

Reinventing Organisational Justice in the Age of Disruption

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Abstract: *Organisational Justice has its origin in social psychology and has been of great interest to social researchers and philosophers. It is agreed by both that any act is “just” if perceived to be fair or virtuous. Employee perceptions about the fairness or unfairness will have a major influence on his/her attitude and behavior which will ultimately affect his/her performance. The study develops a critical understanding of the associations between different justice dimensions (distributive justice, Procedural justice, Interactional justice) and employees outcomes to those justice perceptions. Thus, there is a need to reposition and reinvent organizational justice in India where employees perceive it as value which people use it as “lens” to understand HR Practices.*

Key Words: *organizational justice, fairness, Human Resource Practices, employee perception,*

Date of Submission: 12-03-2018

Date of acceptance: 30-03-2018

I. Introduction

Justice as a concept is now seen to be very much subjective and socially constructed (Folger & Cropanzano,1998). This subjective sense of justice ,what is right or wrong is concerned with understanding of what people think is just or unjust, and how people formulate these fair or unfair judgments and rationalize their positive or negative action and behavior (Tyler et.al, 1991).Given the significance of these outcomes for workplace associations, it is not surprising that fairness is often something that individuals use to define their relations with employers. It was with this in mind that Greenberg (1987) coined the term ‘organizational justice’ which refers to theories of social and interpersonal fairness that may be applied to understanding behavior in organizations.

Organizations are complex mix of dynamic social interactions of employees’ and their reactions to Human Resource practices, systems and authorities. Since the employees are integral part of the organizational system, therefore they constantly review the organization procedures, policies, interactions and outcomes. This process of reviewing creates a perception of the process and outcomes as fair or not. The fairness of the processes and outcomes as perceived by an employee is known as organizational justice. Previous studies on justice in west have also found a significant relation between organizational justice and various organizational outcomes such as commitment, job satisfaction, extra role behaviors, motivation, citizenship behavior etc. (Folger & Konovsky,1989; Moorman, 1991; Colquitt et al.2001). But , justice in India has been seen as social justice only (Vidhu Verma, 2011;K. D Irani & Morris Silver,1995)and the area of organizational justice in organizational settings still remains unexplored. To overcome this limitation, we seek to understand organizational justice , which people use as a ‘**lens**’ to understand the various policies, processes and interactions in an organization.

Although a considerable attention has been paid to organisational justice concept, consequences and antecedents in the west but those findings cannot be generalized in India and hence calls for the positioning of justice in Indian organisations. As a part of this focus, the study reviews organizational justice critically and develop an understanding of the concept of organizational justice and aims at bringing changes in the values and systems of the Indian organisations. The initial approach taken to address this issue is through exploratory research and then extend the boundary to how does organizational justice vary across Indian organisations. Furthermore, we seek to develop a critical understanding of the linkages between different dimensions of organizational justice (distributive justice, Procedural justice, Interactional justice) and employees reactions to the same. This study is also an attempt to view organizational justice as a core value for an organization that affects the perceptions, understanding, behavior and performance of employees in the organization. It is

believed that if organisational justice is added as a value in the vision statement, it will set a dynamic view of the organization and will indicate code of conduct for employees.

Origins of Organisational Justice-

The story is just not very old. Greenberg in 1990 reported that early social justice theories (Krishnan. L, 1992) on organizations were derived to test principles of justice in general social interactions, not organizations in particular. The work of Plato and Aristotle in particular were of enormous historical importance in philosophy. But other philosophers like Rawls, Hobbes have been extremely influential in shaping the conceptual dynamics of organisational justice. Thus, these theories have not experienced much success while explaining various forms of behaviors in organisations. Justice as a concept is now seen to be very much subjective and socially constructed (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998).

This subjective sense of justice, what is right or wrong is concerned with understanding of what people think is just or unjust, and how people formulate these fair or unfair judgments and rationalize their positive or negative action and behavior (Tyler et al., 1997). Organizational justice focuses on the psychology of justice. Given the centrality of these outcomes for workplace relations, it is not surprising that fairness is often something that individuals use to define their relations with employers. It was with this in mind that Greenberg (1987) coined the term 'organizational justice'. It refers to theories of social and interpersonal fairness that may be applied to understanding behavior in organizations. Tyler in his interview stated that organizational justice unfolded in at least four waves

- 1) Emergence of Distributive Justice
- 2) Rise of Procedural Justice
- 3) Interactional justice
- 4) Integrative Justice

Research in this area of organizational justice spanned from 1940s to the 1970s and contemporary interest in the study of distributive justice can be traced back to the seminal work on relative deprivation by authors such as Wegener, B, 1991; Cropanzano and Randall, 1995. Organizational justice history has its roots in relative deprivation theory (RDT), therefore it becomes extremely important to discuss it, before we move to distributive justice.

