with the expectations

of the other”) from the *buyer's perspective* (Eckerd et al. 2022). Correspondingly, suppliers undertake various resolution efforts to mitigate—if not restore—buyers' trust they have compromised, a process henceforth referred to as *trust repair* (Wang et al. 2014).

Scholars (e.g., Wang et al. 2022; Wang et al. 2014) have explicated suppliers' resolution tactics in the forms of *procedural justice* (PJ)—the degree of consistency, bias-suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality in the resolution procedure (Lind and Tyler 1988)—and *distributive justice*

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(DJ)—the extent to which the resolution outcomes of each party are commensurate with its contributions and match appropriate norms (Smith et al. 1999). While past studies have primarily examined PJ's or DJ's *independent* effects (Cheng et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2014), our interviews¹ revealed that suppliers usually combine procedure- and outcome-based resolutions² as noted in the following observation: “[Suppliers] typically apologize [a form of PJ] and compensate [a form of DJ] for any issues. At the very least, they will remedy the situation on the next delivery.” And yet, of those instances when both PJ and DJ were used, not all of them succeed; as one respondent noted, “The compensation and transparency after the fact doesn't help the supply or brand that would have been damaged from the delay of delivery.” Of those instances when only a single tactic (e.g., PJ) was used, some were still successful (Wang et al. 2014). These observations raise pivotal questions: If a successful resolution can rely on the use of both PJ and DJ or just one of them, then how critical are these tactics in determining the outcome, such as repaired trust? And if they are not solely decisive, what additional factors explain when and why certain strategies lead to success?

Regarding the first question, ample evidence has suggested that both PJ and DJ can be instrumental in repairing relationships across interpersonal and interorganizational contexts (e.g., Smith et al. 1999; Wang et al. 2022). However, their interplay remains a theoretical puzzle as two competing mechanisms—fairness heuristic theory (cf., Lind 2001) and motivation-hygiene theory (cf., Herzberg et al. 1959)—propose distinct explanations for how PJ and DJ collectively shape trust repair. While both mechanisms focus on decision-makers' sensemaking of justice-related cues, they differ in their explanations of cognitive processing. Fairness heuristic theory posits that the focal party uses cognitive shortcuts in appraising the exchange partner (Lind 2001), prioritizing the justice cue received earlier (typically PJ in a disruption resolution context) and using it as a heuristic device to assess its partner's overall fairness; thus, the effect of subsequent justice cues (typically DJ) is discounted. Conversely, motivation-hygiene theory assumes systemic information processing, whereby the focal party recognizes and evaluates both PJ and DJ for their unique utilities to form a comprehensive judgment (Herzberg et al. 1959). By assessing either mechanism in isolation, empirical evidence reflects this tension: Some researchers found that the presence of one justice could overshadow the other (e.g., Brockner et al. 2007), whereas others found a synergistic effect of combining PJ and DJ (e.g., Hui et al. 2004). This logical inconsistency suggests that rather than seeking a one-size-fits-all explanation for the PJ-DJ dynamics, a configurational approach can be more appropriate because an identical PJ-DJ combination can yield different outcomes depending on the decision-makers and circumstances.

To address the logical inconsistency and thus resolve the PJ-DJ puzzle, we must identify the *set of conditions* under which fairness heuristic or motivation-hygiene mechanisms prevail (Makadok et al. 2018). *Uncertainty* is pivotal as it shapes the type of cognitive processing decision-makers engage in (Lord and Maher 1990; Grandori 1984). Past studies have alluded to the essential role of uncertainty—particularly outcome uncertainty—in shaping individuals' sensemaking of justice information (De Cremer et al. 2010; Hui et al. 2004). Yet how uncertainty—arising from personal traits and an exchange's

circumstances—influences justice processing remains underexplored. This issue is especially relevant to understanding how buyers process justice cues from suppliers' resolutions. We focus on three uncertainty-related factors stemming from buyer traits and the nature of the disruption: (a) buyer's *uncertainty avoidance* (referred to as *UA* henceforth), or the extent to which the buyer feels threatened by unknown situations and seeks to avoid them (Hofstede 2001); (b) buyer's *trust propensity* (referred to as *TP* henceforth), or the extent to which the buyer is dispositioned to rely on its exchange partner (Mayer et al. 1995), particularly in situations involving uncertainty (Colquitt et al. 2007); and (c) distinctive *supplier failure types* triggering disruptions, which signal the supplier's lack of competence versus integrity (Eckerd et al. 2022).

Juxtaposing *fairness heuristic theory* with *motivation-hygiene theory*, we adopt a configurational approach—both as a theorizing and an analytical approach (Fiss 2011)—to unpack the PJ-DJ puzzle and illustrate its causal complexity (Furnari et al. 2021). Specifically, we (a) identify which uncertainty-related conditions combine with PJ and DJ to achieve trust repair (conjunctural causation), (b) uncover how alternative configurations of conditions lead to successful repair (causal equifinality), and (c) explore configurations resulting in failed repair (causal asymmetry).

We gathered our data via two vignette-based experiments—each featuring a distinct supplier failure—conducted with 553 US purchasing managers. Then we analyzed experimental data via a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) (Fiss 2011; Ragin 2008). Next, we conducted post hoc interviews with 105 experienced purchasing managers and leveraged their qualitative insights to further explicate our QCA findings. As a result, we showed that PJ, DJ, buyer traits, and supplier failure combined in complex ways to shape trust repair. Specifically, we identified three configurations leading to successful trust repair and four leading to failed repair, with some mirroring a pattern consistent with the fairness heuristic mechanism, whereas others were consistent with the motivation-hygiene mechanism.

Our research makes several contributions. First, unlike most studies of supplier-induced disruptions examining the effects of PJ and DJ independently (e.g., Cheng et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2022), our configurational approach reveals that trust repair depends on constellations of justice tactics, buyer traits (UA, TP), and disruption types. Neither the presence nor the absence of either tactic is sufficient to dictate the success or failure of restoring trust. Rather, in multiple cases, it is the simultaneous presence or absence of the two tactics that matters, crucially contingent on specific buyer and disruption traits, thereby signifying *conjunctural causation* (Fiss 2011). In another case, PJ's presence is sufficient to repair trust as long as the decision environment—characterized by buyer and disruption traits—makes uncertainty a salient factor, shaping buyers' information processing in a certain way. As such, our QCA findings show that multiple configurations lead to the same successful outcome (i.e., repaired trust), indicative of *causal equifinality* (Ketchen et al. 2022).

Second, while much of the extant research focuses on supplier actions leading up to effective resolutions (e.g., Wang et al. 2014;

Wang et al. 2022), our findings provide insights into when resolutions would fail. Complementing valuable insights offered by limited research on this matter (e.g., Reimann et al. 2017), we highlight that even the absence of both resolution tactics does *not necessarily* doom a supplier to failure, which further depends on other contextual factors. Also, the configurations leading to failure are not simply the inverse of those leading to success. Certain conditions—such as integrity-based failures—can appear in configurations for both successful and failed trust repair, highlighting *causal asymmetry* (Fiss 2011).

We also advance justice literature by reconciling fairness heuristic and motivation-hygiene theories, previously seen as competing lenses (e.g., Brockner et al. 2007; Hui et al. 2004; Qin et al. 2015; Brockner 2002). By identifying uncertainty as a pivotal factor setting the boundary for these theories, we show that they in fact complement one another, with each being more applicable in different settings depending on the buyer's traits and the disruption's characteristics. Thus, we resolve their logical inconsistency (Makadok et al. 2018). Managerially, these insights provide actionable decision heuristics for suppliers to form trust repair strategies in complex disruption scenarios.

2 | Theoretical Background

2.1 | Supplier-Induced Disruption Recovery and the Role of Justice Tactics

Much of the disruption literature has focused on the economic impact of mitigation strategies—such as multiple sourcing (Tomlin 2006)—and recovery tactics—such as restructuring the supply chain (e.g., DuHadway et al. 2019), while viewing buyers and suppliers as rational decision-makers. Having recognized the key role of managerial cognition, some scholars started focusing on (a) the cognitive process underlying buyers' responses to disruptions (e.g., Ellis et al. 2011) and (b) how suppliers' resolution actions influence buyers' cognitive processes (e.g., Wang et al. 2022), thus shaping the relationship's dynamics (Cheng et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2014). A key observation is that buyers' sensemaking of the disruption and resolution hinges on a range of contextual factors—such as the disruption characteristics (e.g., severity) (e.g., Reimann et al. 2017), buyer traits (e.g., personality) (Timmer and Kaufmann 2019), and relationship attributes (e.g., dependence) (e.g., Cheng et al. 2020)—that combine in complex ways to shape outcomes (Reimann et al. 2017).

One crucial cognitive process is buyer's trust appraisal. Scholars have attempted to assess how disruptions could damage trust (e.g., Eckerd et al. 2022) and how suppliers could act to repair it (e.g., Wang et al. 2014). Similarly, our study focuses on *trust repair* (i.e., the relative increase in a buyer's trusting belief in a supplier after a disruption's resolution) through the supplier's resolution (Kaufmann et al. 2018). Despite extant studies' valuable insights (see a summary of pertinent literature in Table S1), suppliers' resolution tactics are examined mostly independently. It remains unclear how these tactics combine with one another, as well as with key contextual factors, to influence trust repair.

