



ARCHIVED - Archiving Content

Archived Content

Information identified as archived is provided for reference, research or recordkeeping purposes. It is not subject to the Government of Canada Web Standards and has not been altered or updated since it was archived. Please contact us to request a format other than those available.

ARCHIVÉE - Contenu archivé

Contenu archivé

L'information dont il est indiqué qu'elle est archivée est fournie à des fins de référence, de recherche ou de tenue de documents. Elle n'est pas assujettie aux normes Web du gouvernement du Canada et elle n'a pas été modifiée ou mise à jour depuis son archivage. Pour obtenir cette information dans un autre format, veuillez communiquer avec nous.

This document is archival in nature and is intended for those who wish to consult archival documents made available from the collection of Public Safety Canada.

Some of these documents are available in only one official language. Translation, to be provided by Public Safety Canada, is available upon request.

Le présent document a une valeur archivistique et fait partie des documents d'archives rendus disponibles par Sécurité publique Canada à ceux qui souhaitent consulter ces documents issus de sa collection.

Certains de ces documents ne sont disponibles que dans une langue officielle. Sécurité publique Canada fournira une traduction sur demande.



Organisational justice: Implications for police and emergency service leadership

Victoria Herrington and Karl Roberts

Introduction

Organisational justice relates to the way individuals make judgments about *fairness* and *outcomes* when considering the way they are treated in the workplace. Organisational justice is particularly concerned with the implications of justice judgments on staff attitudes, staff retention, workplace relations, productivity and performance. The organisational justice concept is comprised of four justice facets that influence an individual's perceptions about fairness in different ways. These are:

- distributive justice,
- procedural justice,
- interpersonal justice, and
- informational justice (Colquitt, 2001).

Distributive justice is the perceived fairness in the distribution of outcomes (e.g. pay, conditions, and responsibility) within the workplace. Thus individuals are concerned with whether they receive their *just deserts*.

Procedural justice is the extent that workplace procedures are perceived as being fair. Typically fair procedures are characterised as being free from bias, and being applied consistently between different people over time, with decision makers using accurate and timely information to make their decisions. This facet also places great store on the availability of an organisational mechanism to correct decisions that are flawed.

Interpersonal justice refers to the perceived fairness of the interpersonal treatment an individual receives from managers and supervisors. This is typically characterised as being treated with politeness, dignity and respect, and providing the opportunity for an individual to have a *voice* in an interaction, such that they have an opportunity to present their views. And finally **informational justice** refers to the adequacy of the information presented to describe and justify a decision in the workplace, and the quality of the explanations presented for various decisions. Importantly, and as we discuss in greater detail later in this paper, there is evidence to suggest that even when outcomes hold a negative conclusion for an individual, if these four facets are present and met, then the negative reaction that one might expect from an individual receiving an adverse outcome does not eventuate (e.g. Brockner et al., 1995). The purpose of this paper is to consolidate the body of work on organisational

justice with particular reference to policing, and to summarise from this the implications for police and emergency service organisations and their leaders.

What does the research literature tell us about organisational justice?

Much of the literature on organisational justice has been undertaken in domains other than policing and emergency services, and in a recent review of the literature we found only seven articles relating specifically to organisational justice and the police, and none relating to emergency services. In the UK, Myhill and Bradford (2013) undertook a study that concluded that when organisational justice was experienced by police officers in one force, it was associated with positive attitudes towards assisting members of the public.

In India, Srivastava (2009) collected data from a sample of 270 police and found that organisational justice and organisational support were positively related to well-being, whilst Crow et al., (2012) in South Korea noted that police officers' organisational justice perceptions were positively related to their level of organisational commitment and job satisfaction. Wolfe and Piquero (2011) in the US found that police officers who viewed the

“Organisational justice is related to lower levels of engagement in misconduct”

managerial practices of senior officers as just and fair (organisationally just) were less likely to support behaviours such as adherence to a code of silence to protect other police officers engaged in misdeeds, and less likely to believe that police corruption in pursuit of noble causes was justified. They also found that perceptions of organisational justice were associated with lower levels of engagement in misconduct.

