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Epistemic injustice in workplace hierarchies: Power, knowledge and status

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Abstract
Contemporary workplaces are mostly hierarchical. Intrinsic and extrinsic bads of workplace hierarchies have been widely discussed in the literature on workplace democracy and workplace republicanism. However, a distinctively intrinsic relational bad, epistemic injustice in the workplace, has largely been neglected by both normative theorists of the workplace and theorists of epistemic injustice. This article, by bringing in the insights of Miranda Fricker's influential conceptualization of epistemic injustice, argues that hierarchical workplaces have contributed to and reinforced both testimonial and hermeneutical injustices in a central activity of most people's daily lives. This article argues that these injustices are moral wrongs and thus moral injury to the workers. The article concludes by demonstrating that traditional hierarchy is the most epistemically unjust form of hierarchy, while contestatory hierarchy, because of its emphasis on granting the right to the workers to be listened, is less unjust epistemically.

Keywords
epistemic injustice, organizational justice, social justice, workplace democracy, workplace hierarchy, workplace justice

1. Introduction

Contemporary workplaces are hierarchical. In Alfred D. Chandler Jr.'s classic, *The Visible Hand*, he argued that a central feature of modern enterprise is that 'it contains

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many distinct operating units and it is managed by *a hierarchy of salaried executives*' (1977, 1, emphasis added). As Kanter defines it, a hierarchy is an organizational method in which 'positions are arrayed in terms of command rights or authority relationships; other privileges and prerequisites stem from the position in a chain of command' (1991, 63).

The term hierarchy, accordingly, refers to an organizational structure in which groups or people are ranked above or below one another in accordance with authority and status. How exactly hierarchy ought to be defined is a complicated issue. In this article, I adopt a definition of hierarchy that focuses mainly on the degree to which managerial power is accountable to the interests of the workers. The degree of accountability of managerial authority consists of two elements: whether the person exercising this power is required to *listen* and *respond* to the workers. The more managerial power is accountable to the workers, the less hierarchical a workplace is. Thus, my conception of hierarchy is non-binary. Hierarchy should be understood as a continuum: some hierarchical workplaces could be *more hierarchical* than others. For example, Blasi and Kruse (2006) found that some hierarchical workplaces, despite being hierarchical in the sense that workers lack the right to vote on management boards, nevertheless incorporated some 'high-performance work practices', such as self-managed work teams, job training, job rotation and increasing flatness of organizational ranks and differences. High-performance practices would make a hierarchical workplace less hierarchical than workplaces where these practices are absent, because there is an institutional expectation in these settings for managers to listen to the workers.

In spite of the variations of hierarchical workplaces, an overlapping consensus among workplace republicans (Anderson 2017; Gourevitch 2013, 2015, 2016) and workplace democrats (Landemore and Ferreras 2016; Malleson 2014; Pateman 1970) is that hierarchical workplaces are almost inescapable. Although one can leave a particular workplace, there exists almost no option to leave hierarchical workplaces entirely. Anderson (2017, 37–39) calls hierarchical workplaces 'private governments', and superior mangers 'dictators in our midst'. In other words, these thinkers argue against Pettit's claim that 'in a well-functioning labor market . . . no one would depend on any particular master and no one would be at the mercy of a master' (2006, 142) by suggesting that the pervasiveness of hierarchy makes the freedom to leave a particular workplace merely a freedom of choosing a different master. Put aside the question concerning suitability of the slave–master analogy. Their common concern is that all hierarchical workplaces are bad and inescapable for workers.

Why are hierarchical workplaces bad for workers? Frega argues that 'the deterioration of working conditions' in contemporary neoliberal and globalized hierarchical workplaces have contributed to the decline of 'political democracy – rise of authoritarianism, spread of populism, increased democratic deficits, decline of trust in politics and political elites' (2020, 27). Gourevitch also argues that '[a]uthoritarian work conditions violate overlap[ping] but distinct values, related to democratic government, meaningful work, non-domination, exploitation, and the quality of leisure time' (2016, 17). Most critics of non-inclusive and undemocratic workplace hierarchy share Frega and Gourevitch's views (e.g. Anderson 2017; Dagger 2006; Dahl 1986; Ellerman 1992; Hsieh 2005; Malleson 2014; Pateman 1970; Schaff 2012; Schweickart 2002). Their arguments

can be broadly classified into two types: hierarchies are bad, as compared to republican and democratic workplaces, because hierarchical workplaces result in extrinsic bads: weaker political democracy, potentially lower job satisfaction, lower job and civic skills development opportunities and potentially lower job security and wage. Hierarchies also result in intrinsic bads, including, for examples, the lack of opportunities for self-determination and lower self-respect and self-confidence.

A major problem with the intrinsic arguments against workplace hierarchy is that the validity of these arguments often depends heavily on the subjective preferences of individual workers. Self-determination in the context of paid work might not be seen as a universal good by workers themselves, and not every worker ties her own self-respect and self-confidence with the rank and status they enjoy in their paid work. A low-skilled worker in a hierarchical workplace might nevertheless take pride in how hard she works and how her hard work has supported her family. A sense of self-respect, self-confidence and self-worth might be gained in other social sites despite the authoritarian work conditions that she works in.

What I am suggesting here is simply that there is no necessary connection between hierarchical workplace and a lower sense of self-respect, confidence and self-worth. In other words, I am suggesting that an egalitarian or less hierarchical workplace is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of having self-respect, self-confidence and self-worth because it is possible for a person to cultivate them in other social realms. However, I am not arguing that the degree of hierarchy of the workplace and these psychological propensities have no correlation or some sorts of causal relations. Indeed, many findings in empirical research have shown that there is positive relationship between a less hierarchical workplace and a better sense of self-respect (e.g. see Malleson 2014).[1]

A distinctively intrinsic and relational harm that hierarchical workplaces have contributed to is surprisingly neglected by political theorists of the workplace, namely, epistemic injustices at work. According to Fricker, there are two types of epistemic injustice – testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice:

> Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word; hermeneutical injustice occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. (2007, 1)

Medina elaborates Fricker's analysis of epistemic injustice. Epistemic injustice is particularly harmful to productive epistemic interactions 'in which resources are pooled and experiences and imaginations are shared, compared, and contrasted' to create democratic 'cognitive affective attitudes that facilitate and promote the capacity to relate, to listen, to feel concerned, and to care for the interests and aspirations of others' (2013, 7–9). Thus, the bads of being regarded as an epistemic inferior, that is, being denied recognition as an epistemically capable knower who is credible and a potential contributor to the shared knowledge of an organization, community, and society that one belongs to, are moral wrongs done to the worker regardless of her subjective preference. However, epistemic injustice plays out differently in different hierarchical workplaces. The kind of workplace this article focuses on is a typical 'modern business enterprise'

which 'employs a hierarchy of middle and top salaried managers to monitor and coordinate the work of the units under its control' (Chandler 1977, 3). One of the central characteristics of such workplace is the relatively clear distinction between 'blue collar' and 'white collar' employees with varying degrees of power, accountability and obligations within the same workforce.[2]