Because supplier-induced disruptions lead to perceived injustice (Blessley et al. 2018), resolution tactics that demonstrate

or reinstate justice are key levers for trust restoration (Wang et al. 2014). Out of various justice tactics (e.g., procedural, distributive, interactional, and informational), PJ and DJ are shown to be the most effective in resolving disruptions (Mir et al. 2022; Wang et al. 2022)—hence the focus in this research. The supplier can demonstrate PJ (a) through consistent procedures and accurate updates—thereby signaling its reliability in handling unexpected situations (Wang et al. 2014)—and (b) by allowing the buyer to have input on how to resolve disruptions—in turn lessening the buyer's sense of vulnerability (Liu et al. 2012). The supplier can demonstrate DJ by fully reimbursing the buyer for any financial loss resulting from the disruption (Smith et al. 1999)—indicating the supplier's adherence to equity and care for the buyer's welfare, thus alleviating the uncertainty of future losses (Wang et al. 2022). While the literature suggests that PJ and DJ can independently repair trust, it is unclear how and when one justice tactic repairs trust in the other's presence or absence.

Broadly speaking, justice is an influential concept in interorganizational exchanges (Lind and Tyler 1988), such as alliances (e.g., Luo 2007) and buyer–supplier exchanges (e.g., Narasimhan et al. 2013). Despite supply chain scholars' increased interest in justice (see a representative sample in Table S2), limited research takes an integrative approach to investigating how justice dimensions combine in shaping relationship outcomes.³

2.2 | Coexisting Lenses Focusing on Process-Distributive Justice Interplay

Justice theorists have primarily adopted two alternative lenses that explicate distinctive patterns of the PJ-DJ dynamics—with a set of empirical studies supporting each lens. We introduce the key tenets and arguments of each lens below and elaborate on how they may apply to our focal context in Section 3.

2.2.1 | Fairness Heuristics Theory

The fairness heuristic theory was developed from two established models (Brockner 2002): the *group value model* (i.e., fairness used as a device to gauge the value obtained from being in a group) and the *relational model* (i.e., fairness used as an instrument to evaluate the nature of the relationship) (Lind and Tyler 1988; Tyler and Allan Lind 1992). This theory has two key tenets highlighting the use of heuristics by individuals who process the justice cues. First, exchange parties use impressions of fair treatment as a relational *heuristic* device for assessing trustworthiness. Herein justice cues, such as PJ and DJ, serve as proxies for the more abstract trust appraisals (Lind 2001). Second, the heuristic process to form justice assessments and subsequently trust appraisal typically goes through two phases: (a) the *judgmental phase*, in which the justice information first available to the party is used to form fairness assessments through the so-called *primacy effect*, and (b) the *use phase*, in which these assessments guide further cognition and trust reappraisal (Lind 2001). There are two noteworthy points about the context in which heuristics are more likely used. First, shortcuts are more likely provoked in contexts of heightened uncertainties (De Cremer et al. 2010), such as when disruptions cast

doubt on a supplier's ethics (Craighead et al. 2007) or when information is unclear (Qin et al. 2015)—a challenge that becomes more pronounced under time pressure. Second, the use of heuristics is more likely when initially received cues align with expectations but is diminished when initial cues are unexpected, thus prompting deliberate processing (Van den Bos et al. 1997; Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996).

2.2.2 | Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Motivation-hygiene theory distinguishes between *motivating* (good-to-have) factors, which increase positive attitudes, and *hygiene* (must-have) factors, which reduce negative attitudes (Herzberg et al. 1959). Hygiene factors are necessary conditions for motivating factors to elicit positive responses, highlighting the synergistic benefits of having both (Herzberg et al. 1959). Unlike the fairness heuristic theory, involving the key tenets that rely on heuristics processing of selected cues, this theory assumes a deliberate processing of all available cues that are then evaluated based on their perceived utilities (Hui et al. 2004). In our context, the buyer may aim to form a meaningful interpretation of the disruption resolution by attending to cues in the categories of hygiene factors (e.g., meeting basic standards) and motivating factors (i.e., exceeding expectations). This deliberate processing is more likely when buyers have the time and capacity to do so—such as in less urgent or uncertain situations or due to the buyers' predispositions toward systematic processing. Failure to meet hygiene standards leads to dissatisfaction and reduced trust (*regardless of the presence of motivating factors*), while fulfilling them maintains trust. When motivating factors are *also* present, buyers feel more satisfied (Hui et al. 2004), and trust is likely rebuilt.

2.2.3 | Juxtaposition of the Two Theories

While both theories center on decision-makers' information processing to explain the PJ-DJ dynamics, they differ in the mechanisms through which decision-makers attend to and integrate justice-related cues, thereby carrying differential implications. The *fairness heuristic mechanism* prescribes heuristic processing, whereby earlier cues are prioritized and may overshadow subsequent ones. Therefore, it emphasizes the interactive process through which decision-makers assess the exchange partner's series of actions—the reflexive sensemaking of *how actions are being taken*. In contrast, the *motivation-hygiene mechanism* prescribes controlled processing, whereby all cues are systematically evaluated and integrated based on their utilities. Thus, this mechanism focuses on these actions' perceived value—a reflection of *what has been accomplished*. In sum, predicated on differential cognitive processes, each lens offers a parsimonious account of how justice cues are processed. Yet the following remains unclear: under what conditions one mechanism is more applicable than the other; in other words, when heuristic versus controlled processing is more likely to be activated.

Taken together, these alternative mechanisms imply configurational expectations for the efficacy of PJ and DJ. We herein adopt configurational theorizing (Furnari et al. 2021). In Section 3, we first articulate how the presence or absence of PJ and DJ shapes

trust repair, following each mechanism. Next, we reveal a key theme explaining when each mechanism likely operates and identify a set of contextual attributes orchestrated by this overarching theme. Lastly, we hypothesize sufficiency expectations for distinct configurations of attributes—reflecting either mechanism—leading to successful trust repair following a supplier-induced disruption.

3 | Hypothesis Development: Configurations for Trust Repair

3.1 | PJ-DJ Interplay via the Fairness Heuristics Theory

The two phases of the fairness heuristic—the judgmental phase and the use phase—are critical in shaping the PJ-DJ dynamics. During the judgmental phase, buyers may receive multiple pieces of justice-relevant information via the supplier's resolution. When this happens, the information first received often has the greatest impact on the general assessment (e.g., Van den Bos et al. 1997). Because the procedure is usually encountered before the outcome (Reimann et al. 2017; Lind 2001),⁴ the PJ of the supplier has a primacy effect on its DJ. In other words, the buyer forms a general assessment based on PJ information. When the supplier demonstrates fairness via its procedure, even if the supplier lacks DJ during the resolution, the less equitable outcome can be explained away to preserve the established assessment. In contrast, when the supplier fails to show justice in its procedure (e.g., a process lacking consistencies), the buyer may instead initially form an assessment of the supplier that it is less fair.

Importantly, this general assessment is more impactful in the subsequent use phase when the initially received cues are desirable (or expected) and less so when the cues are undesirable (or unexpected) (Van den Bos et al. 1997). Thus, the supplier's resolution process—the more immediate justice cue that either conforms to (in the case of high PJ) or deviates from (in the case of low PJ) the buyer's expectation—dictates the strength of its primacy effect and the effectiveness of the subsequent justice cue in the form of DJ. During the use phase, when the supplier's initial procedure lacks fairness, this unexpected cue provokes the buyer's more controlled information processing. Thus, the buyer may leverage additional information indicated by the supplier's fairness (or lack of) in outcome allocation and evaluate the supplier's trustworthiness. DJ's effectiveness can then be more prominent in restoring trust. In contrast, when the supplier demonstrates sufficient fairness via its procedure (i.e., conforming to the buyer's expectation), the buyer will use the supplier's PJ as a proxy for its overall fairness, and the subsequent DJ will be less relevant.