Relative Deprivation Theory- RDT belongs to the social movement theory and was developed by sociologist Samuel A in 1949. His work on RDT brought a shift in focus from social reform to theory. According to RDT, individuals will feel dissatisfied if they recognize any unjust or unfavourable act in an organization. This discontentment will be followed by feelings of relative deprivation resulting in behavioral changes (anger, grievances, low morale, resentment etc.) Thus RDT emphasizes more on emotional responses. The relative deprivation theories took the following forms by explaining a) Every individual expects or anticipates some outcome b) Every individual compares it to some standard c) If individual outcome is less than his expectations, dissatisfaction occurs which takes the form of behavioral changes (Mark & Folger, 1984; Folger & Martin, 1986; Crosby, 1984). Scholars have questioned the link between relative deprivation theory and the social movements. Critics have also questioned about other forms of deprivation like self referenced relative deprivation, egoistic deprivation and fraternal deprivation. Relative deprivation theory does not talk about the rules for reference standards and how an individual sets these relative standards. Relative deprivation researchers failed to explain the referent standards which gave rise to organizational justice theories and its dimensions as shown in Figure 1 below:

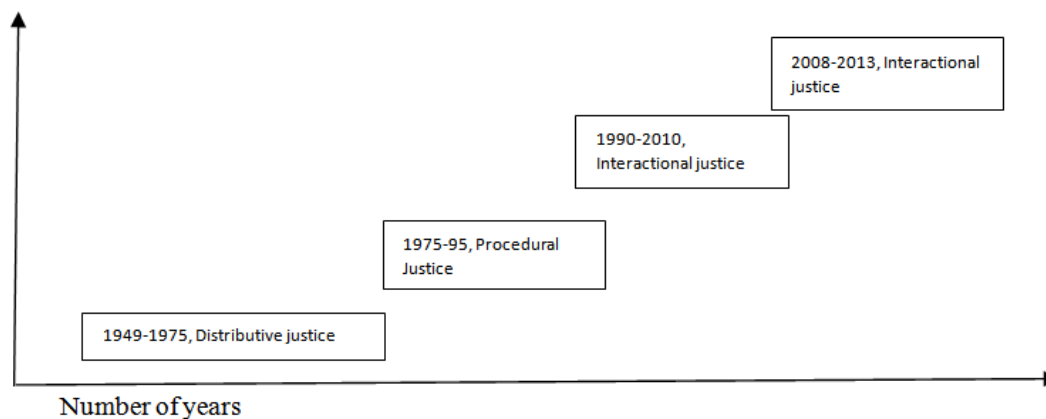


Figure:1, Waves of Organisational Justice

Source: Adapted from Talor et.al.,(1997)

Distributive justice- According to Tyler “Distributive justice was the beginning of organizational justice” and interest in the distributive justice has been drawn from the relative deprivation theories. Tyler coincided that Adams Equity theory was a major breakthrough in organizational research. Distributive justice spanned from 1950 till 1970’s, when Adam’s proposed Equity theory in 1965. It was one amongst the few justice theories that nurtured in the organizational settings. Adams equity theory elaborated on the idea of distributive justice proposed by Homan’s in 1961 and focused on the distribution of rewards and resources. Like Homans, he recognized the importance of social exchange relationships by focusing on inputs (time, effort, education, training etc.) and outputs (pay, recognition, rewards etc.) Adams (1965) postulated individuals base their evaluation of distributive justice not only on what they receive but on what they receive relative to some standard or referent. Equity theory generated lot of research and as Lind concisely put it “Justice was synonymous with Adams Equity Theory. After few years, an alternative version of equity theory was proposed by Walster & Berscheid; 1978 and distinguished between two forms of equity a)Actual Equity and b)Psychological equity. He further claims that such type of equity exists in underpaid and over paid employees. But, today Walster’s theory receives very less attention by organizational justice researchers.

Although there were many critics to Adams theory also who questioned that how can we define inputs and outcomes as they are subjective constructs. Moreover how much contribution each individual is making towards a certain output is also controversial. Are the decisions taken for distribution of resources ethical and based only on inputs made? Folger also criticized Adams Equity theory and claimed that he only employed a one dimensional construct of distributive justice and also ignored the underpay condition of equity. Various other social psychological theorists (Deutsch, 1983, Leventhal, 1976) have indicated that equity is one of many values that underlie systems of distributive justice. The concept of distributive justice has focused primarily on the reactions to perceived inequity but ignores the other dimensions of justice , which led to the focus on procedural justice. This also shifted the focus to other areas of justice like decision making processes and role of allocators in distribution of rewards. Some researchers argued that it is not appropriate to consider equity as the only solution to distributive problem which led to the development of other forms of justice.