This article has four goals. First, I want to draw our attention to how certain problematic management practices that are especially commonplace in more hierarchical workplaces are the result of epistemic injustice and will further strengthen epistemic injustice against the workers, thereby creating a vicious circle. Second, by highlighting epistemic injustices that hierarchical work practices have done to workers, this article strengthens the intrinsic critique of hierarchical workplaces by adding an additional ground to demonstrate the moral wrongs of hierarchy, wrongs whose validity does not depend on the subjective preference of individual workers. Regardless of whether workers themselves realize that they are suffering from epistemic injustices, they are morally wronged by epistemic injustices. Third, this article enriches the existing epistemic injustice literature by applying the idea in the context of paid work to show how a central activity in most people's everyday life helps to sustain and reproduce injustices at our cognitive level. This is particularly important given that Fricker's (2007) work only mentions workplaces three times without providing any detailed and systematic discussion of epistemic injustice at work, and Medina's (2013) book never mentions the workplace once.[3] This is surprising given the important role of the workplace in the reproduction of epistemic injustice. One of the few exceptions is Gerlsbeck and Herzog's (2020) article, where they apply epistemic democratic theory to demonstrate that '[i]f democracy promises effective decision-making in addition to its intrinsic values, there might be an instrumental case in favor of democratizing the workplace, or at least no instrumental case against it' (p. 309). Even though this is an important first step towards understanding the epistemic dimension of the workplace, their work is not an analysis of why workplace hierarchy is morally wrong from an epistemic point of view. This article provides *moral, instead of instrumental efficiency, arguments* in favour of a less hierarchically structured workplace. Fourth, as I have noted at the outset, I do not hold a binary conception of hierarchy. This article, therefore, will provide a more nuanced analysis to show why some forms of workplace hierarchy, especially in relation to the way they structure epistemic relations, are more problematic than other forms of workplace hierarchy. Thus, it avoids the false dichotomy between hierarchical/non-hierarchical workplaces and shows that even if we submit to the claim that some hierarchies are necessary due to efficiency or functional concerns, there might still be ways to improve such hierarchies to make them less problematic from the perspective of epistemic injustice.

The article is structured as follows. In section 2, I explore the idea of testimonial injustice in the context of workplace hierarchy. I argue that testimonial injustice wrongs workers by projecting them as intellectually incapable, lacking valuable knowledge of production and morally corrupted. In section 3, I argue that workplace hierarchy structurally contributes to both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice for three reasons: its tendency to cultivate epistemic vices; its suppression of epistemic friction; and its structural blockages to the circulation of knowledge. In section 4, I discuss the moral

wrongs of epistemic injustice. In section 5, I distinguish three different types of workplace hierarchy, namely, traditional, inclusive and contestatory. I discuss the institutional practices of these different types of hierarchy. I then argue that traditional hierarchy is most epistemically unjust, while contestatory hierarchy is least epistemically unjust.

2. Epistemic injustice in workplace hierarchy

According to Fricker, testimonial injustice 'occurs when prejudice on the part of the hearer leads to the speaker receiving less credibility than he or she deserves' (2003, 154). Although Fricker (2007, 2013) focuses exclusively on credibility deficit in her discussions of testimonial injustice,[4] I believe that both credibility deficit and excess are central to testimonial injustice in the workplace since the workplace is often a platform where the contestation of conflicting opinions occurs (Anderson 2012; Medina 2013). As Coady rightly points out,

> competition for credibility is a pervasive feature of much of our social and political life. The unjustifiably low credibility often assigned to the testimony of oppressed groups . . . is inextricably linked with the unjustifiably high credibility that privileged groups often enjoy. (2017, 67)

In cases where work arrangements are concerned, for instance, if managers and workers are in conflict, the excessive credibility that managers enjoy will necessarily imply a deficit in the worker's credibility.

The central case that this section attempts to draw our attention to is 'prejudicial credibility deficit' and 'prejudicial credibility excess' (Fricker 2007) in the workplace. Prejudicial credibility deficit/excess denotes that a person is given insufficient or excess credibility because of the stereotypes that are associated with the speaker. Consider a description of the 'workmen' in Frederick Winslow Taylor (1947b)'s *The Principles of Scientific Management*, which the fellows of the Academy of Management had voted *the most* influential management book of the 20th century (Bedeian and Wren 2001):

> The progress of many types of management is punctuated by a series of disputes, disagreements and compromises between employers and men . . . thinking and talking over the injustice . . . *All such types are out of the question [of good management], and need not be considered . . . What the workmen want from their employers beyond anything else is high wages*. (Taylor 1947a, 21, emphasis added)

Taylor's argument is that working-class people are simple-minded, and their greatest desire is higher wages, *regardless of what they claim in their 'thinking and talking' about injustices in the workplace*. According to Taylor, good management is simply the satisfaction of the workers' predefined desire – wages – and hence the sole concern of good management is the application of scientific management to increase productivity and reduce labour cost so that higher profit can be yielded and workers can earn higher wages. He thereby concluded that once the scientific management system is properly applied, 'there is absolutely no danger from strikes or other troubles' (Taylor 1947b,

135). The Taylorist stereotyping of workers denotes a form of credibility deficit of the worker in two ways. First, the management assumes that it knows better than the worker what the worker desires the most and hence can define the worker's wants independent of the worker's own testimony. Second, workers' complaints against injustices of the workplace would not be regarded as credible and will simply be seen as craving for higher monetary rewards. In other words, all complaints are treated as *excuses* for the yearning for higher wages. This wrong here goes deeper than merely managers refusing to accept workers' demands, because the Taylorist manager refuses to accept the *credibility* of workers' demands, not just the demands themselves.

Such prejudices still exist in today's economy. For example, oftentimes the response to workers' complaints against overwork is increasing the pay for overtime work. *The Fair Labor Standards Act* in the United States requires a premium overtime pay for any work hour beyond 40 hours. Instead of providing a right to reject overtime work, their demand for free time was reduced to a demand for higher wages. When John Oliver criticized the working conditions in Amazon's warehouses, Dave Clark, Amazon's senior VP of operations, argued back by claiming that its minimum wage, US$15 per hour, is 'industry-leading', despite warehouse workers' constant complaints against the physical and mental risks, such as sleep deprivation and anxiety, that they are suffering from (Sainato 2019; Spangler 2019). As one Amazon worker Jade Velez said in an interview: 'Amazon is leaning heavily on this compensation angle for a lot of their messaging, but they're not addressing the core workplace issues workers are bringing up' (Sainato 2019). Part of the reason is that these core workplace issues that workers raised are regarded by the Amazon management as excuses for demanding higher wages. The distinctive normative wrong in this scenario is not only that workers lack institutional mechanisms to contest the decisions of the management but also that their status as knowers who can speak for themselves and who are credible and honest about their dissatisfaction are being denied. They are unable to contest the management epistemically because their opinions are not taken seriously due to the prejudices against the working class.

The prejudices affect not only matters concerning workers' demands for justice but also extends to the ways how they carry out their work. Consider again Taylor's critique of the 'old types of management':

> the essential idea of the ordinary types of management is that each workman has become more skilled in his own trade than it is possible for any one in the management to be, and that, therefore, the details of how the work shall best be done must be left to him . . . *the old idea is that each workman can best regulate his own way of doing the work.* (Taylor 1947b, 63, emphasis added)

Taylor criticized these old types of management as 'unscientific' because workers' knowledge of production is 'rule of thumb' knowledge that needs to be replaced by 'scientific knowledge'. According to Taylor, 'the scientific selection of the men, and inducing the men to work in accordance with these scientific principles are entirely out of the question' in old types of management (Taylor 1947b, 63). For him, 'every single act of every workman can be reduced to a science' (Taylor 1947b, 64), and therefore the

management is the brain while the workers are only machine-like beings responsible for carrying out job tasks as planned: '[a]s far as possible the workmen . . . should be entirely relieved of the work of planning . . . *All possible brain work should be removed*' (Taylor 1947a, 98, emphasis added). In discussing a hardworking, productive and skilled pig-iron handler, Taylor (1947b, 62) described him as:

> a man of the type of the ox, – no rare specimen of humanity, difficult to find and therefore very highly prized. On the contrary, he was a man so stupid that he was unfitted to do most kinds of laboring work, even. The selection of the man, then, does not involve finding some extraordinary individual, but merely picking out from among very ordinary men the few who are especially suited to this type of work.