3.2 | PJ-DJ Interplay via the Motivation-Hygiene Theory

The key premises of the motivation-hygiene theory are (a) the motivating factor and the hygiene factor offer distinct utilities and (b) individuals intentionally process cues as indicated by both factors (Herzberg et al. 1959). The two justice variables

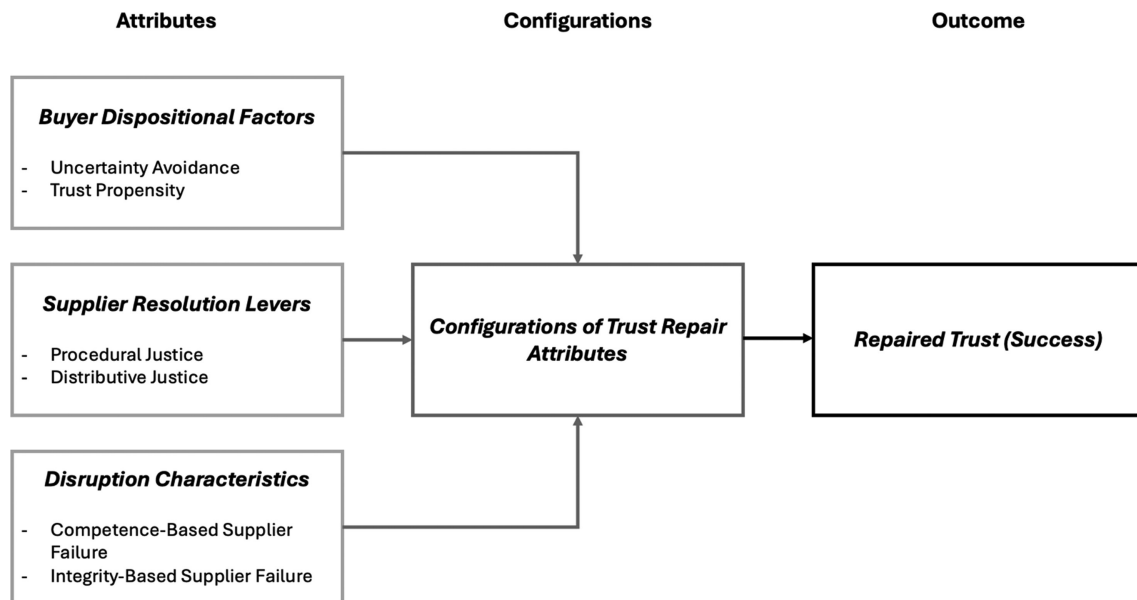


FIGURE 1 | Conceptual framework.

are unique factors in social exchanges: DJ is associated with equity and thus serves as insurance for acceptable outcomes in these exchanges (Cheng et al. 2020), whereas PJ is related to the partner's perceived reliability and commitment (Folger and Konovsky 1989) and is a key motivator for the focal party to pursue continuity in the relationship (Wang et al. 2014). In the context of supplier-induced disruptions, we argue that DJ tends to be the hygiene factor necessary to repair a disruption, whereas PJ is a motivating factor enabling partners to be satisfied with each other and even revive mutual trust (Maddox 1981; Herzberg et al. 1959). Because the supplier's failure directly caused the disruption, the financial losses (e.g., penalties the buyer paid to its customer) would not have been incurred without the supplier's wrongdoing. Thus, the supplier's DJ (i.e., financial compensation) could be viewed as necessary to rectify its wrongdoing, and a lack of sufficient compensation might disqualify the supplier and further damage trust *regardless of* the resolution procedure (Wang et al. 2022). However, DJ's presence *alone* can be insufficient to solicit a positive attitude—repaired trust—from the buyer because the buyer expects the supplier to take full responsibility for the financial consequences resulting from its failure (Wang et al. 2022).

In contrast, the supplier's PJ is viewed as a positive, good-to-have attribute. As long as DJ is guaranteed, the lack of PJ is less likely to disqualify the supplier immediately. However, PJ's presence can further motivate the buyer to feel more satisfied and regain trust in the supplier. From an economic perspective, higher PJ—suggesting the supplier's reliability and consistency—may lead buyers to be more optimistic about their chances of receiving their share of the desired outcome in the future (Luo 2007). From a psychological perspective, higher PJ involves (a) an exchange of accurate information between the supplier and buyer and (b) ethics in the supplier's resolution steps—both making the supplier's financial compensation (DJ) more genuine. In brief, the buyer bases its trust appraisal on both factors, and the PJ (motivating) factor's effectiveness is more salient when the DJ (hygiene) factor is already in place.

3.3 | Dialectic Between the Two Lenses in Disruption Resolution: Uncertainty as the Orchestrating Theme

A consensus among justice theorists is that the behavioral mechanisms underlying the different forms of PJ-DJ interplay may be more or less applicable depending on the focal context. A key difference between the two mechanisms is how individuals process justice cues in the form of the supplier's resolution. While the fairness heuristics mechanism is predicated on using cognitive shortcuts such that the justice cues received first overshadow the subsequent cues' impact (Lind 2001), the motivation-hygiene mechanism prescribes a controlled manner of processing these justice cues because different cues offer the decision-maker unique values (Herzberg et al. 1959). *Uncertainty* emerges as a crucial concept for at least two reasons. First, it guides how individuals process information (Lord and Maher 1990; Grandori 1984). Past studies deploying either theory (De Cremer et al. 2010; Hui et al. 2004) have hinted at the indispensable role of uncertainty-related attributes (e.g., outcome uncertainty) in shaping how individuals process justice information. Second, trust, justice, and uncertainty are closely interconnected concepts, whereby justice mitigates trust-related uncertainty and reduces discomfort arising from uncertainty (Van den Bos et al. 2001). Following extant literature's insight that disruption resolution's effectiveness depends on attributes of the event and decision-makers (Reimann et al. 2017), we identify the following *uncertainty-related attributes* that, along with PJ and DJ, form configurations of successful trust repair (see Figure 1).

3.3.1 | Supplier Failure Type

The nature of the incident damaging the trust can be “a pivotal determinant of the success of the repair efforts” (Dirks et al. 2009, 74). Evidence suggests that whether the disruption is triggered by a competence- or integrity-based supplier failure

has a profound impact on buyers' trust appraisal of the supplier (Eckerd et al. 2022) because competence failures cast doubt on a supplier's capability, whereas integrity failures raise concerns about principles and values.

We propose that distinct supplier failure types likely shape the perceived uncertainty about the focal exchange, thereby influencing the type of information processing the buyer uses. The fairness heuristics process is likely to be the salient mechanism when the supplier failure is integrity-based. A primary situation for a party to engage in the fairness heuristics process is when there is a lack of clear information about the exchange partner, resulting in high uncertainty in making assessments (De Cremer et al. 2010; Qin et al. 2015). When the failure brings into question the integrity of the supplier, the buyer may have difficulty grasping its motives and principles, thus experiencing exceptionally high uncertainty about the exchange (Eckerd et al. 2022). The buyer is then prompted to immediately begin reappraising its trust toward the supplier, setting the stage for a heuristic sensemaking process.

When the supplier failure is competence-based, the motivation-hygiene mechanism is more likely to be provoked. Because a competence failure is task- or situation-specific (Dirks et al. 2009) and the issue of concern is often easier to define and address, the buyer likely perceives lesser ambiguity in reevaluating the supplier. Also, the buyer likely views such failures as one-time incidents—which are less likely to spill over to other facets of the exchange (Dirks et al. 2009)—thereby having a lower urgency for reevaluation. The buyer can then be more intentional in seeking all relevant justice cues through the supplier's resolution.

While the supplier failure type shapes the situational uncertainty perceived by the buyer, it alone is *unlikely sufficient* to dictate the buyer's sensemaking process because individuals with different traits can handle the same uncertain situation differently. Instead, the type of supplier failure may combine with buyer traits in shaping the buyer's sensemaking of the supplier's justice tactics.

3.3.2 | Individual Buyer's Uncertainty Avoidance

One key trait influencing individuals' information processing across uncertain contexts is uncertainty avoidance⁵ (cf., Taras et al. 2010). Feeling more threatened by uncertain situations' ambiguity, high-UA individuals selectively focus on information that offers clear structures and rules to reduce ambiguity, influencing their adaptive behaviors in uncertain situations (Venaik and Brewer 2010), such as disruption resolution. By contrast, low-UA individuals are more accepting of unpredictability and process uncertainties with greater composure (Triandis 1995).

Because UA affects how individuals scan and attend to stimuli from an uncertain environment and use the gathered information to make decisions (Mikulincer 1997), we propose that the UA of buyers plays an indispensable role in their sensemaking of suppliers' justice tactics. Feeling stressed and threatened by uncertainties, high-UA buyers find processing information—for example, screening a complex environment and interpreting

the uncertain and ambiguous stimuli—cognitively challenging (Sung et al. 2017). Thus, they tend to rely on shortcuts to reduce their cognitive overload (Mikulincer 1997) so as to quickly escape the discomfort of uncertainties. This is not to say that these individuals do not *intend* to seek information to reduce uncertainties. Rather, because they experience considerable uneasiness in unknown situations, their search is likely rushed. Because high-UA buyers rely on established rules and customs in pursuing security (Hofstede 2001), they likely have a selective focus on cues indicating stability and predictability, such as (in)consistent procedures—the mental resources needed for dealing with the cognitive challenges imposed by stressful disruptions (Inkson et al. 1970). Herein, a disruption triggered by the supplier's integrity-based failure is one such situation that heightens the tendency of high-UA buyers to engage in heuristic information processing, specifically fairness heuristics as a cognitive shortcut to guide their reassessment of trust toward the supplier. Thus,

Hypothesis 1a. *The use of procedural justice alone is sufficient for trust repair IF the disruption is triggered by an integrity-based supplier failure AND IF the buyer has high uncertainty avoidance.*