However, if we look at the concept of distributive justice in Indian organisations and how it varies between private and public sector, consider the imbalance that exists between input and output. To determine distributive justice, individuals turn to standard distributive norms of their group. Does organisations have laid those distributive norms of equity, equality, need , power and responsibility ? Is the distributive decision ethical?

Procedural Justice- Organisational researchers in early 1970’s claimed that an individual also gets influenced by the way allocation decisions are made in an organization.(Deutsch, 1975; Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Leventhal, 1976a, 1980). This idea has been referred to as procedural justice - the perceived fairness of the policies and procedures used to make decisions in the workplace (Greenberg, 1990a). It gained importance from mid 1970’s and continued through 1990’s and shifted the focus to the procedures used in allocating the resources or rewards.

The pioneer work done by Thibaut and Walker in 1975 introduced the procedural justice construct in 1975 and based their arguments on two criteria’s a) process control and b) decision control .They claimed that individuals perceive an outcome to be just or fair if an individual has an ability to control the process and have a say in the determination of an outcome. Process control was identified as an important determinant of procedural justice in their study. Later, Leventhal in 1976 considered distributive justice from the perspective of an individual making the allocation. As a critique to Adams Equity Theory , Leventhal (1976a) developed a justice judgment model to explain perceptions of justice. Leventhal (1976b) specified certain criteria’s and norms for distribution of outcomes and claimed that people judge their deservingness by three different justice rules: (a) the contribution rule, (b) the equality rule, and (c) the needs rule. The contribution rule dictates that every individual should get on the basis of his contribution towards the goal. Equality rule says that everyone should get similar rewards or outcomes irrespective of their efforts or contribution. And a needs rule says that individuals with more needs should receive higher outcomes. Though the distributive justice has provided an insight into organizational processes but has failed to answer the concerns about fairness in the processes. Leventhal defines it as “individuals’ perception of the procedures that regulates the distributive process”.Leventhal thus proposed six justice rules for assessing perceptions of procedural fairness (see table 1 for brief summary)

Table No-2: Procedural Justice Rules

Justice rule	Operational rule descriptor
The Consistency Rule	This rule dictates that allocative procedures must be applied consistently across persons and time. Leventhal gives the example of a situation where, when gathering information about job applicants, some are given more difficult aptitude tests than others
The Bias Suppression Rule	Decision makers must be neutral and avoid self interest of ideological

	preconceptions
The Accuracy Rule	This rule dictates that it is necessary to base the allocative process on as much good information and informed opinion as possible. Information must be gathered and processed with minimum error
The Correctability Rule	This dictates that opportunities must exist to modify or reverse decisions made e.g. appeal procedures exist for correcting bad outcomes.
The Representation Rule	This rule dictates that all subgroups in the population affected by the decision are heard from and their basic concerns and values must be considered during the allocation process. For example, decision making bodies or committees should include representatives of important subgroups.
The Ethicality Rule	This predicts that the procedures uphold personal standards of ethics and morality of the individual.

Source: Adapted from Leventhal (1980)

According to Leventhal (1980), different rule might apply in different situations .The literature so far maintains that individuals evaluate justice on the basis of outcomes received (distributive justice) and the process they experience (procedural justice).However, individuals are also sensitive to two other focal determinants'(Colquitt, et.al.,2003) structural and the social determinants . These deal with the social aspects of procedures like environment, relationship among individuals etc which were found to be equally important (Bies, 1987; Bies and Moag, 1986; Greenberg, 1993).The following section deals with the third wave of organisational justice, termed interactional justice.

Interactional Justice- Bies and Moag (1986) suggested that any allocation decision (distributive justice) is an arrangement of three events: (1) a procedure to be followed ; (2) the interaction between allocator and allocation recipient(s); and (3) the outcome itself . During the course of events the environment and social sensitivity plays a major role. Individuals are sensitive towards the way they are treated and the message is communicated to them during the interaction phase. Bies (1986) reported that candidates who were not selected for the job perceived those outcomes as fair when authorities explained the process and showed concern. Mikula, Petri,& Tanzer,1990 and Colquitt et al (2001)have supported the above fact and claimed that honesty, respect and politeness increases interpersonal justice perceptions. In a field experiment, Greenberg (1994), explained the interactional justice through a study in a company where smoking was banned for workers. He found that employees accepted the ban and perceived it as fair and just because higher levels of sensitivity were shown towards them.

In the late 1990s, researchers debated, if interactional justice was a distinct justice construct or made up of interpersonal and informational justice. Some researchers claimed that interactional justice is a social component of procedural justice (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997). Even Greenberg in 1993 used interpersonal justice to describe social aspects of distributive justice and informational justice to describe social component of procedural justice. However, Bies and Moag (1986) treated interactional justice as separate justice construct from distributive and procedural justice. Colquitt (2001) measurement model results supported their argument and suggested Intercational justice is a separate justice construct and has two components interpersonal justice and informational justice.