And who are those especially suited to blue-collar type of work? People who are willing to submit to authority do not dispute the managerial decisions and are responsive to incentive schemes designed by the management. This is why he argued that 'the philosophy of the old management puts the entire responsibility upon the workmen, while the philosophy of the new places a great part of it upon the management' (Taylor 1947b, 63–64). Thus, he claimed that:

> [i]t is only through *enforced* standardization of methods, *enforced* adoption of the best implements and working conditions, and *enforced* cooperation that this faster work can be assured. And the duty of enforcing the adoption of standards and of enforcing this cooperation rests with the *management* alone. (Taylor 1947b, 83, emphasis original)

Standards need to be *enforced* because blue-collar workers, he claimed, are 'too stupid' to understand the scientific principles of design and of the productive process. They are structurally excluded from 'all work of planning'.

Harry Braverman (1974) and the followers of the 'labor process theory' were right to point out that the Taylorist scientific management subjects labour to the control of capital by de-skilling them. Work becomes increasingly precarious; workers' bargaining power decreases because they are more replaceable; and work becomes less emotionally and intellectually rewarding (Devinatz 2014). Nonetheless, what labour process theorists neglected were the epistemic assumptions and consequences of the process of deskilling labour in the Taylorist hierarchical workplace. Taylor's justification of the de-skilling of labour was not only in the name of the interests of capital to control the workers but on the ground that scientific management frees blue-collar workers from what they are not suitable for – planning and design that require epistemic capacities. This is what Fricker calls 'pre-emptive testimonial injustice' (2017, 56). It occurs when 'members of a group are excluded from opportunities to testify because they lack certain markers of trustworthiness' (Anderson 2012, 165). This happens because 'groups who are subject to identity prejudice and are thereby susceptible to unjust credibility deficits will, by the same token, also tend simply not to be asked to share their thoughts, their judgements, their opinions' (Fricker 2007, 130). Taylor believed that the exclusion of blue-collar workers from activities that require epistemic capacities is good for the workers because they would be benefited monetarily by an improved productive process designed by the

epistemically superior management team, and the epistemically superior management team is much more suitable to do this kind of epistemic labour. Thus, accordingly, the exclusion of blue-collar workers from the planning and design of the productive process is a result of an *epistemic* division of labour between workers and the management: the 'intelligent and knowledgeable' management commands; the 'simple-minded and unintelligent' (especially blue-collar) worker obeys. The credibility deficit that blue-collar workers suffer also implies the managerial class in a Taylorist workplace enjoys credibility excess. The management class is regarded as those who possess not only the technical know-how of the production process but also knowledge concerning the psychological state and mentality of workers. The Taylorist prejudice against the epistemic capacity of workers offers a managerial explanation for the superiority of a workplace hierarchy that excludes workers from the planning and decision-making of the firm, and such exclusion further strengthens the prejudices against workers' epistemic capacities. The prejudices deprive workers of their epistemic right to have their testimony be taken seriously, and the institutional exclusion of workers from the knowledge and decision-making concerning the production process deprives them of any right to contest the management institutionally.

Hierarchical workplaces have also strengthened a widespread prejudice that 'the working classes are the moral inferiors of the upper classes' (Fricker 2007, 23). Such prejudices can be easily found in contemporary management practices. For examples, Apple inspects retail workers' personal belonging every day, and workers usually have to wait in line for about 30 minutes based on the upper management's assumption that retail workers are likely to steal Apple's valuable products from the stores (Anderson 2017, xix). Walmart has rules that prevent workers from talking to one another while on duty, calling this time theft (Anderson 2017, xix). About half of US employees had been required by their employers to undergo drug screening even though there is no sign that the employee is a drug user (Anderson 2017, xix). These management practices mostly only apply to workers at lower ranks and are seldom seen in middle and upper management. The differential subjection to these demands is crucial. The growing prevalence of employee drug testing is a result of the upper management's concerns about counterproductive behaviours at work as well as the social utility of drug testing in reducing the use of illicit drugs in society (Konovsky and Cropanzano 1991; MacDonald, Wells, and Fry 1993). The use of employment drug testing, however, is disproportionately high among low-skilled and racially disadvantaged workers, and this is due to the tracker prejudice that they have long been associated with: the image of a drug abuser (Burston, Jones, and Roberson-Saunders 1995; Miller-Day and Barneet 2004; Moskowitz, Stone, and Childs 2012; Wozniak 2015). The drug test could in principle be designed in ways that do not reinforce the prejudices against disadvantaged workers, such as by setting up a system of random testing that would take a diverse sample of employees from different racial and educational backgrounds. The differential subjection to these demands represents a form of discrimination against disadvantaged workers. Hence, testimonial injustices are usually connected with and reinforce other types of prejudices and injustices beyond the one that depicts workers at lower ranks as inept at the brain side of work.

Two objections might be raised against my central arguments in this section. First, some might object that contemporary workplaces are no longer similar to the Taylorist

workplace, and hence relying heavily on Taylor's scientific management model to criticize contemporary workplaces' epistemic assumptions and consequences makes my arguments irrelevant to today's workplaces. As Cowen argues, '[t]he desire to attract and keep talent is the single biggest reason why companies try to create pleasant and tolerant atmospheres for their workers', and '[l]arge numbers of employers go out of their way to make their companies sources of worker dignity . . . because workers and potential workers value such freedoms and protections' (2017, 114).

As Anderson (2017) points out in her response to Cowen's critique, contemporary workplaces do not seem like what Cowen has described: a survey investigating around 1500 garment factories in Southern California conducted by the US Department of Labor between 2007 and 2012 discovered labour violations that are like sweatshop conditions 93% of the time, and a great majority of workers in the poultry industry are 'forced to wear diapers' because they were not given adequate bathroom breaks (Anderson 2017, 134). In addition to these examples, Amazon's warehouses and Foxconn are notorious for their Taylorist style of management. The slogan 'We are not robots!' is 'one of the most visible messages of striking Amazon workers across the world', and an important demand of Amazon workers is the liberation from 'the work rhythms imposed by the machines propping up logistics operation in FCs [fulfillment centers]' (Delfanti 2019, 1). Similar to Taylor, Amazon adopts scientific management by employing new technologies to 'increase workers' productivity, standardize tasks, facilitate worker turnover, and ultimately gain control over the workforce' (Delfanti 2019, 2). The Taiwanese company Foxconn, a principal manufacturer of Apple's products, currently employs more than 1.4 million workers in China and is known for its deplorable work conditions (Chan, Pun, and Selden 2013). The frequent workplace suicides in Foxconn, whereby individuals choose to take their lives because of the extreme pressures at work, have aroused wide societal concerns in China (Walters 2017). As Braverman pointed out, despite industrial psychologists and the human relations school's prominent critiques of Taylor's naive view of human motivation and workers' epistemic capacities, Taylorism still 'dominates the world of production', and 'its fundamental teachings have become the bedrock of all work design' (1974, 87). Thus, Taylor's work provides a prototypical articulation of the assumptions and rationale of non-inclusive and undemocratic traditional hierarchical workplaces.