Taking a different tack, Noblet et al. (2009) drew on self-report data from 582 Australian police officers to assess a link between organisational justice perceptions and job stress. They found only weak support for the

importance of interpersonal justice (one facet of organisational justice), and concluded that much of job stress was instead accounted for by job characteristics such as job demand, job control and social support. At the other end of the stress scale, Farmer, Beehr and Love (2003) found that self-reported job satisfaction of undercover police officers was related to perceptions of procedural and broader organisational justice. And De Angelis and Kupchil (2007) found that police officers reported greater satisfaction with a police force’s complaints process if they felt that the investigation of a complaint against them had been carried out in a procedurally fair manner, regardless of the outcome.

Whilst research on organisational justice in policing is relatively sparse, much more work has been undertaken in non-police fields. One of the leading authors here is Jason Colquitt, who has undertaken two meta-analyses of the organisational justice literature to date (Colquitt et al., 2001; 2013). A meta-analysis is essentially a statistical literature review, in which the findings from a number of studies are grouped together and re-analysed to strengthen the conclusions that can be drawn.

Both meta-analyses show that in general, when people interact with those in authority in the workplace - such as managers - they have powerful expectations about how they ought to be treated, and that these expectations are consistent with the four components of organisational justice described earlier (i.e. distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice). Individuals have been found more satisfied with the outcomes received from their organisation when they believe these to be a fair reflection of the effort they exert, were found to be more committed to an organisation as a result, and less likely to disobey rules and regulations or to withdraw their efforts (i.e. engage in counter-workplace activities) (Tang & Sarsfield-Baldwin, 1996; Mcfarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Colquitt et al., 2001).

Experiences of organisational justice have been found to be associated with:

- job satisfaction
- organisational commitment
- trust of management
- job performance
- productivity
- extra role behaviour
- legitimacy

Reflecting the work in policing noted earlier, experiences of procedural justice were found to be associated with job satisfaction, commitment to the organisation, trust of management, job performance, and productivity (Colquitt et

al., 2001, 2013), as well as extra role behaviour – that is, the

social niceties of being friendly and helpful, and undertaking tasks beyond one’s immediate remit - and an acceptance of even unpopular decisions (Organ, 1997; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Husted, 1998).

During interactions with superiors in which experiences fall short of an individual’s organisational justice expectations, there are adverse consequences for their attitudes and behaviours, which impact negatively on a range of important workplace outcomes such as

“Organisational justice involves broader systemic considerations such as the fairness of rules, regulations, operating procedures and the clarity and fairness of directions given”

productivity, rule breaking and workplace harmony (Colquitt et al., 2001). In such circumstances it appears that individuals are more likely to override organisational goals and pursue their own interests instead (French & Raven, 1959; Tyler, 2006; Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002; Tekleab et al., 2005).

In contrast, where superiors use fair management methods consistent with organisational justice expectations they are perceived as having greater *legitimacy* - that is individuals are likely to accept the manager’s right to hold authority over them as subordinates (Tyler, 2006) - and employees are more likely to believe that a manager’s cultural norms and rules should be followed (French & Raven, 1959; Schein, 1993).

There are a number of psychological mechanisms that are implicated in the development of organisational justice, including the perception of trust in an authority, and an individual’s sense of their identity (Colquitt et al., 2012; Tyler & Blader, 2003). Rather than deal with these intricacies here we refer readers to Roberts and Herrington (2013) for a review of these in a policing context.

Does organisational justice fit with the nature of police and emergency service work?

Some might argue that organisational justice is simply not a good fit for policing and emergency services, although we would suggest that the research done in the policing field to date and reported above effectively counters this. Nonetheless it is important to note that unlike other organisations, many police officers and emergency service personnel do not work in an office or

under the constant supervision of a supervisor, and often have a great deal of discretion in their work. This presents challenges for the effective implementation of organisational justice, especially the interpersonal justice elements, as it may be difficult for supervisors to communicate these aspects of *justice* on a day to day basis. However organisational justice is not only about the nature of interpersonal day to day interactions, which form just one part of the concept, and other aspects of organisational justice – notably procedural justice – exist even in the absence of frequent meetings between supervisors/leaders and staff. This is because organisational justice involves broader systemic considerations such as the fairness of rules, regulations, operating procedures and the clarity and fairness of directions given.

