

## THE IMPACT OF PERCEPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE ON EMPLOYEE ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR

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**Purpose:** The aim of this paper is to present the impact of employees' perception of distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice on their behaviour and attitude in a workplace.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The paper is theoretical and cognitive, grounded in an extensive literature review encompassing theoretical, review, and empirical studies on the impact of perception of justice on employee attitude.

**Findings:** Human resources management must take into account employees' perception of: distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice that refer to decisions taken by companies towards employees and results that come from these decisions, because this perception influences the behaviours and attitudes in a workplace.

**Practical implications:** This research will allow a better understanding of human behaviour in the context of work. Perception of justice by employees influences behaviours and attitudes in a workplace and these behaviours and attitudes directly translate onto companies' financial results.

**Social implications:** The research shows how perception of organizational justice may psychologically impact individuals so that they demonstrate positive behaviours (greater satisfaction from work and organizational engagement) or so that they do not demonstrate dysfunctional behaviours (retaliatory behaviour).

**Originality/value:** The research has shown that perception of organizational justice (distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational) has an impact on employees' attitudes and behaviours in a workplace. This research is addressed to persons who hold managerial positions and those managing people's teams, to HR specialists and persons who implement human resources management systems in companies.

**Keywords:** human resources management, organizational justice, employee behaviours and attitudes.

**Category of the paper:** Viewpoint, literature review.

## 1. Introduction

Organizational justice is examined both in the context of organization of work and the company itself. Research on organizational justice has generally focused on the answer to the question of why managers and their organizations are seen as just or unjust by employees. On the other hand, these studies have referred to whether and how organizational justice affects employees' work results and well-being at work (Colquitt et al., 2001; Silva, Caetano, 2016).

The first studies on organizational justice de facto concerned distributive justice. They were carried out by Homans (1961), Blau (1964) and Adams (1965). They were also largely related to philosophy and to a large extent referred to morality and justice examined in the context of results of the balance of profits and losses of inputs (efforts) and outputs (results) in a workplace. Distributive justice involves making a conscious comparative calculation of input of a person and a reward that this person will receive from the decision-making system. Injustice is felt when an individual is rewarded excessively or not sufficiently compared to other persons.

The term "organizational justice" was first used by French in 1964 in reference to general questions of justice in managing personnel (French, 1964), while Greenberg (1987) was first to use this term in the context of human perception of justice in organizations.

Other researchers (e.g. Bies and Moag (1986), Greenberg (1993), Colquitt et al. (2001), Cropanzano and Stein (2009), Sen (2009)) who looked at organizational justice also started off with distributive justice and expanded organizational justice with ever new aspects.

Organizational justice includes distributive justice, which refers to justice of results of decisions and distributions made by the system. The second type of organizational justice is procedural justice, which refers to justice of processes and their elements applied in decision making. The next type of justice is interactional justice, which refers to judgements on justice of interpersonal reactions (including exchanges during work) (Warokka et al., 2012). This last type of justice was divided into two separate types: the first one is interpersonal justice, which refers to dignity and respect in treating employees, while the second involves informational justice, which refers to whether an employee receives adequate explanations on events at work, in particular procedures and results, thus whether communication with employees is adequate and sufficient in qualitative and quantitative terms (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001).

Research on organizational justice is often descriptive rather than prescriptive (Cropanzano, Stein, 2009). This means that it refers more often to what people actually do and think and to their attitudes, how they perceive justice and what they think is just, rather than to what they should do and think, that is compliance of actions with specific standards of ethical decency. The normative approach is about understanding the features of events that make them truly objectively just (e.g. Sandel, 2009; Bazerman, Tenbrunsel, 2012), while the descriptive approach involves a subjective perception of justice. Thus, philosophical justice uses the

normative approach to justice, while organizational justice uses a descriptive approach (Crawshaw et al., 2012).

A descriptive approach dominates among management science researchers – a deed is just if it is perceived as such by employees, not because it is in line with norms that flow from ethical systems. In this context it seems important how employees decide whether a given situation is just or not. And thus, such an assessment refers not only to cognitive processes but also to emotional ones. Two groups of theories are trying to answer a question asked like this – one of them assumes that the assessment of the situation done by employees is thorough and reasonable, and the second one is superficial and automatic, based on patterns, heuristics and stereotypes (Bazerman, Tenbrunsel, 2012; Mazur-Wierzbicka et al., 2022).