In contrast, low-UA buyers find it cognitively stimulating to search for and comprehend information gathered from their environment and view such information processing as an opportunity to manage uncertainties. They are less tempted to resort to heuristics. Instead, they engage in systematic information processing—such as intentionally gathering all relevant justice cues and processing those cues (De Cremer et al. 2010) to reevaluate the supplier—in order to proactively reduce uncertainties about continuing the relationship. This process aligns more with the motivation-hygiene theory, allowing buyers to comprehensively appraise the supplier. Compared to high-UA buyers, low-UA buyers tend not to overly emphasize a formalized procedure (Taras et al. 2010). This is not to say that the procedure is unimportant; instead, these individuals tend *not* to prioritize procedure over outcome but acknowledge the distinct utilities of fair procedures versus fair compensations. We argue that, *regardless of how uncertain the situation*, low-UA buyers tend to engage in this more controlled information-processing of PJ and DJ cues. In other words, unlike the high-UA case, the supplier failure type is *not* an indispensable part of the subsequent low-UA configuration. Thus,

Hypothesis 1b. *The combined use of procedural justice and distributive justice is sufficient for trust repair if the buyer has low uncertainty avoidance.*

3.3.3 | Individual Buyer's Trust Propensity

While UA captures individuals' tolerance for and approach to uncertainty in general, TP describes individuals' predisposition to rely on others (Mayer et al. 1995) and thus individuals' approach to relational uncertainty within social exchanges. We argue that TP also plays an essential role in dictating the buyer's cognitive process used to reevaluate the supplier's trustworthiness. High-TP buyers—due to a higher dispositional tendency to trust exchange partners—are less cautious when making

trust-related attributions and more inclined to quickly update their trust assessments with *any* positive cues that would suggest the supplier's reliability (Colquitt et al. 2007). Because PJ is often perceived prior to DJ, the supplier's PJ likely serves as a key signal helping restore the trust. Also, high-TP buyers are less suspicious of partners. Thus, they feel more comfortable using the fairness heuristic device for trust appraisal. Because TP is a stable trait that spans different social exchange situations (Kramer 1999), we propose that high TP *alone* is *sufficient* to guarantee a successful trust repair *as long as* the supplier demonstrates its dependability through a consistent and fair procedure. Thus,

Hypothesis 2a. *The use of procedural justice alone is sufficient for trust repair if the buyer has high trust propensity.*

In contrast, low-TP buyers are much more suspicious of exchange partners. They are highly methodical and cautious of evaluating their vulnerability with partners and are thus compelled to gather a comprehensive set of cues to help guide their decisions. These buyers typically avoid rushed decision-making, instead staying open to the prospect that more information may follow (Kramer 1999). It is argued that their natural suspicion can lead to more sophisticated analyses “characterized by active, careful consideration of the potential motives [of the partner] and causes [of the incident]” (Fein 1996, 1167). Thus, their sensemaking of the supplier's justice tactics likely aligns better with the motivation-hygiene mechanism.

However, the nature of the disruption also matters to low-TP buyers. When the disruption stems from a competence failure—resulting in more moderate perceived uncertainty about the exchange, low-TP buyers, albeit predisposed to skepticism, may still be willing to consider the supplier's justice cues as credible signals of remediation and reassess the supplier's trustworthiness accordingly. In contrast, a disruption that casts doubt on the supplier's integrity may elevate relationship uncertainty to such a high level that these buyers do not even entertain the possibility of trust repair. In that case, the supplier's justice cues are likely *insufficient* to recoup low-TP buyers' trust. In other words, lower situational uncertainty—as shaped by the supplier's failure—serves as a prerequisite for low-TP buyers to view justice cues as a meaningful basis for trust appraisal. Thus,

Hypothesis 2b. *The combined use of procedural justice and distributive justice is sufficient for trust repair if the disruption is triggered by a competence-based supplier failure and if the buyer has low trust propensity.*

4 | Empirical Data and Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)

4.1 | Data Collection

Our primary data were gathered using a controlled experimental approach, allowing us to test *causal* relationships without sacrificing realism (Aguinis and Bradley 2014). Presented with a vignette containing the basic contextual information (i.e., the buyer–supplier relationship and supplier-induced disruption) and the experimental cues manipulating factors of interest (i.e.,

the justice resolution), participants assumed an a priori-defined purchasing-manager role and responded to questions about their perceptions of the manipulated factors and response variables (Alexander and Becker 1978). Our experimental design was a multi-stage experiment with a 2 (PJ: high vs. low) X 2 (DJ: high vs. low) *between-subjects* treatment design and a *repeated measure* of trust before and after the repair. This repeated-measure design was chosen to capture changes in trust and to address the concern of lacking “natural anchors” seen in pure between-subjects designs (Charness et al. 2012). We conducted two main experiments for the two failure types: Study 1 featured a competence-based supplier failure, whereas Study 2 featured an integrity-based failure.

We followed Rungtusanatham et al.'s (2011) guidelines to develop realistic vignettes; Appendix S2 reports details of the vignette design, experimental tasks, and manipulations. Pretests and a pilot study assessed our design's validity—reliable measures, effective manipulations, and realistic vignettes—and addressed the concerns of demand effects. Experimental checks are provided in Appendix S3. Following the main experiments, we gathered additional qualitative insights via survey-based written interviews with experienced purchasing managers. While the experimental data was used to test hypothesized configurational expectations, the qualitative insights provide a contextualized understanding of managerial cognition and further triangulate the emergent configurations.

Table 1 provides an overview of pretests, the pilot study, main studies, post hoc written interviews, and robustness check studies.

For the main experiments, we used the Qualtrics B2B panel and recruited participants who (a) were currently employed as purchasing managers and (b) had at least 1 year of procurement experience in the United States. Appendix S4 reports recruiting protocols and sample details for the main experiments. Appendix S8 details the interview protocols and the sample for the interviews.

4.2 | Measures

Our response variable was *repaired trust*, that is, the relative increase in one's trusting belief in the supplier after its resolution. Adapting Mayer and Davis's (1999) trust measure, we measured participants' trust at the end of the first stage before the resolution (congeneric reliability, henceforth referred to as $\rho_C = 0.95$; see Cho 2016) and at the end of the second stage after the resolution ($\rho_C = 0.94$). Thus, *repaired trust* was calculated as the change in trust measured before and after the resolution.

For individual buyers' UA, we adapted the composite measures used by Venaik and Brewer (2010) and Boulamatsi et al. (2021); those measures were adapted from Hofstede's (2001) ecological level constructs of culture on UA. Such adaptation was necessary because Hofstede's measurement was initially designed to capture collective rather than individual traits. For buyers' TP ($\rho_C = 0.83$), we adopted the measure used by Mayer and Davis (1999). All multi-item measures were on a 7-point Likert scale. Our measurement analysis consisted of two steps—a

TABLE 1 | Summary of studies.

Studies	Key Features	Purposes	Key takeaways
Pre-experiment structured interviews	Structured interviews with 18 purchasing managers and 18 supplier managers	- To gain a deeper understanding of the nature of disruptions and the common resolution tactics - To identify important disposition traits of individual buyers	- Suppliers use a portfolio of resolution tactics depending on the context. - Individual buyers have varied perceptions of uncertainty in a given context, which can impact their view of the disruption and expectation of the resolution.
Pre-test (Details in Appendix S3)	- Vignette-based—Between-subjects: DJ (2 levels), disruptions' contexts (2 failures) - US purchasing managers	- To assess the validity of the newly developed disruption contexts and manipulations for DJ - To assess the validity of two alternative measures for UA (Hofstede's vs. GLOBE)	- The newly developed disruption contexts are perceived as realistic and distinct from each other. Competence-based vignettes required finetuning some of the disruption context's wording. - The newly developed manipulation cues of DJ are effective. - The Hofstede measure is more reliable than the GLOBE measure and also yields a greater variation among individuals.
Pilot study (Details in Appendix S3)	- Vignette-based - Between-subjects: PJ (2 levels), DJ (2 levels), disruptions' contexts (2 failures) - No repeated measure: trust measured once at the end of the resolution stage - US purchasing managers	- To further confirm the validity and realism of the disruptions' contexts - To assess the reliability of manipulation check items and the effectiveness of manipulation cues	- The disruptions' contexts are confirmed to be distinct from each other. - Reliable manipulation check items and effective manipulations
Study 1 (Competence) Study 2 (Integrity)	- Vignette-based (<i>Vignette details in Appendix S2</i>) - Between-subjects: PJ and DJ (2 by 2) - Repeated measures of trust - US purchasing managers (Sample details in Appendix S4)	To test the hypotheses about configurations leading to successful trust repair	- Hypothesis 1a, 1b and Hypothesis 2b are supported. - Hypothesis 2a is not supported. - Table 3 provides more details.