Indeed supportive management that accepts an officer's discretion and does not insist on close supervision may in fact contribute to the officer's sense of justice. Managers and leaders can set the *climate* of the workplace and, in spite of often having only fleeting direct contact with those on the front line or elsewhere in the organisation, can influence the workplace environment, and with that create a work context infused with organisational justice principles. To say the same thing another way, even where there is little contact with large numbers of staff, managers (particularly senior managers) can influence the development of policies and practices, and can ensure that the organisation is aligned with organisational justice in mind.

Another potential challenge for policing and emergency service organisations considering the utility of an organisational justice framework is the bread and butter of these organisations, the frequent attendance at highly volatile emergency situations. In such contexts fast decision making and actions are crucial. In these circumstances the opportunity for managers to behave in what we might call an overtly organisationally just manner may be limited. For example, there may be limited time for managers to explain the reasoning for their decisions, to involve subordinates in decision making, or for outcomes such as specific tasks to be distributed fairly.

In many situations this may also not be desirable for the subordinate, who may prefer to have clear direction from their senior officer, and may expect the adoption of a traditional command-and-control approach. In such situations the operational debrief is one space that provides an opportunity for managers to listen to staff and provide feedback about an event afterwards and explain reasoning behind the more controversial or opaque decisions that might have been taken.

Of course whether managers feel free to do this in a resolutely hierarchical organisation is another matter, although we believe that there is evidence that such an approach can work well in practice (see for example Schafer (2013) for an analysis of August Vollmer's Friday Crab Club, which provided a regular opportunity for workplace gripes and grievances to be heard in the spirit of learning and reconciliation). Importantly, emergency and crisis situations do not happen in isolation, and do not characterise every interaction between an officer and his/her superior. More mundane day to day interactions provide ample opportunity to deal with members in *just* ways, and have the capacity to *set up* front line staff for more effective working when a crisis eventuates. After all, if organisational justice gives rise to greater trust of managers, and trust in management means that subordinates view managers as having greater legitimacy and are more likely to accept and behave in accordance with instructions, the upshot is that managers may be more effectively able to deploy their 'authority' when it is called for in emergency situations because the conditions exist for this to be acceptable to those over who authority is exercised (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Implications for police and emergency service leaders

The strength of the literature on the benefits of organisational justice, both within and outside of a policing and emergency service context, is good, at least so far, and this leads us to ask what the implications for leaders in such organisations are. Importantly we should start with a recognition that thus far we have spoken about the relationship between managers and subordinates, rather than leaders. There is a clear difference in the 'reach' of manager and leader roles, of course, with managers responsible for enacting the system, and leaders responsible for - amongst other things - creating (or at least maintaining) the system in the first place. Is organisational justice the responsibility of managers or leaders then? We would argue that it is the responsibility of both.

True, managers are likely to have greatest influence over perceptions of interpersonal and informational justice, through their day to day dealings with officers at the pointy end of the organisation. And leaders are most likely to set the conditions for procedural justice through the design and implementation of systems and processes, as well as being custodians - arguably - of the organisational values that give rise to an individual's sense of whether their entitlements have been met (distributive justice). But there is significant overlap, and the research on organisational justice undertaken to date has not differentiated between organisational justice actions (or perceptions) at various

ranks in an organisation (which is a point we return to later), instead concentrating on the importance of the position of authority.

As such, and as we have noted, the literature suggests that organisations where those in authority treat subordinates in an organisationally just manner see positive outcomes. These include heightened productivity, positive workplace relations, extra-role behaviour ('going the extra mile'), a reduction in absenteeism and negative workplace behaviour, and even a reduction in corrupt practices. Thus managers *and* leaders, both of whom are in positions of authority, would be well advised to adopt strategies that are consistent with the characteristics of organisational justice.