Second, my critiques against testimonial injustice at work might appear to rest upon a problematic form of 'epistemic egalitarianism' which suggests that everyone should receive equal credibility. Some might therefore reject my arguments by claiming that possessing unequal credibility is not necessarily unjust because, as hearers, we often attribute unequal credibility to different groups and people in ways that do not appear to be obviously unjust (Anderson 2012; Fricker 2007). In medical issues, we often attribute higher credibility to doctors and nurses without critically examining the evidence and reasons they offer. In political debates, we hopefully would attribute less credibility to neo-Nazi groups. In these cases, credibility inequality might be regarded as a good thing because it helps us to facilitate trust or critical-mindedness in contexts where they are appropriate. I should make clear that my arguments do not presuppose any form of credibility egalitarianism. I agree that some identity markers are useful for tracking the credibility of specific groups and people in certain areas and issues. Following Fricker,

what I am concerned about is not epistemic inequality but ‘discriminatory epistemic injustice’, that is, ‘a prejudice through which the speaker is misjudged and perceived as epistemically lesser’ (Fricker 2017, 53) or greater. The key idea here is that the hearer should ‘match the level of credibility she attributes to her interlocutor to the evidence that he is offering the truth’ (Fricker 2007, 19). I call the credibility deficit of workers and the credibility excess of managers a testimonial *injustice* not because their credibility is unequal, but because their credibility is affected by identity makers that are prejudicial. Fricker’s frequently cited example of testimonial injustice is that ‘the police do not believe you because you are black’ (2007, 1). In my discussion, it is the managers and upper management who do not believe you because you are a worker at lower ranks, or, alternatively, you are trusted and/or taken seriously simply because you are a manager at a higher rank.

3. Workplace hierarchy and the perpetuation of epistemic injustice

In this section, I discuss how workplace hierarchy perpetuates epistemic injustice by demonstrating their connection in three ways: (a) the epistemic vices that hierarchical workplaces tend to cultivate; (b) the suppression of epistemic friction in hierarchical workplaces; and (c) hierarchical workplaces’ ‘structural blockages in the circulation of knowledge’ (Congdon 2017, 243).

(a) Workplace hierarchy and epistemic vices

As Medina says, ‘the epistemic excesses (excessive authority and credibility, excessive self-confidence, etc.) that privileged subjects enjoy’ often spoils their epistemic character (2013, 24). The key epistemic vice that hierarchical workplaces tend to cultivate is what Fricker (2007) and Medina (2013) call ‘epistemic arrogance’. Epistemic arrogance tends to develop when one receives excessive credibility that renders one ‘closed minded, dogmatic, blithely impervious to criticism, and so on’ (Fricker 2007, 20). Epistemic arrogance is an epistemic vice because it prevents the agent from developing epistemic virtues that can help them to realize their cognitive prejudices and biases.

An important reason why unaccountable managers in hierarchical workplaces are particularly inclined to develop epistemic arrogance is that there are structural causes for them to be overconfident in their own capacities, judgement and beliefs. Researchers of organizational studies have found that in hierarchical workplaces where managers hold arbitrary power in employment and promotion decisions, subordinates’ ‘uncertainty about their position in relation to the disproportionate power of the all-encompassing, autocratic system’ has made flattery ‘increasingly a strategy for survival under authoritarian work conditions’ (Yang 2014, 1). Organizational psychologists define flattery as a form of ingratiation behaviours that individuals employ to ‘increase their attractiveness in the eyes of others’ (Linden and Mitchell 1988, 572) and as an ‘attempt to influence someone higher in the formal hierarchy of authority in the organization’ (Porter, Allen, and Angle 2003, 432). Instead of a particular workplace’s peculiar culture or individual worker’s idiosyncrasies, Martin and Wilson (2012) suggest that flattery, or brownnosing,

is a strategic resource for subordinates to enlist the support of upper-level managers (see also Yang 2014). Thus, patterns of flattery reflect the unequal power structural arrangements in the workplace (Martin and Wilson, 2012). Flattery is effective because, as social psychologists have argued, ‘most people want to receive accolades’, and ‘most people want to be appreciated’ (DuBrin 2010, 108). The more arbitrary power a manager holds, the more likely that flattery is a structural necessity for survival. In many cases of at-will employment, flattery often is used to develop relationships of favouritism that lower one’s risk of being dismissed from one’s job.

The structural necessity of flattery would unavoidably cultivate epistemic vices because subordinates would not be able to point out managers’ mistakes and would have to exaggerate managers’ achievements. It is much easier for psychological propensities of being closed minded, dogmatic and blithely impervious to criticism to develop in an epistemic environment in which one is structurally insulated from the need to face and take into account criticisms and conflicting opinions. The ‘not needing to know’ also cultivates another epistemic vice – ‘epistemic laziness’ (Medina 2013, 24). Epistemic arrogance is the lack of mental and psychological capacities to tolerate and take criticisms seriously; epistemic laziness is the unwillingness and the lack of curiosity to learn and solicit conflicting opinions. As Medina points out, ‘knowledge requires work and its acquisition will not happen without the active participation of the knower’ (2013, 33–34). The acquisition of knowledge requires cognitive energy; the acquisition of knowledge that one is uncomfortable with requires *additional* cognitive energy that can sometimes be demanding and challenging to the epistemic agent. Thus, there is a motivational problem in the acquisition of conflicting opinions. Plenty of evidence has shown that people tend to consume news materials only from outlets that are aligned with their opinions (Flaxman, Goel, and Rao 2016; Garrett 2009; Iyengar and Hahn 2009). The ‘echo chamber effect’ demonstrates that there is a tendency for people to avoid exposure to opinions different to their own when they do not need to be aware of them (Sunstein 2007). Not all people can afford epistemic laziness. In the context of a hierarchical workplace, lower-rank workers usually must invest their cognitive energy in learning the predilection and preference of managers who hold power. The arbitrary power of managers and the structural incentives of flattery provide mechanisms of avoidance that insulate them from the need to expose to differences and hence cultivate their epistemic arrogance and laziness.

(b) The institutional suppression of epistemic friction

An epistemically inclusive and reflective environment which recognizes the status of every member as a knower and potential contributor requires institutional protection of epistemic friction. Epistemic friction is the coexistence of significantly different perspectives. The most important epistemic benefit of epistemic friction is that it may force ‘one to be self-critical, to compare and contrast one’s beliefs, to meet justificatory demands, to recognize cognitive gaps’ while meliorating factors that ‘censoring, silencing, or inhibiting the formation of beliefs, the articulations of doubts, the formation of questions and lines of inquiry, and so on’ (Medina 2013, 50).

Epistemic friction requires institutional protection and facilitation. In a racially prejudicial society, the preservation of multiple racial perspectives requires institutional protection such as affirmative action, blind review employment processes, provision of mobilizational resources for racial minority groups' collective claim making and so on. Although the mere existence of multiple perspectives might not necessarily transform people's cognitive–affective attitude, the existence of multiple perspectives is nonetheless a necessary condition to cultivate the sensitivity to the potential blindness of one's own perspective. The facilitation and preservation of indigenous collective claim-making, for example, provides a critical indigenous perspective unveiling the colonial dimension of liberal democracy that liberal democratic citizens might otherwise be unaware of.

Similarly, epistemic friction in the workplace also requires institutional protection and facilitation, and yet most hierarchical workplaces lack these institutional measures. High-performance work practices (HPWPs) that are beneficial to the production of epistemic friction, such as engaging workers in the decision-making process, deliberating organizational goals and commitments with workers, providing extensive training opportunities for workers, reducing status differences in hierarchy, initiating self-motivated work team practices through delegation of power and so on (Ashkanasy, Bennett, and Martinko 2016; Boxall 2012), have only been systematically adopted by 1.10% of firms in the United States (Blasi and Kruse 2006; Malleson 2014). In addition to the low adoption rate of HPWP, the number of employed union members in the United States declined by 2.9 million since 1983, and the union membership rate dropped from 20.1% in 1983 to 11.1% in 2015 (Dunn and Walker 2016). If we agree that HPWPs tend to empower workers' individual claim-making and union protection tends to empower workers' collective claim-making, most hierarchical workplaces in the United States today are actively silencing the voices of workers by refusing to adopt HPWPs and by actively preventing workers from forming and participating in labour unions.