The aim of this paper is to present the impact of employees' perception of distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice on their behaviour and attitudes in a workplace.

## **2. Perception of distributive justice by employees in the context of human resources management**

Organizational justice refers to employees' perception of how punishments, promotions, pay and awards in an organization are applied. It is interested in decision making in those areas and how these decisions are communicated to employees. Organizational justice should be considered in the context of all areas of human resources management. Perception of organizational justice affects employee behaviours in achieving organizational goals. It has been shown that perception of justice affects employee motivation, their well-being, attitudes, behaviour and results important for the organization (Cohen-Charash, Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001; Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021). Employees' individual actions, thus, determine an organization's long-term success or failure. Managers may use justice as an effective tool to improve employee job satisfaction, organizational identification and performance (Colquitt et al., 2013).

When considering the first type of organizational justice – distributive justice – through the prism of HRM, one may notice that from the point of view of employees the assessment of justice of distribution of results is made by employees – that is employees mainly compare the pay, bonus, amount and frequency of rewards, additional benefits, possibilities of promotion, order of letting people go or availability of training. From the point of view of an enterprise, talent management and carrier management gain additional importance.

Distribution of these variables is perceived by employees as just when it is in line with selected norms of allocation. Employees compare their input-to-output ratio with other employees. They strive to remove inequalities (which emerge when proportions between

employees are unequal) either by limiting input data (effort put into work) or output data (work effects). Other principles of division (based, e.g., on equality, on the moment of employment or on individuals' needs) are less frequently applied to professional work, though they also occur in selected institutions (especially the first two).

Distributive justice assumes having to divide fairly the results or allocations done by the system. From the point of view of an employee, it is an element that often determines changing jobs. Persons highly involved in the life of a company react more negatively to unjust actions compared with less engaged employees. Also, perception of distributive justice has great significance for employees with high potential. No recognition of efforts of highly engaged persons and persons with a high potential causes frustration which may end in exhaustion or in changing jobs.

### **3. Perception of procedural justice by employees in the context of human resources management**

Procedural justice is also very important in the context of managing employees. It is not only the fact of existence of procedures used in employment and letting go, motivating (including remuneration systems), in assessment or development of employees that affect the attitudes and engagement of employees; adequate/just application of these schemes matter too. Procedural justice assumes an instrumental outlook on justice and the imperative of existence of just procedures that enhance trust in the decision-making system thanks to predictability and controllability of the entire process. Besides, just procedures are important because they give employees the sense of acceptance and belonging to desired groups in a company (Tyler, Blader, 2000, 2003). Just procedures help employees to satisfy important needs, both relational and economic. People accept a certain dose of injustice in distribution if they think that the process under which decisions relating to distributions is just (Byrne, Cropanzano, 2001), which is why the decision-making process should be based on the principle of impartiality. Apart from this, justice is a control mechanism that ensures predictability.

Special focus as part of procedural justice is given to Performance Appraisals Systems (PAS) which have become a basic management tool that allows adjustment of employee behaviours to the goals of the organization. Procedural justice is an essential criterion that determines PAS's effectiveness. If justice is not seen in PAS, it may generate psychological barriers and undesirable behaviours in employees (Dusterhoff, Cunningham, Macgregor, 2014)

#### **4. Perception of interpersonal justice by employees in the context of human resources management**

Answering the question on the significance of interpersonal justice for an employee, it needs to be concluded that justice is a key element of being a social creature. Key here are: understanding relations between people, the question of being the same as others and at the same time exceptional, differentiation between one's own interests and belonging to a group, the question of responding to interests and motives of other people and these persons' responding to interests and motives of an individual. Additionally, O'Reilly and Aquino (2011) prove that third persons often respond negatively to injustice suffered by others. Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel and Rupp (2001) claim that justice satisfies man's psychological needs: the need for control, the need of belonging and the sense of one's worth and the need for meaningful existence.