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Studies	Key Features	Purposes	Key takeaways
Survey-based written interviews (Details in Appendix S8)	• Critical incident technique • Disruptions' contexts featuring two types of supplier failures • US purchasing managers	• To enrich our understanding of the main findings, particularly about the nuanced differences across disruption contexts and the cognition of buyers, leading to their decisions • To seek disruption examples featuring the two supplier failures and to assess external validity of the experiment's findings	• Buyers make distinct causal attributions across two supplier failure types (why a failure occurred and its implications). • The disruption examples given by participants for the two types of supplier failures were very similar to our hypothetical scenarios, offering evidence of external validity.
Robustness check study 1 (Details in Appendix S7)	• Vignette-based experiment • Between-subjects: two alternative wordings • US purchasing managers	• To assess the potential threat of demand effects (due to the wording of "highly deceitful" used in Study 2's vignettes)	• In an integrity-based context, there is no significant difference across the two alternative wordings (a) in perceived integrity or trust of the supplier or (b) in trust of the supplier.
Robustness check study 2 (Details in Appendix S7)	• Vignette-based experiment • Between-subjects: two alternative time lapse designs • US business managers	• To assess the priming effect of PJ with alternative time lapse designs (using more explicit time lapse cues, compared to the more subtle design in the main studies)	• In a competence-based context, there is no significant differences in perceived DJ or trust. • In an integrity-based context, despite no statistically significant differences, one alternative showcases a stronger priming effect than the original design, suggesting our findings related to the fairness heuristic mechanism might serve as a conservative test.

measurement invariance test followed by a confirmatory factor analysis. Measures and measurement analysis are detailed in Appendix S5.

4.3 | "Fuzzy" Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA)

To test our hypothesized configurations leading to successful trust repair, we conducted the qualitative comparative analysis

(QCA) on data from our two combined experimental studies. Unlike the more traditional regression analysis used to assess linear relationships based on a correlation logic, QCA is particularly suitable to test configurations of factors based on a set-theoretic logic (Fiss 2011; Mellewigt et al. 2018). Specifically, QCA yields insights into *conjunctural causation*—the intricate interplay of multiple causal factors—and accommodates *causal equifinality*—the possibilities that multiple distinct configurations can lead to the same outcome (as exemplified by our hypotheses).

In addition, QCA acknowledges *causal asymmetry*. The configuration leading to an unsatisfactory outcome is not simply the inverse of one leading to a satisfactory outcome (Fiss 2011), and often satisfactory versus unsatisfactory outcomes are driven by entirely different configurations (Ketchen et al. 2022). While we primarily focus on configurations leading to successful trust repair, exploring those resulting in unsuccessful repair can yield valuable insights from both theoretical and practical perspectives; thus, we used QCA for this purpose following the main analysis.

While the earlier form of QCA uses binary categories (e.g., a condition's "presence" or "absence") and assigns observations (cases) with dichotomized membership, the fuzzy-set version (fsQCA) has recently been introduced to capture partial membership, allowing each observation to be located along a set's continuum ranging from "fully in" to "fully out" (Mellewigt et al. 2018). While our justice factors and supplier failure types are dichotomous and thus treated as "crisp" sets,⁶ UA and TP are on an interval scale; thus, fsQCA is appropriate.

4.3.1 | Calibration

A crucial step before conducting fsQCA is the calibration of UA and TP into set memberships, for which the key is to determine three qualitative anchors: the thresholds for full membership ('fully in' coded as 1) and full nonmembership ('fully out' coded as 0) and the crossover point, which is "the point of maximum ambiguity (i.e., fuzziness) in the assessment of whether a case is more in or out of a set" (Ragin 2008, 30). The choice of anchors should be theory-driven (Ragin 2008); the interval scale serves as the theoretical benchmark in our case. Yet it is also suggested that the distribution of observations on the raw data should *not* be disregarded during the calibration process (Schneider and Wagemann 2012) because "the meaning of concepts, and therefore their respective sets, is highly dependent on the research context" (Ragin 2008, 72). In our case, the calibration of high (versus low) UA and TP should then consider our specific context—the US purchasing managers. Of the three anchors, the crossover point is "the most important decision to be taken in the calibration process" (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 287). As such, for both UA and TP, the crossover point was at 4, indicating indifference on a 7-point scale. To determine the thresholds for full membership and nonmembership, we further considered the distribution of our observations as exemplified by past studies (e.g., Leppänen et al. 2024; Mellewigt et al. 2018), specifically the prominent gaps in data that separated observations of full (non)membership from partial (non)membership (see Section 4 of Appendix S5 for the distribution details). We chose the anchors (3.2, 4, 5.8) for UA and (3.4, 4, 6) for TP. We ran robustness checks with alternative calibration anchors, and results remained qualitatively consistent (see Section 5.3).

For our outcome measure—*trust repair* (i.e., the change in trust measured before and after the resolution), we chose 0 (i.e., no change) as the crossover point that distinguishes qualitatively successful repair from unsuccessful repair. After further considering the distribution of this measure as exemplified by past research (e.g., Leppänen et al. 2024), we chose (−0.6, 0, 1.2) as

the qualitative anchors. As for the exploratory analysis to identify conditions leading to a lack of success in trust repair, we created the low outcome (*low trust repair*) using the negation of the high outcome (*high trust repair*) (Fiss 2011; Mellewigt et al. 2018).

4.3.2 | Procedure

Our analysis followed the best practice guidelines (Ragin 2008; Schneider and Wagemann 2012). First, we conducted a necessity analysis for each causal condition, assessing the degree to which the focal condition is present whenever trust repair is successful. While our hypotheses focus on the sufficiency of causal configurations, necessity analysis is recommended to be conducted prior to the sufficiency analysis.

To test the hypotheses, we then conducted the sufficiency analysis. We started by constructing truth tables listing all theoretically possible configurations of causal conditions. Because our data set was large, we limited the analysis to configurations with sufficient empirical representation (Mellewigt et al. 2018) based on two criteria (Ragin 2008). The most important criterion is a consistency threshold, which ensures that cases of a given configuration consistently exhibit the outcome. Setting this threshold above 0.75 is recommended (Ragin 2008). Out of an abundance of caution, we set our consistency threshold at 0.80. (We ran robustness checks with alternative thresholds at 0.75 and 0.85; see Section 5.3). The second criterion is a frequency threshold to ensure that the configuration is represented by a minimum number of cases. While most extant studies—with a medium sample size (around 150–300 cases)—have set this threshold at two or three cases (e.g., Fiss 2011; Leppänen et al. 2024; Mellewigt et al. 2018), we set our threshold at 15 to ensure that approximately 75% of our (relatively larger) sample was included as recommended by Ragin (2008). We excluded configurations failing to meet these thresholds and then performed "logical minimization" to derive a set of configurations for the outcome (Ragin 2008).

An issue most QCA social science researchers face is limited diversity (Fiss 2011); not all logically possible combinations of configurations have sufficient empirical evidence (these configurations are "logical remainders") (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 151). Thus, counterfactual analysis is a key step of the logical minimization, for which counterfactual claims—directional expectations for how a single condition affects the outcome—are made for configurations with limited diversity. Ideally, directional expectations should be derived from theoretical knowledge (Ragin 2008). As such, we made directional expectations only for the justice factors: the presence of either justice factor would positively contribute to successful trust repair (cf., Wang et al. 2014). We did not make directional assumptions for the other conditions.

In line with the principle of causal asymmetry, we analyzed these high and low outcomes separately. We integrated the qualitative insights from the post-experiment written interviews into the discussion of QCA results (detailed quotes reported in Appendix S8).

5 | Results

5.1 | Necessity Analysis Results

For the necessity analysis, the consistency threshold is recommended to be set at a higher value than the sufficiency analysis; a condition having a necessity consistency score above 0.9 is considered necessary for the outcome (Ragin 2008). Our analysis shows that none of the five causal conditions meet this threshold (with necessity consistency scores ranging between 0.49 and 0.67), suggesting that a successful trust repair does not warrant the presence of any single condition.

5.2 | Sufficiency Analysis Results

To test the hypotheses, we ran the standard sufficiency analysis, which yields three solution sets—complex, intermediate, and parsimonious.⁷ Among the three, the intermediate solution “strik[es] a balance between complexity and parsimony, using theory as a guide as to which logical remainders should be assumed to have a link to the outcome” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 175). A comparison of the intermediate and parsimonious solutions allows researchers to distinguish core conditions—those appearing in both solutions—from peripheral ones—those only appearing in intermediate solutions (Fiss 2011). Herein, our substantive discussion is based on the intermediate solution that specifies both core and peripheral conditions.

Results are presented in a graphical format (see Table 2). Each column represents a distinct causal path (or configuration) leading to either high or low trust repair. Each row represents a causal condition. A solid (crossed-out) circle indicates that the presence of a high (low) level of that condition is required for the path. Rows with no circles signify that the condition's presence is irrelevant to that particular configuration. The size of circles indicates whether the condition is core (large) or peripheral (small). All conditions in a given path must be met for the outcome to occur, illustrating sufficiency.