Where institutional protective measures are absent, epistemic counterpoints can hardly be generated. Subordinates in a hierarchical workplace might be afraid of speaking out publicly because of the fear of punishment, even if no one is intentionally prohibiting them from speaking out publicly. A *deeper* level of silencing is caused by the lack of a favourable legal infrastructure for union or work council formation and participation. Fricker's (2007, 149–50) discussion of sexual harassment provides an illuminating example. Women who had been sexually harassed prior to the creation of the language and concept of sexual harassment were unable to tell their experience in a way that others could understand as problematic. Eventually this hermeneutical lacuna was overcome by collective deliberative actions of feminist activists (Fricker 2007, 150). Communicating and making sense of the experience of oppression requires the creation of new hermeneutical resources, and that further requires some forms of collective deliberative channels. Although most workers do have ready-to-hand concepts to make sense of the daily exploitation that they confront,[5] collective deliberative platforms, such as labour unions and work councils, are particularly important in new forms of work arrangements, where experiences of injustices are often new and atypical or at least not obviously clear to the public. For instance, unions play a crucial role in facilitating the development and application of the concept of 'sham contracting' to criticize sharing

economy's dominant contractual practice, which is the employer's attempt to flee from responsibilities for employee entitlements through disguising a standard employment relationship as an independent contractual relationship (Minter 2017).

More importantly, in the absence of institutional protection, even if workers do have epistemic counter standpoints, the management would not take them seriously.[6] This is what Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr. (2012) calls 'willful hermeneutical ignorance'. It occurs when 'dominantly situated knowers refuse to acknowledge epistemic tools developed from the experienced world of those situated marginally' (p. 715). Without institutional measures that formally force the management to listen and respond to workers at lower ranks, willful hermeneutical ignorance can become a particularly salient feature in the workplace because there is nothing in the management's situation requires them to investigate working conditions in light of workers' concerns. Recognizing the epistemic tools and standpoints of the workers would 'moves epistemic power away from' the management and 'make clearer the injustices that maintain [the management's] dominant privilege'. Thus, it is not 'in the immediate interest of the dominantly situated to acquire and maintain epistemic resources calibrated to the marginally experience world' (Pohlhaus 2012, 721).

As Medina suggests, hermeneutical injustices are 'committed structurally or institutionally when there are structural conditions or institutional designs that . . . favor certain hermeneutical communities and practices and disadvantage others' (2017, 46). I argue that the absence of a favourable legal infrastructure for the participation and formation of collective platforms (such as, but not limited to, unions and work councils) for workers' deliberation and collective actions that enable them to enrich their hermeneutical resources and force the management to acknowledge their epistemic tools constitutes hermeneutical injustices because it disadvantages workers' ability to engage in collective sense-making and fight against wilful hermeneutical ignorance. A caveat is that I am not suggesting that a labour union is the only site where oppressed workers can have epistemically productive deliberation. Many gig workers who lack the opportunity and right to participate in labour unions and work councils have formed various 'digital communities' to share information, deliberate oppressed experience and mobilize resistance (Maffie 2020). However, labour unions and work councils represent a distinctive legal contestatory institutional channel that can, through collective bargaining, force the management to listen to, engage with, and recognize the collective voices and epistemic tools of workers, while most of these voluntary digital communities are unable to.

(c) Structural blockages in the circulation of knowledge

The prejudice that workers at lower ranks are not capable knowers is partially a result of hierarchical workplaces' non-inclusive circulation of knowledge of the productive process and overall planning. If production and management knowledge is a marker of one's credibility, and the opportunities to access production and management knowledge are closely linked to one's relative position in a hierarchy, then the unequal opportunities to access intra-firm training concerning production and management knowledge will result in the credibility excess of managers at higher ranks and the credibility deficit of workers

at lower ranks. Fuller suggests that sometimes rank divides us into 'somebodies' and 'nobodies' (2003), because, as Ingram points out:

> More than most care to admit, we treat others – and are treated by others – based on our relative rank. The truth is that each of us has felt like a somebody some times and a nobody at others. A key to feeling like a somebody is being recognized by others. Without recognition from others, we may feel discounted, disconnected, marginal, or even invisible. (Ingram 2006)

This is especially the case when rank is associated with the opportunities to access intra-firm knowledge and thereby one's epistemic status in a hierarchical workplace. By excluding workers at lower ranks, 'the holder of higher rank can use the power inherent in that rank to aggrandize themselves at the expense of those of lower ranks' (Fuller 2003, 14). A worker becomes 'nobody' in a workplace when her status as a knower is being denied as a result of structural blockages in the circulation of knowledge to workers at lower ranks. Workplace hierarchies that systematically deprive workers at lower ranks of the opportunities to access knowledge of production and management are comparable to societies that systematically prevent disadvantaged groups from education. Both are examples of an original structural epistemic injustice as the denial of fair opportunities for access to knowledge that significantly affects one's credibility and this 'generates additional structural inequalities in opportunities for exercising full epistemic agency, which is an injustice to the speakers' (Anderson 2012, 169).

Reducing what Ingram (2006) calls 'rankism', that is, distributing credibility, opportunities for fair access to knowledge and decision-making power simply in accordance with relative positions in a hierarchy is necessary for meliorating the structural blockages in the circulation of knowledge in hierarchical workplace. Measures of reducing rankism include the inclusion of employees of lower ranks in major organizational events, committees and task forces, provision of opportunities for employees of lower ranks to offer suggestions about the improvement of the productive process, formal requirements of demanding upper-management to respond to these suggestions and increasing the flatness of organization by eliminating distinctions that generate feelings of class distinction in the workplace (Ingram 2006). These measures are largely similar to HPWPs. Researchers have found that hierarchical workplaces are reluctant to embrace the systemic adoption of a full range of HPWPs despite strong research evidence showing the benefits of these practices (Gill 2009; Godard and Delaney 2000; Pfeffer and Veiga 1999). One of the main barriers to the adoption of HPWP is management resistance. They often 'resist a loss of power through devolved decision making and flattened hierarchies' (Gill 2009, 40; Kochan, Katz, and McKersie 1986). In sum, the arbitrary and unaccountable power that managers at higher ranks hold reinforces workplace hierarchy, because this power gives them the right to refuse the adoption of inclusive practices that can facilitate the fair circulation of knowledge, even when solid evidence has demonstrated the productive advantages of these practices.

4. The moral wrongs of epistemic injustice

In this article, I emphasize that epistemic injustice is problematic because it is a moral wrong. But what exactly are the moral wrongs? There are four, namely, disrespect, unjust barriers to epistemic agency, discrimination and unjust social privilege.

(a) Disrespect

Testimonial injustice is a profound form of disrespect. Congdon (2017, 249) rightly points out that a person suffers from epistemic disrespect when there are expressive acts that convey the denial of her *capacities as a knower* and her *right as a speaker*. These capacities include 'a minimal capacity for self-reflexiveness' and 'a minimal capacity to offer and ask for justification'. The right of a speaker is 'the right not to have one's epistemic credentials dismissed on the basis of bad prejudice'. This is a disrespect in twofold: her competency to be a potential contributor in communicative practices aiming at improving the productive process has been denied; her right to be taken as an epistemic equal has also been denied.