Interpersonal justice helps employees meet their expectations concerning needs of social relations, being among others and being appreciated in a group. Through identification of a social group and through contributing to it, people increase their chances of achieving their goals and may boost their social worth and significance. On the other hand, sacrificing oneself for a group and identification with a group may limit freedom of action and the employee may become prone to rejection and exploitation.

Interpersonal justice from the superiors and the organization drives identity, which in turn affects judgements that have an impact on involvement. One's status or position in a group (including the sense of pride) and the status of an individual in a group (including the sense of respect) are important variables related to identity.

These statuses shape the degree in which employees define themselves as members of a group. The model of group engagement (Tyler, Blader 2000, 2003) proves that a positive perception of justice leads to high identification with the group.

Interpersonal justice as a basis of interaction on the ground of human resources management boosts knowledge sharing, investment in relations, engagement (Liu et al., 2012) and quality of relations. Just treatment of employees is a necessary condition for creating effective relations with them (Cropanzano, Rupp, 2008). Just treatment of employees will mean that managers will seem better people and leaders (Byrne et al., 2012).

## **5. Perception of informational justice by employees in the context of human resources management**

Informational justice emphasizes the role of availability of information. When information most important to employees is not available from the employer, employees rely on other sources of information that allow assessment of what is just and how to respond to a given situation. Information based on justice that refers to an assessment of results and procedures may remove uncertainty and mitigate discomfort of uncertainty even if the experiences of justice are not related to uncertainty.

In a situation where superiors keep important information for themselves, the employees experience a feeling that they are not part of the organization or that they are not important enough in the company and may be omitted. If that is the case, negative and harmful experiences may occur in social interactions (Kunasz, 2022; Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2017).

## **6. The consequences of perception of lack of justice at a workplace for companies**

Observing organizational justice has an impact on work results. Perception of justice or injustice does not only affect employee emotions, but most of all it impacts their behaviour and attitudes at work (and these, in turn, affect performance), their job satisfaction and their trust in the management (Cohen-Charash, Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). On the other hand, negative perception of organizational justice causes frustration among employees, chronic stress and burnout (Maslach, 2007; Bernd, Beuren, 2021).

Conlon et al. (2005) divided effects of perception of organizational justice into “the good, the bad and the ugly effects”. The first group refers to positive responses that appear as a result of assessment of justice (e.g. completing a task, employee loyalty, identification with the company, job satisfaction, organizational engagement). The second group points to the effects of injustice, such as employee leaving, great number of sick leave instances, great turnover and absenteeism. The third one focuses on the achievement of employee behaviours that are contrary to the desired effect (retaliatory behaviours).

Employees often intuitively try to restore justice by elimination or discouraging unjust behaviour or making the management aware of ethical issues.

Sometimes they try to restore justice themselves by applying retaliatory behaviour. Retaliatory actions such as theft, deceit, opportunism, groundless resistance, lesser initiative, lowered organizational engagement, no cooperation, withdrawal, excessive focus on employee's promotion of themselves, being unkind, maliciousness, lower morale, initiating

conflicts, discretionary behaviours in the work performed or other deviations from applicable values, are substantiated as a special way of settling cases. This is why it is essential for organizations to be able to identify and tackle factors outside the organization that may trigger a sense of inequality.

## 7. Conclusions

Human resources management must take into account employees' perceptions of distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice, which refer to decisions taken by companies towards employees and results that come from these decisions, because this perception influences the behaviour and attitudes in a workplace, and these behaviours and attitudes directly affect companies' performance. In the economic practice, a better understanding of human behaviour in the context of professional work is very important.

Perception of organizational justice may affect individuals psychologically so that they demonstrate positive behaviours or so that they do not demonstrate dysfunctional behaviours, that is negative on the one hand and retaliatory on the other.

Positive behaviours that result from perception of organizational justice may be as follows: employee loyalty, identification with the company, job satisfaction and organizational engagement. Negative behaviours include, for example: employee leaving, great number of sick leave instances, great turnover and absenteeism. Retaliatory behaviours include theft, deceit, opportunism, groundless resistance, lesser initiative, lowered organizational engagement, no cooperation, withdrawal, excessive focus on employee's promotion of themselves, being unkind, maliciousness, lower morale, initiating conflicts and discretionary behaviours in the work performed.

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