We report the measures of fit for the overall solution as well as individual paths. The consistency of the overall solutions, 0.81 and 0.78, indicates that they approximate the data well. The overall solutions' coverage,⁸ 0.21 and 0.45, indicates that the identified configurations covered 21% of cases with high trust repair and 45% with low trust repair. In practice, tradeoffs exist (a) between consistency and coverage—“higher consistency values often come at the price of lower coverage values” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 149) and (b) between frequency and coverage—“[t]he higher the frequency threshold, the lower the solution coverage is likely to be” (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 182). It is recommended to prioritize the validity of results—thus consistency and frequency—over coverage. For individual paths, consistency indicates how well the path (relative to the outcome) fits the data, while raw coverage reflects the proportion of outcome cases explained by that path.

5.2.1 | Hypothesis Testing Results: Paths to Success in Trust Repair

The hypothesis testing results are summarized in Table 3. The analysis indicated three causal paths to high trust repair. Configuration H1 suggests a pattern closely aligned with the fairness heuristics mechanism. Here, suppliers rely exclusively on PJ to repair trust but under two conditions: the failure is integrity-based and the buyer exhibits high UA. Both conditions are core, suggesting that the integrity-based disruption—a situation with heightened uncertainty—and the buyer's tendency to avoid such uncertainty are *indispensable* elements of this path. This configuration fully supports Hypothesis 1a.

Configurations H2 and H3 reflect a different repair approach, aligning with the motivation-hygiene mechanism. Both configurations indicate that suppliers can effectively repair trust by deploying both PJ and DJ—provided the buyer has low TP. The fact that low TP emerges as a core condition in both configurations signifies its essential role in activating an individual buyer's systemic information processing per the motivation-hygiene theory. Buyers with low TP tend to be more methodical in evaluating their vulnerability with exchange partners, prompting them to seek comprehensive information—both PJ and DJ cues—when assessing suppliers (Colquitt et al. 2007). One purchasing manager highlighted this tendency in commenting on a supplier's approach to resolving a disruption:

The proactive nature that the supplier took as well as fully disclosing the process they relied on that resulted in the miscommunication is *reassuring*. It would significantly help the *future prospects* (*emphasis added*).

Yet low TP *alone* is *insufficient* to guarantee that the combined use of PJ and DJ will repair trust. Rather, additional (peripheral) conditions are needed; either the supplier's failure is competence-based (as in Configuration H2) or the buyer has a low UA tendency (as in Configuration H3). These peripheral conditions ensure that either the situation is not viewed as extremely uncertain, allowing a more controlled assessment of all justice cues, or the buyer is well dispositioned to handle uncertainty and thus able to engage in more comprehensive information processing. Configuration H2 fully supports Hypothesis 2b. While Configuration H3 supports Hypothesis 1b such that the buyer's low UA is a key element enabling the effectiveness of combining PJ with DJ, the buyer's low TP emerges as an additional factor.

Configuration H1 vis-à-vis the other two configurations indicates the first-order equifinality (Fiss 2011): Distinct core strategies can all lead to a successful repair. Also, the latter two configurations—which share their core strategy—indicate the second-order equifinality (Fiss 2011): The same core strategy can be effective across various contexts.

5.2.2 | Additional Results: When Trust Repair Fails

While we are primarily interested in successful repair, understanding the paths leading to unsuccessful repair can be informative. Our analysis indicates four configurations of low

TABLE 2 | QCA sufficiency analysis results: causal configurations for high and low trust repair.

	Outcome: high trust repair			Outcome: low trust repair			
	Configuration H1	Configuration H2	Configuration H3	Configuration L1	Configuration L2	Configuration L3	Configuration L4
Causal conditions							
<i>Justice tactics</i>							
PI (high vs. low)	●	●	●	⊗	⊗	⊗	●
DJ (high vs. low)		●	⊗	⊗	⊗	⊗	
<i>Individual traits</i>							
UA (high vs. low)	●		⊗			●	⊗
Trust propensity (high vs. low)		⊗	⊗		●		⊗
<i>Disruption traits</i>							
Competence (presence vs. absence)		●					●
Integrity (presence vs. absence)	●			●			
Measures of fit							
Consistency	0.81	0.80	0.85	0.70	0.84	0.89	0.86
Raw coverage	0.14	0.18	0.15	0.18	0.25	0.20	0.10
Unique coverage	0.06	0.09	0.08	0.04	0.13	0.04	0.04
No. cases for the path	41	59	44	69	93	82	31
Overall solution consistency	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.78
Overall solution coverage	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.45	0.45	0.45	0.45

Note: (1) Each column represents a causal configuration (or path) leading to the focal outcome. Each row represents a causal condition (or factor). (2) The solid circle indicates the required presence of a high level of the condition to be part of the focal configuration, whereas the crossed-out circle indicates the required presence of a low level of the condition to be part of the configuration. An unfilled row indicates that the presence of either a high or low level of the condition does not matter to the focal configuration. (3) The large circle presents a core condition. The small circle presents a peripheral condition. (4) Unique coverage shows how much of the overall coverage stems exclusively from the respective path. (5) The analysis used the experimental data from Study 1 ($N = 268$) and Study 2 ($N = 285$).

TABLE 3 | Summary of hypothesis testing results.

Hypothesis	Result	Evidence	Details
H1a: The use of procedural justice alone is sufficient for trust repair <i>if</i> the disruption is triggered by an integrity-based supplier failure <i>and if</i> the buyer has high uncertainty avoidance.	Supported	Configuration H1	- The presence of PJ, the integrity-based failure, and the buyer's high UA are core conditions (main results). - Buyer's low TP can be an additional peripheral condition (robustness check).
H1b: The combined use of procedural justice <i>and</i> distributive justice is sufficient for trust repair <i>if</i> the buyer has low uncertainty avoidance.	Supported ^a	Configuration H3	- Both the presence of PJ and of DJ are core conditions, and the buyer's low UA is a peripheral condition (main results). - An additional core condition is buyer's low TP (main results).
H2a: The use of procedural justice alone is sufficient for trust repair <i>if</i> the buyer has high trust propensity.	Not supported	No configuration	
H2b: The combined use of procedural justice <i>and</i> distributive justice is sufficient for trust repair <i>if</i> the disruption is triggered by a competence-based supplier failure <i>and if</i> the buyer has low trust propensity.	Supported	Configuration H2	The presence of both PJ and DJ along with buyer's low TP are core conditions, and competence-based failure is a peripheral condition (main results).

^aWhile the results indicate an additional core condition for this configuration, the configurational pattern as stated in **H1b** is supported.

trust repair. (In Appendix S6, the theoretical insights backed by qualitative evidence are discussed in detail.) In three out of four configurations (L1, L2, L3), the combined low PJ and low DJ emerge as core factors, emphasizing that fairness is critical for addressing supplier-induced disruptions. Each configuration involves an additional peripheral condition—integrity-based failure, buyer's high TP, and buyer's high UA, respectively—indicating that the lack of PJ and DJ alone does not guarantee failure.

Distinct from the other configurations, Configuration L4 suggests that, *regardless of* the supplier's PJ, its lack of DJ impairs trust—provided that the disruption is caused by the supplier's competence-based failure and the buyer has low UA and low TP. This pattern reflects the motivation-hygiene logic from an alternative angle. When the failure indicates moderate uncertainties, the buyer—who is dispositioned to seek comprehensive information—tends to engage in systemic processing of justice cues. Because DJ is likely the qualifying factor and PJ is the motivating factor, simply lacking DJ may disqualify the supplier (regardless of its PJ) from the buyer's view, further eroding trust.

5.3 | Robustness Checks

We conducted four robustness checks. First, we ran fsQCA with two alternative sets of thresholds for consistency (75%, 85%) and frequency (10, 20). Configurations are highly consistent (reported in Table G1), with one exception that Configuration H1 is no longer present under the more stringent thresholds (discussed in detail in Section 1 of Appendix S7). Second, we deployed alternative calibration anchors—(2.6, 4, 6) for UA and (2.8, 4, 6) for TP (results reported in Table G1). Core and

peripheral conditions of Configurations H2 and H3 remain the same; Configuration H1 is no longer present (discussed in detail in Section 2 of Appendix S7). Third, we checked demand-effect threats. In addition to following Eckerd et al.'s (2021) procedural measures, we conducted Robustness Check Study 1 with alternative verbiage to further alleviate concern about demand effects. Section 3 of Appendix S7 discusses the results. Lastly, the time lapse between PJ and DJ was manipulated in a subtle way; as such, our results for the fairness heuristic mechanism were on the conservative side. In Robustness Check Study 2, we tested two alternative time-lapse designs. Table G2 shows the detailed comparison, and Section 4 of Appendix S7 discusses the results.

6 | Discussion

6.1 | Configurations of the Procedural and Distributive Justice as Trust Repair “Levers”

Extant studies on disruptions and other adverse incidents in interorganizational exchanges (e.g., psychological contract violations) have provided valuable insights into resolution tactics' independent effects (see Appendix S1 for a summary). However, those studies, mostly using a linear approach, often overlook how such tactics, particularly PJ and DJ, are used in tandem (e.g., Cheng et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2022).