Testimonial injustice is a profound form of disrespect also because there exist very few alternatives to hierarchical workplaces. Workers are more or less forced to suffer disrespect with no escape, depending on whether hierarchical workplace has contestatory mechanisms that give workers at lower ranks the right to contest the decisions of upper management, thereby forcing the upper management to listen and respond to their concerns, despite the prejudices that the upper management may hold against them.

Disrespect is a moral wrong because it is essentially a denial of the epistemic status of an individual due to discriminatory prejudices that are ungrounded. There are a number of harmful consequences resulting from these discriminatory prejudices. First of all, to perceive oneself as an epistemically capable person requires a process of mutual recognition. For example, it is extremely difficult for a writer to believe herself to be a good writer when everyone around her tells her that her writings are not good, even when this is objectively false and their judgement was simply a result of prejudice. Therefore, the lack of recognition of one's epistemic capacities is likely to erode one's epistemic confidence – you do not believe in your own epistemic capacities because others do not believe in your epistemic capacities, regardless of whether you are *actually* epistemically capable.

(b) Epistemic agency

Epistemic injustice constitutes barriers to epistemic agency. Epistemic agency refers to 'the agency one has over one's belief-forming practices, which will directly affect the way in which one forms belief and indirectly affects the beliefs one forms' (Olson 2015, 449). Understanding and telling oppressive experience at work requires articulation and a sense-making process, and articulation and sense-making depend on the availability of collective deliberative platforms in the workplace. Both the lack of these platforms and the willful ignorance of the epistemic tools articulated by workers are usually the results of the upper management and employers' deliberate resistance. Thus, in the context of

the workplace, hermeneutical injustices that prevent the effective exercise of epistemic agency of workers at lower ranks is to a large extent a result of the intentional interference of the upper management.

Hermeneutical barriers to effective epistemic agency are only part of the story. The lack of epistemic confidence resulting from the testimonial injustice that workers at lower ranks confront is another important barrier to epistemic agency. Recall Fricker's (2007, 149–50) discussion of Carmita Wood's story. In addition to the lack of hermeneutical resources to make sense of her sexually abusive experience at work, another reason why she wrote down her reason for quitting the job as 'personal' was because she was living in a time when most people thought that sexual harassment was only a kind of harmless flirting. Her testimony that she had experienced horrific sexual harassment at work was not being taken seriously and was regarded by others simply as her individual problem: being overly sensitive to 'harmless flirting'. If your testimony is not taken seriously by others, it tends to undermine your confidence in your status as an epistemically capable agent. If workers at lower ranks whose opinions are never being taken seriously, they tend not to believe in their capacities in forming and giving valid opinions concerning personal and firm-wide matters, and therefore they tend not to talk about them in the workplace (McGregor 1985).

Hermeneutical and testimonial barriers to epistemic agency are epistemic silencing at two different levels. Hermeneutical injustice in the workplace happens in the intentional removal of potential collective deliberative platforms that are important for the workers to articulate and make sense of their oppressive opinions. Workers are silenced by the intentional removal of the epistemic resources that are necessary for them to speak out. Testimonial injustice results in epistemic silencing of the workers through undermining their epistemic self-confidence. In sum, these unjust barriers to epistemic agency are moral wrongs in that they undermine the development of one's capabilities as an epistemic agent and help perpetuate unjust prejudices and institutional arrangements through epistemic silencing.

(c) Discrimination

Testimonial injustice is itself a form of discrimination because it rests on and reinforces discriminatory prejudices. However, these discriminatory prejudices do not stop at the level of epistemic interactions. It is important to note that the identity as a working class or a blue-collar worker causes one being subject to a 'tracker prejudice', which 'renders one susceptible not only to testimonial injustice but to a gamut of different injustices' (Fricker 2007, 27). Hence, when testimonial injustice reinforces discriminatory prejudices associated with the working class, it is also reinforcing injustices in other areas because it is 'systematically connected with other kinds of actual or potential injustice' (Fricker 2007, 27).

By way of example, consider Lipset's influential article which depicts workers at lower ranks as a destabilizing factor for democracy because they are incapable of making sophisticated democratic decisions. According to him, a lower rank worker's 'educational attainment is less than that of men with higher socio-economic status', and

> his association as a child with others of similar background not only fails to stimulate his intellectual interests but also creates an atmosphere which prevents his educational experience from increasing his general social sophistication and his understanding of different groups and ideas. (1959, 495)

Also, in the workplace, the worker is 'surrounded on the job by others with a similar restricted cultural, educational, and family background' (Lipset 1959, 495). In other words, workers were regarded as undesirable people and a social problem. Such tracker prejudice is still common in our time. Social psychology researchers found that people evaluated workers at lower ranks 'more negatively, felt less admiration, and were less willing to interact with [them] or to recommend [them] for a job' (Jones 2011; Vazquez and Lois 2020, 1). Thus, the identity as a working-class individual not only decreases one's credibility in the workplace but also negatively affects one's general sociability and network opportunities. Another example that shows worker identity as a systemic prejudice is the individualization of structural injustices. Problems such as low wage and poverty that many workers at lower ranks are suffering from are often 'attributed to their own fecklessness, irresponsibility, and the lack of ambition or determination' rather than to economic and social inequalities (Pickering 2019, 316). This not only weakens workers' claim for the improvement of work conditions but also undermines their welfare entitlements.

Testimonial injustice reinforces discriminatory prejudices and provides energy to discriminatory social and institutional practices that regulate those who have been discriminated against. In other words, testimonial injustice fuels the energy for a social system in which the distribution of rights and burdens is based on prejudicial stereotyping of workers at lower ranks, and hence the harms of epistemic injustice are not only cognitive harms but also external harms resulting from these unjust social and institutional arrangements as well.

(d) Unjust social privilege

Social identity power is at work whenever there is an operation of power that depends on 'shared imaginative conceptions of social identity' (Fricker 2007, 14). The general make-up of managers and workers with varying degrees of power and accountability exemplifies the intersectionality of social identities in the workplace. Some intersectionally privileged people benefit more from the hierarchically structured workplace than others.[7]

A particularly troubling issue of the hierarchical workplace is that it is a major site for the reproduction of unjust social privilege. Workers who lack necessary qualifications and social ties often do not have access to upper/middle managerial level jobs (Oesch and von Ow 2017). They have no choice but to take up temporary, low-status and low-wage jobs. Furthermore, racial and economic inequalities deeply affect the opportunities for college education. For example, in the United States, the college admission and graduation rate of white students are substantially higher than that of black students (Charles, Roscigno, and Torres 2007). A large group of literature has also shown that household socio-economic status, such as parental income and education, is a crucial

indicator of students' educational attainment (Charles et al. 2007; Parcel and Menaghan 1994). Additionally, female employees face more barriers than their male counterpart in workplace promotion. Gender inequality in top managerial positions is rampant. In 2018, only 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women (Zarya 2018), in spite of the fact that women are 50.8% of the US population and they earn more than 57% of undergraduate degree and 59% of master's degree (Warner, Ellmann, and Boesch 2018).

In a hierarchical workplace, usually those at the bottom are female racial minorities from poor family background, while those at the top are white male from the upper class. The more intersectionally privileged people are, the easier they can access higher managerial positions that provide them with greater authority and credibility at work. The intersectionally privileged therefore enjoy unjust credibility excess and a dominating hermeneutical position, which grant them the power to command workers and marginalize their claims to reform unjust work conditions. Testimonial and hermeneutical injustices thus help the intersectionally privileged to sustain their unjust privilege at the expense of the fair treatment to the intersectionally disadvantaged.