But how might this be achieved? Wolfe and Piquero (2011) provide some concrete suggestions for police managers (and leaders) that would enhance organisational justice, and we believe these carry across into other emergency services. They suggest that:

- managers should ensure that promotions and special assignments are fairly allocated (distributive and procedural justice)
- officers should understand why such decisions are made (informational justice)
- clear explanations should be given for any such disciplinary actions (informational justice)
- agency policies, rules and regulations should be clearly specified and managers need to ensure that officers have adequate information about what they are (informational justice)
- where officers are suspected of wrong doing disciplinary actions should be fairly distributed (distributive justice), managers should carry out procedurally fair investigations (procedural justice) and officers should be provided information that clearly explains the processes and respective responsibilities (informational justice)
- managers should ensure that agency policies, rules, and regulations allow the goals of justice to be accomplished (procedural justice), and
- managers should show subordinate officers that the agency cares for their well-being and that their opinions are taken seriously. Where possible subordinates should be given the opportunity for input into the decision making process (interpersonal justice).

It seems to us that much of what organisational justice precepts and Wolfe and Piquero are suggesting is the basis of decent human conduct, and much already occurs naturally in the workplace through the actions of thoughtful leaders and managers and a benevolent, or at least benign, organisation. Nonetheless we suggest that

there is merit in leaders in police and emergency services actively (re)considering which activities currently undertaken as part of established practice engender the principles of organisational justice. Once identified these already established activities could be *refreshed* through the lens of organisational justice, so that their success might be better identified and measured through metrics with the outcomes of organisational justice (e.g. productivity, extra role behaviour and job satisfaction) in mind.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of research examining organisational justice and in doing so has considered the implications of this body of work for policing and emergency services. We have noted that organisationally just workplaces experience greater cooperation between staff, positive attitudes towards managers, the workplace, and the public, greater productivity and less counter productive behaviour.

Organisational justice is relatively easy to achieve, essentially requiring those in authority to treat others with respect and dignity, take account of their needs where possible, provide an opportunity for them to have a voice in the interaction, ensuring that outcomes are distributed fairly, and making sure the systems in an organisation support such activities.

Such actions are in line with what we know about good police and emergency service leadership, which have been reported in an earlier publication in this series (Pearson-Goff and Herrington, 2013), and on paper, should not be too difficult to achieve. Nonetheless workplaces are still characterised by organisationally unjust practices, and disgruntled employees as a result. So despite the theory the reality seems somewhat further away.

Despite the work on organisational justice to date there remain a number of unanswered questions. Is organisational justice really possible in organisations so often characterised by command-and-control management? Are there other factors that mediate perceptions of organisational justice, such as rank or gender? Does one's own experience of organisational justice beget one to behave in organisational just ways (and, of course, vice versa)? And how might we best encourage organisational justice principles in practice? Is training in justice precepts sufficient, or is something else - perhaps the development of accountability mechanisms - required?

It is glib, but accurate, to conclude with the need for further research, but in doing so we call for this research to

concentrate on the realities of the police and emergency service organisation, and to be translated into practical advice for practitioners at all levels, to enable them to build a better workplace, and to exemplify justice in their interactions with others.

Future Research

The AIPM is engaged in a piece of research looking at the impact of organisational justice on institutional legitimacy, police engagement with communities, and officer's self assessments of their own legitimacy (referred to as power-holder legitimacy, and hypothesised to have an impact on the way officers engage with their communities). We are working with Birkbeck, University of London, the University of Western Sydney, The University of Cambridge and Oxford University on this research. We are looking for constables and sergeants to complete a short (15-20 minute) questionnaire. If you are interested in your force taking part in this research please contact Victoria Herrington at vherrington@aipm.gov.au or by phone on 0299344802 to discuss