Adopting a configurational approach, our study reveals that the presence of PJ, DJ, or even their combination alone does not guarantee effective trust repair. This insight offers a plausible explanation for Mir et al.'s (2022) exploratory finding that the combined use of justice tactics *alone* does not predict resolution outcomes. Rather, these tactics' effectiveness as trust repair

“levers” is contingent on disruption and buyer-related conditions. While an emerging stream of studies has acknowledged the contingent nature of disruption resolution, our configurational findings extend this stream on conditions, outcomes, and asymmetries. On conditions, while recent studies have considered various contextual factors (i.e., disruption and relationship traits), they either take a monolithic view of suppliers’ resolution (Reimann et al. 2017) or examine different tactics separately (Wang et al. 2022). By discerning the distinctive nature of suppliers’ tactics (procedural versus outcome), we suggest that different tactics combine with the disruption conditions and individual buyers’ traits in complex ways to shape buyers’ processing of the incident and suppliers’ resolutions. On outcomes, we have offered insights into configurations leading to failed repair (in addition to the successful repair), thus adding to the very emerging research stream examining both positive and negative outcomes post-disruption (Reimann et al. 2017). Furthermore, while this emerging stream has shown that the presence vs. absence of suppliers’ resolution can be an indispensable part of a positive vs. negative outcome (Reimann et al. 2017), our (more nuanced) findings highlight that configurations leading to successful vs. unsuccessful repair are not simple mirror images defined by the presence or absence of a single resolution tactic. Herein, following recent guidelines (Furnari et al. 2021), we have labeled the configurations (see Table 4) for ease of interpretation and to facilitate discussion of key takeaways (including pitfalls) for supplier managers.

We reveal two situations (Configurations H2 and H3) in which full-fledged use of justice—ensuring both a fair procedure and an equitable reimbursement—effectively repairs buyers’ trust. Both situations feature a low trust-propensity buyer, suggesting that the buyer’s low inclination to trust others is a *necessary* condition for the buyer to attend to *all* the justice cues signaled via the supplier’s resolution and subsequently process those cues for trust reappraisal. While studies have started identifying situational factors that prompt buyers to be attuned to suppliers’ justice signals (e.g., Cheng et al. 2020), our findings suggest buyers’ low TP—a stable trait predispositioning a buyer to be calculative and cautious in making relationship decisions—is a core condition.

However, buyers’ low TP alone is insufficient; other peripheral conditions are required. One configuration (H2) expects that the disruption is triggered by the supplier’s competence-based failure, which would suggest that the issue is task-specific and unambiguous to address. Thus, the perceived situational uncertainty might be moderate (rather than extreme), helping facilitate the buyer’s more controlled information processing. Therefore, in this configuration where the incident brings into question the supplier’s capabilities and the buyer tends to be suspicious, the supplier’s combined use of PJ and DJ is sufficient by dispelling the buyer’s perception of its unfitness through a consistent procedure and fair compensation.

The other configuration (H3) expects that the low-TP buyer is also motivated to resolve (rather than escape) uncertain circumstances (i.e., low UA); thus, the buyer is more inclined to seek and leverage comprehensive information to mitigate the perceived uncertainty of the focal exchange. In this configuration where the supplier deals with a buyer with a low tendency to

TABLE 4 | Naming configurations: takeaways and pitfalls.

Configurations	Naming with descriptions
H1	<i>Crafting a convincing first impression</i> Procedural justice applied in a swift and definitive manner to overcome a highly uncertain context (i.e., integrity-based failure faced by a high-UA buyer). [Consistent with Fairness Heuristics Theory]
H2	<i>Dispelling unfitness perception</i> Full justice to overcome distrust in competence (targeting low-TP buyer) [Consistent with Motivation-Hygiene Theory]
H3	<i>Featuring full transparency</i> Full justice to win back trust without regard to ambiguity (targeting low-UA and low-TP buyer) [Consistent with Motivation-Hygiene Theory]
L1	<i>Exhibiting persistent disregard for exchange norms</i> The supplier’s failure to showcase any remediation efforts following an integrity breach further damages the trust.
L2	<i>Failing to capitalize on trust propensity</i> High-TP buyer—who would have given trust easily—is left yearning for accountability due to the lack of any remediation efforts.
L3	<i>Amplifying uncertainty</i> The supplier’s lack of remediation efforts exacerbates high-UA buyer’s stress and discomfort with ambiguity stemming from the disruption.
L4	<i>Ending on a sour note</i> The supplier’s failure to fairly compensate the buyer toward the end disqualifies the supplier regardless of its earlier resolution procedure.

avoid uncertainty and little inclination to trust others, the supplier’s combined use of procedural and distributive justice “levers” is sufficient, showcasing reliability and trustworthiness in a transparent manner without ambiguity.

Yet it is not always the case that more justice tactics are better. In another configuration (H1), using a fair procedure by itself is sufficient to repair the trust damage, provided two core conditions are present: the integrity-based supplier failure and the buyer’s high-UA trait. Those two conditions activate the fairness heuristics in two ways. First, an integrity-based failure provokes heightened uncertainty regarding the relationship. Second, a high-UA buyer likely feels threatened by, and aims to avoid, the highly uncertain situation, thus being prompted to use cognitive

shortcuts in assessing the disruption. PJ—the justice cue received first and used as a heuristic device—in turn overshadows DJ (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996; Van den Bos et al. 1997). This scenario provides a viable explanation for a key observation in past research: The fact that “procedural justice is the most effective mechanism (followed by distributive justice ...) to recoup the damage to buyers’ trust” (Wang et al. 2014, 374) may be a function of certain buyers’ heuristic process in evaluating justice cues. We identified conditions indispensable for this pattern (cf., Makadok et al. 2018).⁹ Accordingly, in this configuration where a disruption calls the supplier’s integrity into question and the buyer is predisposed to stress in uncertain situations, the supplier’s use of only PJ—delivering a consistent, accurate and timely resolution process—is sufficient, which conveys trustworthiness from the outset.

Interestingly, we did not find sufficient evidence for high-TP buyers (i.e., no configuration features high-TP buyers). In contrast to our expectation that high-TP buyers would engage in heuristic processing and the supplier’s use of PJ would be sufficient, our findings suggest that these buyers’ cognition could not be explained by the fairness-heuristic mechanism (or the motivation-hygiene mechanism). While these buyers may make a rushed appraisal based on any positive cues the supplier signals, they—who trust “by default”—might simply not rely on justice cues as a heuristic device for appraising trust (Colquitt et al. 2006).

Lastly, past research has largely overlooked configurations explaining when suppliers failed to repair trust (Reimann et al. (2017) as a notable exception); herein, we note key implications. The lack of both a fair resolution procedure and equitable compensation is predictably part of a failed repair—as in three configurations (L1, L2, L3); however, lacking both PJ and DJ by itself is *insufficient*. Each configuration involves an additional peripheral condition. One configuration (L1) expects an integrity-based failure—a severe breach of exchange norms. In this configuration, the failure of the supplier to show remediation efforts signals its continued disregard for these norms, further eroding the buyer’s trust. The conditions in the other two configurations pertain to the buyer: The buyer has *either* a high UA tendency (L3)—feeling threatened by the uncertainty that is further amplified by the supplier’s lack of PJ and DJ—or a strong TP tendency (L2)—easily giving trust but left yearning for accountability due to the supplier’s lack of PJ and DJ. While the two justice theories offer insights into how lacking in one justice dimension can render another dimension more (as in the fairness heuristics theory) or less effective (as in the motivation hygiene theory), it is unclear under what conditions lacking in *both* dimensions would result in a definitive failure. Our findings add clarity to this under-researched area.

The final low-trust-repair configuration (L4) illustrates how the lack of DJ *alone* (regardless of PJ) can be sufficient for failed repair when (a) the buyer exhibits both low UA and low TP and (b) the disruption signals the supplier’s incompetence. Under these conditions, the buyer is particularly likely to seek comprehensive information throughout the entire resolution (from procedure to outcome). Yet the fact that the supplier—who directly caused the disruption—fails to redeem its wrongdoing toward the end can sufficiently disqualify the supplier in the buyer’s eyes (Wang

et al. 2022). While our main findings—Configurations H2 and H3—highlight the motivation-hygiene mechanism by showing how the presence of the motivating factor (PJ) boosts trust repair when the hygiene factor (DJ) is already present, the L4 configuration reflects the other side of the mechanism—how the absence of the hygiene factor (DJ) alone leads to trust erosion.

6.2 | Unpacking Causal Complexity in a Disruption Resolution Context

Our findings highlight the *causal complexity* inherent in the disruption resolution in three ways. First, our results showcase *conjunctural causation*. That is, a resolution tactic’s specific impact must be evaluated in juxtaposition with other tactics’ impacts, considering the contextual nuances, such as the traits of both the decision-makers and the disruptive events. With the illustrated interdependence of resolution tactics and the prevalent practice of implementing tactics as a bundle, we caution against examining similar tactics’ effects in isolation in future research on disruption and related contexts (e.g., service recovery). Instead, we call for approaches that explicitly embrace the intricate dynamics among resolution tactics and contextual contingencies.