5. Varieties of workplace hierarchy and their respective epistemic injustices

In this section, I distinguish three types of workplace hierarchy: (a) traditional, (b) inclusive and (c) contestatory and demonstrate that workplace hierarchy is not a binary concept. Among three types of hierarchy, traditional hierarchy is the most rigid, then inclusive and then contestatory. Recall our definition of hierarchy: it is defined in terms of the degree to which managerial power is accountable to the interests of workers, and that further implies two components – whether it is obligated to *listen* and *respond* to the workers. Thus, there are broadly three institutional measures that are relevant to the degree of accountability of managerial power: (1) the protection of worker's voices, (2) the institutional requirements that demand managers to respond to workers' questions and justify their decisions to workers and (3) the institutional setting that offers scope for the co-creation of goals, rules and regulations concerning the workplace. The central claim in this section is that the introduction of institutional measures that reduce the degree of hierarchy in a workplace can ameliorate the level of epistemic injustice at work. In the real world, hierarchy is a continuum that is more complicated than a tripartite division that these three ideal types depict. However, for conceptual clarity, these three ideal types capture the essential characteristics of three vastly different models of workplace hierarchy and that helps us to understand how different institutional measures are related to epistemic injustice. Thus, the section offers preliminary arguments from the perspective of epistemic injustice to demonstrate the different degrees of workplace injustice that different types of workplace hierarchy are contributing to.

The rationale behind this working definition of workplace hierarchy is that the three institutional measures mentioned above are constraints on the ways in which managers at higher ranks have to listen to and address the concerns of the workers. The more constraints that managerial power faces, the less likely that its exercise can be unaccountable and arbitrary, and hence the less hierarchical a workplace would be. This is especially significant for epistemic injustice. Recall that one of the major reasons why workers at

lower rank suffer from credibility deficit and managers at higher ranks enjoy credibility excess is that workers do not have institutional protection through which they can safely contest the prejudicial stereotype against them due to the fear of arbitrary punishment, while managers can monopolize the knowledge concerning the overall planning and strategies of the firm which gives them excessive credibility. Also, unaccountable managerial power creates a structural necessity of flattery as an essential survival strategy, which tends to cultivate epistemic vices of managers at higher ranks such as epistemic arrogance and laziness that further disadvantage workers' epistemic status. In addition to testimonial injustice, the absence of collective bodies (e.g. unions and work councils) can prevent workers from effectively articulating and making sense of their experience of oppression and fighting against willful hermeneutical ignorance, and that constitutes hermeneutical injustice because they are unable to communicate their experience of oppression in a way that is understandable to others who do not share the same experience.

(a) Traditional workplace hierarchy

Traditional workplace hierarchy is workplaces where *formal* inclusive participatory channels and protective measures that demand managerial justification are both absent. This should not be taken as workers lacking all opportunities for participation. Informal ones might exist. Some managers might have a personal preference for worker engagement, and the level of participation might even be comparable to workplaces where formal requirements of inclusion exist. However, inclusion in a traditional hierarchical workplace depends on the good will of individual managers. In the absence of organizational commitment and institutional requirements, the good will of individual managers is contingent and unstable. Whenever serious disagreement between workers and managers emerges, traditional hierarchical workplaces provide structural incentives for managers to suppress the voices of the workers. For the manager to maintain her willingness to be open-minded and receptive to workers' voices in a hierarchy where institutional requirements of inclusion are absent depends significantly on her individual epistemic virtues. Fricker (2007) rightly argues that the cultivation of individual epistemic virtues is necessary for combating epistemic injustices, but Anderson also rightly points out that Fricker's focus on individual epistemic virtues as remedies for epistemic injustice is insufficient in that structural causes of epistemic injustice need to be tackled *structurally*:

> We should not think of structural remedies as *competing* with virtue-based remedies for epistemic injustice. Many structural remedies are put in place to enable individual virtue to work, by giving it favorable conditions. In employment contexts, for example, structural remedies to prevent employment discrimination include institutional requirements that hiring, firing, and promotion decisions be based on explicit, objective measures rather than subjective assessment; that managers be given enough time to make such decisions carefully; that the evaluation context avoid priming stereotypes; and that managers be held accountable for discriminatory outcomes. (Anderson 2012, 168, original emphasis)

I am in full agreement with Anderson and her insight that we cannot rely solely on 'epistemic heroes' – 'extraordinary subjects who under conditions of epistemic oppression are able to develop epistemic virtues with a tremendous transformative potential' (Medina 2013, 186) – as a solution to epistemic injustice. These institutional measures are precisely what traditional hierarchies lack, and hence from an institutional perspective, traditional hierarchies are most stratified and epistemically unjust.

(b) Inclusive workplace hierarchy

The second type of workplace hierarchy is inclusive hierarchy. Unlike traditional hierarchy, inclusive hierarchy has *formal* inclusive practices, typically those in HPWPs such as schemes of employee participation, employee consultation, delegation of power to self-managed teams and so on. Inclusive hierarchy is still a hierarchy because the ultimate decision-making power is in the hands of the managers, and hence the management can still exercise unaccountable power due to the fact that these formal inclusive practices are 'a self-binding management strategy' (Müller-Jentsch 2019, 149). In inclusive workplaces, '[m]anagers bind themselves to employees by taking account of their concerns and interests in a formalized manner', and '[t]heir practices seek to recognize the human factor in work in order to improve individual and organizational performance' (Müller-Jentsch 2019, 149–50). In other words, workers at lower ranks are regarded as members of the epistemic community only when their inclusion is beneficial to the pre-defined organizational goal – productivity. Thus, in inclusive hierarchy, the reason for inclusion is not that workers, especially those at lower ranks, have a moral right to be free from discrimination against their epistemic status, but simply that there might be instrumental gains in respecting their epistemic status, be it higher morale, lower turnover, or higher individual performance.

Inclusive hierarchy is less hierarchical than traditional hierarchy because formal inclusive institutions signal an organizational commitment to respect the voices of workers, thereby rendering a more stable participatory channel in which workers are treated as informants. Also, regardless of the intention of the management, inclusion performs the function of knowledge dissemination by increasing the transparency of decision-making and relevant information. However, as Müller-Jentsch (2019, 151) suggests, self-binding inclusive institutions are ultimately 'management devices', not 'democratic institutions'. There are three problems with inclusive hierarchies. First, the low adoption rate of inclusive institutions in hierarchical workplaces demonstrates how difficult it is to expect firms to self-impose formal inclusive institutions that empower workers' voices. Second, if the goal of inclusive hierarchies is to raise organizational performance, there might be a differentiation in its application. These institutions typically only include workers whose skills are relatively scarce in the market, while ignoring those workers at lower ranks who can be easily replaced, thereby marginalizing the most disadvantaged workers (Lopes, Calapez, and Lopes 2017). Third, even when firms allow low-skilled workers to participate in some sort of inclusive institutions, the level of inclusion is usually confined to the shop floor and almost never reaches the board of management (Kwok 2020; Lopes et al. 2017). Thus, in inclusive hierarchies, the firm's fundamental decisions still exclude the workers from its decision-making process.

(c) Contestatory workplace hierarchy

The third type of workplace hierarchy is contestatory hierarchy. Different from traditional hierarchy, contestatory hierarchy has formal inclusive institutions protected by the laws, and different from inclusive hierarchy, workers in contestatory hierarchy enjoy a right of contestation. The German co-determination system will be used as an example to discuss the substantive elements in contestatory hierarchy. In contrast to traditional hierarchy, contestatory hierarchy has formal institutions of inclusion, such as work councils at the shop floor level and designated seats for worker representatives in the supervisory board. Different from inclusive hierarchy, these formal inclusive institutions are not self-binding managerial devices, but legally granted rights to workers. In other words, the status of these legally granted inclusive institutions is not conditional on their performance enhancing functions.