Integrative Justice- This is another stream of justice, which combined the effects of all the three dimensions of justice and gained dominance in 21st century. Colquitt et al. (2006) suggested fourth wave called integrative justice which was running parallel to the interactional justice. Organisational researchers have tested the various moderating effects on justice which paved the way for multidimensional concepts. This is apparent from the above discussion on literature of organizational justice. Greenberg in 1987 distinguished proactive and reactive approaches and content versus process theories to explain justice. The major process theories which fall at various points on this continuum are fairness theory, and fairness heuristic theory. Fairness Theory integrates equity theory, relative deprivation and Leventhal's (1980) six justice rules along with relational aspects of justice. The process theories above provided key insights into how individuals formulate justice judgements and the content models of organisational justice explain the motives for why workers are concerned with organisational justice.

Table 2: key justice components and theories

Dimensions of justice	Components and theories
Distributive justice	Relative Deprivation Theory (Crosby, 1984; Martin, 1981) Adams Equity Theory (Adams, 1963, 1965) Walster et al. : Equity theory revised (1973)
Procedural Justice	Six Justice Rules (Leventhal, 1980) Process control(Thibaut & Walker, 1975) Voice in Decision making (Folger,1977)
Interactional Justice	Informational justice &

	Interpersonal Justice (Bies & Moag,1986)
Integrative Justice	Moderation effects Linkage between different dimensions of Justice and emotional responses Content and Process theories (Lind & Tyler;1988 ,Lind ;2001)

Source- Adapted from Chan, M. (2000: 71) based on information from Folger and Cropanzano (1998) and Cropanzano et al (2001).

II. Discussion

As the previous section shows, there has been a proliferation of studies on organisational justice in recent years focusing on differing theoretical perspectives. Number of debates can be found within the literature including construct discrimination and distinctiveness. Justice researchers have also take into account the effects of moderators and mediators in the justice perceptions and employee reactions. Literature has identified environmental and individual situational factors (Nowakowski & Conlon, 2005) responsible for employee reactions to the perceived justice or injustice. This implies that perception towards justice changes when these factors vary (Nowakowski & Conlon, 2005). These perceptions are found to influence the behavior of an individual which is responsible for employee’s own performance. The presumed link between perception of procedural justice and discretionary behaviors was recently affirmed in the literature (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Hence, it becomes extremely important for an organization to control the behavior of an employee shaped by these justice perceptions through value based systems and processes embedded in the organization value statements

When an employee perceives that the decisions, outcomes (distributive justice), systems, procedures (Procedural justice), interpersonal treatment (Interactional justice) as unjust or unfair, moral outrage, anger, resentment are the natural reactions. (Beugre,2005; Nowakowski & Conlon, 2005). This influences the behavior and leads to negative employee reactions at work place. Scholars have focused more on employee negative reactions as they are harmful and contagious at work place. The presumed link between perception of procedural justice and discretionary behaviors has also been affirmed in the literature e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector,2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Colquitt et al. (2001) meta analytic review focused on most commonly researched nine different outcomes: evaluation of authority ,outcome satisfaction, negative reactions, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, trust, organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB’s); withdrawal, and performance , summary of which is shown below (Table -3)

Table no-3: Employee level outcomes of justice

Employee outcome	Forms of Justice
Satisfaction	Distributive justice
Job satisfaction	Procedural Interactional justice (interpersonal & informational Justice)
Commitment	Distributive Procedural
Trust	Procedural Interactional (interpersonal and informational)
Evaluation of authority	Distributive Procedural
Organisation commitment behaviours (OCB)	Procedural
Withdrawal	Distributive Procedural Interactional
Negative behaviour	Interactional
Performance	Procedural

Source- Colquitt et al. (2001)

Based on our discussion above and looking at the general employee behavioral problem in the organisations, a considerable gap has been observed between management, employees and their demands. As a result, decisions are not always accepted and employees show tenacity during implementation of such decisions. It has been reported by researchers that favourable decision outcomes report positive job outcomes (e.g., Kim, Ok, & Lee, 2009; McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). .Organisations deals with the employee perceptions of injustice in different ways through explanations, corrections, and excuses which shows their intention of pacifying the perceived injustice. The impact of “perceived injustice” on an employee can be mitigated by including organizational justice as an important component of value based organisations .There is a need of value based

organisations for employees in the system to create an environment of trust and mutual co-operation. This fair or just treatment will help in shaping positive employee behaviors, make future events more predictable, reduce uncertainty, increase performance levels as well.

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IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) is UGC approved Journal with SI. No. 4481, Journal no. 46879.

Shalini Sahni*. " Reinventing Organisational Justice In The Age of Disruption." *IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) 20.3 (2018): 01-07.*