Second, our results illustrate *equifinality*, which warrants managerial flexibility, in nuanced ways. Some configurations leading to a given outcome share the same set of core tactics but differ in terms of the peripheral conditions, such as buyer traits (as in Configurations L2 and L3 or in Configurations H2 and H3), whereas other configurations feature an entirely different set of justice (core) tactic(s) (as in Configurations H1 and H3). In the former case, the supplier can use one resolution strategy to address different disruption circumstances, whereas in the latter, the supplier has the flexibility of choosing entirely different strategies considering its resource endowments (e.g., size) and constraints (e.g., reimbursement costs and disruption severity). Both cases are beneficial.

Third, while most research has assumed conditions leading up to a failed resolution would be the opposite of a successful one (e.g., Cheng et al. 2020; Wang et al. 2022), our research suggests that the two groups were *not* mirror images of one another, highlighting *causal asymmetry*. For instance, lacking both justice tactics results in a failed repair when the supplier deals with a high-UA buyer (Configuration L3). Yet, when dealing with a low-UA buyer, combining the two tactics does not necessarily guarantee a successful repair—*unless* the buyer also exhibits low TP (Configuration H3). In fact, the same condition(s) of a failed repair—such as an integrity-based failure as in Configuration L1—can be an indispensable part of the path leading to a successful repair as in Configuration H1, depending on other contingencies. Thus, no circumstances (at least in our context) will necessarily doom a supplier as long as proper tactics are used.

6.3 | Two Complementary Theories in a Disruption Resolution Context

As Makadok et al. (2018) noted, “Uncovering ... inconsistencies between theories can be a valuable contribution by providing an

indicator that the theories offer incompatible competing explanations, so that empirical testing may offer an opportunity to ... assess the conditions under which one theory is more likely to apply than the other” (1538). Thus far, the extant literature shows mixed evidence for the PJ-DJ interplay—one justice dimension’s efficacy is found to be either *reinforced* (e.g., Hui et al. 2004; Luo 2007), *diminished* (e.g., Brockner et al. 2007; Skarlicki and Folger 1997), or *unaffected* (Mir et al. 2022) by the other dimension’s presence.

Our research sheds light on this long-existing debate. Rather than viewing the two theories as competing lenses, as some past studies have done (Hui et al. 2004), our research reveals that they can be *complementary* because each explains the PJ-DJ dynamics in different disruption settings. Our results indicate that *uncertainty* is a critical orchestrating theme shaping the type of information processing adopted by buyers and thus how they react to a supplier’s use of justice tactics. Given the focal phenomenon’s causal complexity, integrating the alternative lenses provides fruitful insights that not only offer a more comprehensive account of the phenomenon but also deepen our understanding of each lens by clarifying its limitations and complementarities.

6.4 | Societal Implications

This research has broader societal implications. For buyer firms, our findings suggest how suppliers’ use of PJ and DJ in handling negative incidents may signal those suppliers’ alignment with ESG principles. As in Configuration H1, suppliers’ clear and consistent procedures alone rebuild trust for high-UA buyers facing integrity-based failures, indicating that the suppliers’ strong ethical oversight likely signals reliable governance. In Configurations H2 and H3, suppliers’ combining fair procedures with full compensation restores trust for buyers with low TP or UA, reflecting that the fair treatment of supply chain partners can be a core pillar for business ethics. Buyers may not only use these signals for selecting suppliers for sustainable sourcing programs but also consider preemptively incorporating stricter ethical terms into contracts. Conversely, multiple low-trust-repair configurations—where suppliers neglect both fair processes and compensation—may serve as warning signs of questionable governance or lack of ethics. Overall, by assessing suppliers’ justice tactics, buyers can align sourcing with ethics goals, strengthening the resilience of supply chains in today’s responsibility-focused market.

6.5 | Limitations and Future Research

Following the “5W and H” approach (cf., Cao and Lumineau 2015), we succinctly summarize below future research opportunities (with detailed examples provided in Appendix S9). First, while our vignettes included key variables to ensure realism, we excluded other contextual variables to ensure internal validity. Thus, our findings must be cautiously extrapolated to *other types of disruptions* (e.g., force majeure disruptions, service recovery), *institutional environments* (e.g., non-manufacturing sectors, collectivistic cultures), and *relationship contexts* (e.g., transactional relationships). Second, the

number of configurations grows exponentially as more conditions are added—potentially hindering effective theorizing (Furnari et al. 2021). Future research can employ alternative lenses leading to other pertinent conditions (e.g., buyer knowledge and culture). Third, by virtue of justice’s multi-dimensional nature, our manipulations aimed to encompass essential components of PJ and DJ. Future research can explore the nuances of specific components (e.g., consistency vis-à-vis ethicality for PJ). Relatedly, economic-based experiments can be used to capture how managers construe DJ based on desired compensation level. Fourth, we focused on the two most-studied justice dimensions (cf., Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996), which are the most influential in the disruption context (Mir et al. 2022; Wang et al. 2022). Future studies can examine other dimensions, such as interpersonal and informational justice. Fifth, because both UA and TP are stable traits, we captured these traits via participants’ self-reporting. Future experiments can manipulate situational traits (e.g., stress) and explore their influence. Lastly, our qualitative data was gathered from structured interviews coded by the lead author. Scholars may employ alternative qualitative methods (e.g., grounded theory) to gain a more in-depth, nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Endnotes

¹ Before launching the research, we conducted interviews with 18 purchasing managers and 18 supplier managers to enrich our understanding of the focal context. Table 1 (in the method section) explains how these preliminary interviews fit within the overall research design.

² While suppliers may not have enough time to identify every strategy to cope with the circumstances upon discovering disruptions, in most cases they are aware of disruptions’ material impact on relationships with buyers and the need for a good resolution plan (Reimann et al. 2017).

³ As a notable exception, Narasimhan et al. (2013) examined the interplay among various justice dimensions in a traditional buyer–supplier relationship and focused on economic outcomes (e.g., cost, quality, timeliness).

⁴ Our study focuses on the more immediate responses from the supplier rather than its longer-term mechanisms. In some cases (albeit less common), the supplier may simply provide financial reimbursement without any immediate procedural remedies. In such cases, instead of perceiving no informational cues regarding the supplier’s procedure, the buyer more likely interprets the situation as cueing the supplier’s lack of adequate procedures (Reimann et al. 2017). While the buyer may later observe the supplier’s effort in gradually correcting its procedures, such effort is not considered the same immediate procedural response we focus on here. Empirically, we also examined this assumption via a pre-test. Before presenting the hypothetical scenarios, we asked subjects, given their experiences with disruption resolutions, if they would typically first observe the supplier’s resolution efforts or the compensation. Sixty percent confirmed that they would observe efforts first (or only efforts), whereas 35% would observe compensation first (or only compensation); the rest did not respond. As a result, our hypothesis is predicated on the key precondition that procedural cues are observed before outcome cues.

⁵ UA should not be confused with risk aversion. Risk preferences describe a person’s tendency to be attracted to or repelled by alternatives with *known* higher (or lower) probabilities (Knight 1921), whereas UA indicates a person’s desire for unambiguous expectations and thus clear structures to make the future more predictable. UA does not necessarily mean that a person is unwilling to take risks (Hofstede 2001). In fact, a person may engage in risk-seeking behavior to remove

ambiguity from a situation, “such as starting a fight with a potential opponent rather than sitting back and waiting” (148). Because buyers’ decisions following a disruption are forward-looking (Wang et al. 2014) concerning the prevention of unknown losses, we focus on UA.

⁶We treated these factors as “crisp” sets for three reasons. Theoretically, we focus on the use (non-use) of justice tactics and the type of supplier failure triggering a disruption, indicating their dichotomous nature. Managerially, we aim to offer suggestions for supplier managers to act on their type of failure by using a tactic or not. Empirically, we manipulated these factors at two levels. Our manipulation checks (Web Appendix C) indicated that for each factor, participants in the two treatment groups perceived the manipulated factor’s clear distinctions (e.g., competence versus integrity failure).

⁷It is important to note that none of these solutions contradict the empirical evidence (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). They only differ based on the theoretical assumptions about the logical remainders and whether easy or difficult counterfactuals are used (see Ragin (2008) for a detailed discussion).

⁸This metric is only partially analogous to R-square as in regression because this coverage value for individual configurations is used for *descriptive* rather than diagnostic purposes. A configuration with higher coverage is not viewed as more “favorable” as one with lower coverage. In fact, lower-coverage configurations can yield interesting insights and suggest missed opportunities to achieve (or avoid) a desired (or less-desired) outcome (Mendel and Ragin 2010).

⁹A robustness check revealed that the buyer’s low TP may be an additional peripheral condition for Configuration H1. Low-TP buyers tend to require more concrete information to (re)establish trust (Colquitt et al. 2006), which may ensure that the justice information is perceived to be pertinent to trust appraisal.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Data S1:** Supplementary information.