In the German co-determination system, workers in firms with more than five employees are entitled to elect a work council, and the council is endowed with extensive rights to information, consultation, negotiation and veto (Berger and Vaccarino 2016; Page 2011). Managers and the work council have to meet at least once a month to discuss current issues, and the co-determination act requires managers and employers to provide comprehensive information concerning manpower planning, recruitment, work procedures and operations in a timely manner. The work council is also given the right to inspect relevant documents if they are in doubt about the credibility of the information the management has provided. In addition to the right to information, the work council is entitled to monitor managerial compliance with requirements for the legal and equitable treatment of workers, safety regulations and collective agreements. They have the right to make recommendations that improve the conditions of work and knowledge and information circulation, and also a right to be *listened* to, as in any dismissal and employment decisions, the work council must be consulted. In matters of working conditions that are not regulated by legislation or collective agreement, such as employee codes of conduct, principles of leave arrangements and schedules, bonus rates and performance related remuneration, the work council has the right to negotiation and managers are expected to reach an agreement with the work council. In cases where the work council believes that managerial decisions are prejudicial and discriminatory, or may violate mutually agreed regulation or collective agreement, the work council has the right to veto the managerial decisions (Page 2011). To a large extent, the work council is a defensive mechanism that requires managers to listen to the concerns and demands of workers as well as a right to reject unreasonable rules and decisions.

The level of inclusion in contestatory hierarchy is also higher than that of inclusive hierarchy. Under the German co-determination system, large firms are required to assign half of the seats on the supervisory board to worker representatives (Gerlsbeck and Herzog 2020). The supervisory board holds extensive rights of governance, including approving the appointment of management board members,[8] monitoring the management board, deciding the scope of co-determination, scrutinizing annual accounts and so on (Page 2011). Thus, in a contestatory hierarchy, workers are legally entitled to be involved in firm's fundamental decision-making.

There are two epistemically significant features in a contestatory hierarchy that the other two types of hierarchy lack. First, the work council and designated seats on the supervisory board for worker representatives ensure the circulation of information and knowledge concerning the productive process and managerial decisions, thereby reducing the prejudices against workers resulting from their exclusion from access to knowledge and information in the workplace. Second, the right to veto is an institutional guarantee that managers at upper ranks will have to listen to the workers and offer reasonable justifications for their managerial decisions to gain the consent of the workers. The veto power is a legal guarantee of a minimal epistemic standing because it eliminates conditions for *epistemic laziness*, meaning that managers cannot simply ignore the voices of the workers. Regardless of the cognitive biases that managers have, the veto power fosters mutual justificatory practices on relatively equal terms by forcing managers to treat others as epistemic equals through the removal of unilateral decision-making power from managers. Reducing power inequalities between managers and workers provides a more favourable institutional environment in which cognitive prejudices and prejudicial managerial decisions could be exposed and challenged. In short, the essence of contestatory hierarchy is to guarantee a relatively equal epistemic standing between workers and managers by introducing the right to contestation to workers.

It should now be clear why I categorize the German co-determination system, despite the name ‘co-determination’, as a contestatory system. However, one might question why I categorize the system as a hierarchy (e.g. see Gerlsbeck and Herzog 2020, 312). First, in the German co-determination system, only firms in the coal and steel industries with more than 1000 employees have full-parity co-determination. In medium-sized firms with 500 to 2000 employees, only one-third of the seats in the supervisory board are seats for worker representatives. In large firms with more than 2000 employees, the percentage of worker representative seats goes up to 50%. However, in most firms that are regulated by co-determination acts, the chairperson of the supervisory board must be elected by the shareholders alone, and the chairperson has the casting vote in case of a deadlock (Wagner 2011). Therefore, even though the German co-determination system significantly reduces the degree of hierarchy in workplace governance, it is still based on a model of the primacy of shareholders. In addition to this, the differentiation between medium and large firms has made co-determination in medium firms simply a mechanism of defence as workers’ interests only constitute a minority in the supervisory board. Since the management board is appointed and monitored by the supervisory board, the management board is accountable to the supervisory board. The constitution of the supervisory board reflects whom the management board is accountable to. In medium firms, they are accountable to the interests of the shareholders to a much greater extent than to that of the workers. In large firms, even though the worker representatives occupy half of the seats, in cases of unresolvable disagreement between the shareholders and the workers, the management board is structurally required to side with the shareholders due to the casting vote the chairperson has. It is a hierarchy that ranks shareholders’ interests above workers’ interests while giving the latter legal rights of contestation.

6. Conclusion

This article argues that workplace hierarchies contribute to two types of epistemic injustice – testimonial justice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when workers at lower ranks suffer from prejudicial credibility deficit while managers at upper ranks enjoy prejudicial credibility excess simply because of their relative positions in the hierarchy. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when workers at lower ranks lack necessary collective platforms to enrich their hermeneutical resources and fight against willful hermeneutical ignorance. However, workplace hierarchy is a continuum. I have shown that, among different types of hierarchical workplace, traditional hierarchical workplaces are most epistemically unjust while contestatory hierarchical workplaces are least epistemically unjust, because the latter grants workers at lower ranks the rights to information and contestation. Such rights are important in that they force the privileged managers to listen to and be held accountable to the workers. The workplace is a central site for social interactions, and thus it is also a main site for the reproduction of epistemic injustices. If we take seriously the moral wrongs of epistemic injustices in hierarchical workplaces and their wider negative social effects, we ought to restructure our workplaces to make them as just as possible epistemically.

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Notes

1. For readers who are sceptical about my critique of existing intrinsic arguments against workplace hierarchy, this article could be read in a different way: there is already a large group of literature that addresses these bads of workplace hierarchy, and yet epistemic injustice at work is much less acknowledged since the literature on epistemic injustice is relatively new and also has yet been brought into the normative debates of workplace arrangements. Thus, this article could be read as adding an additional intrinsic wrong of workplace hierarchy that has yet been systematically articulated.
2. There are important and more complicated questions once we take into account the epistemic division of labour at a global level. An example would be a multinational firm which has a relatively epistemically just local workplace in an affluent country while also has massive offshore operations such as sweatshops and factories in less affluent countries whose members would not have any chance or channel to voice their concerns to planning work done in the affluent country's local workplace. Due to the limit of space, the article largely puts aside this question. However, this article might shed light on an additional injustice that has not been well-noticed in the global justice literature: the problems of offshore sweatshops and factories, in addition to their horrible work conditions, involve also the almost complete denial of the

equal epistemic status of labour (especially in the global south). I thank the reviewer for this point.

3. In addition to this, a recent important collection of major contributions of theorists of epistemic injustice edited by Kidd, Medina, and Pohlhaus Jr. (2017) contains no explicit discussion of the workplace even though there are ten chapters in part five on 'case studies of epistemic injustice'.
4. For instance, Fricker says: 'I do not think it would be right to characterise any of the individual moments of credibility excess that such a person receives as in itself an instance of testimonial injustice, since none of them wrongs him sufficiently in itself' (2007, 21).
5. I thank the reviewer for this point.
6. I thank the reviewer for this point.
7. I thank the reviewer for this point.
8. The German co-determination system is a two-tier system, in which the management board (*Vorstand*) is responsible for managing, planning, coordinating, and supervising the firm's daily operation and activities, while the supervisory board (*Aufsichtstrat*) is mainly responsible for monitoring the management board. For a detailed discussion, see (Page 2011).

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