References

- Brockner, J., Wiesenfeld, B. M., & Martin, C. L. (1995). Decision Frame, Procedural Justice, and Survivors' Reactions to Job Layoffs. *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 63(1), 59-68.
- Cohen-Charash, Y. & Spector, P. E. (2001). The role of justice in organisations: A meta-analysis. *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86(2), 278-321.
- Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organisational justice: A construct validation of a measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 386-400.
- Colquitt, J. A., Conlon, D. E., Wesson, M. J., Porter, C. O., & Ng, K. Y. (2001). Justice at the millennium: a meta-analytic review of 25 years of organisational justice research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(3), 425.
- Colquitt, J. A., LePine, J. A., Piccolo, R. F., Zapata, C. P., & Rich, B. L. (2012). Explaining the justice-performance relationship: trust as exchange deepener or trust as uncertainty reducer? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 97(1), 1.
- Colquitt, J. A., Scott, B. A., Rodell, J. B., Long, D. M., Zapata, C. P., Conlon, D. E., & Wesson, M. J. (2013). Justice at the millennium, a decade later: A meta-analytic test of social exchange and affect-based perspectives. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 98: 199-236.
- Crow M. S., Lee, C., Joo, J. (2012) Organisational justice and organisational commitment among South Korean police officers: An investigation of job satisfaction as a mediator. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 35(2): 402-423.
- De Angelis, J., & Kupchik, A. (2007). Citizen oversight, procedural justice, and officer perceptions of the complaint investigation process. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 30(4), 651-671.
- Farmer, S. J., Beehr, T. A., & Love, K. G. (2003). Becoming an undercover police officer: A note on fairness perceptions, behavior, and attitudes. *Journal of Organisational Behavior*, 24(4), 373-387.
- French, J. R., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. *Studies in Social Power*, 150, 167.
- McFarlin, D. B., & Sweeney, P. D. (1992). Research Notes. Distributive and procedural justice as predictors of satisfaction with personal and organisational outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 35(3), 626-637.
- Myhill, A. & Bradford, B. (2013) Overcoming cop culture? Organisational justice and police officers' attitudes toward the public. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 36(2): 5-5.
- Noblet A. J., Rodwell, J. J. & Allisey, A. F. (2009) Police stress: the role of the psychological contract and perceptions of fairness. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 32(4): 613-630.
- Organ, D. W. (1997). Organisational citizenship behavior: It's construct clean-up time. *Human Performance*, 10(2), 85-97.
- Pearson-Goff, M. and Herrington, V. (2013) *Police Leaders and leadership development: A systematic literature review*. Sydney: AIPM.
- Roberts, K.A. and Herrington, V. (2013) Organisational and procedural justice: A review of the literature and its implications for policing. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 8(2), 115-130.
- Rupp, D. E., & Cropanzano, R. (2002) The mediating effects of social exchange relationships in predicting workplace outcomes from multifoci organisational justice. *Organisational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 89(1), 925-946.
- Schafer, J. (2013) The Role of Trust and Transparency in the Pursuit of Procedural and Organisational Justice. *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, 8(2), 131-143.
- Schein, E. H. (1993) On dialogue, culture, and organisational learning. *Organisational Dynamics*, 22(2), 40-51.
- Srivastava, S. (2009) Explorations in police organisation: an Indian context. *International Journal of Police Science & Management*. 11(3), 255-273.
- Tang, T. L. P., & Sarsfield-Baldwin, L. J. (1996) Distributive and procedural justice as related to satisfaction and commitment. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 61, 25-31.
- Tekleab, A. G., Takeuchi, R., & Taylor, M. S. (2005) Extending the Chain of Relationships among Organisational Justice, Social Exchange, and Employee Reactions: The Role of Contract Violations. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(1), 146-157.
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57, 375-400.
- Tyler T.R. (2005) Policing in black and white: Ethnic group differences in trust and confidence in the police. *Police Quarterly*, 8(3), 322-342.
- Tyler, T. R., & Blader, S. L. (2003) The group engagement model: Procedural justice, social identity, and cooperative behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 7(4), 349-361.
- Wolfe, S. & Piquero, A. (2011) Organisational Justice and Police Misconduct. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*. 38(4), 332-353.

Note:

A special edition of the Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, edited by the authors, explores the extant literature on organisational justice and procedural justice in greater detail. It draws on the proceedings of an international colloquium on the topic held at the AIPM in 2012. Contact the AIPM library for further details about this special edition.

About the Authors:

Dr Victoria Herrington is the Director of Research and Learning at the AIPM.

Professor Karl Roberts is Chair of Policing and Criminal Justice at the University of Western Sydney and Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Massachusetts.