

**Perspectives on Organisational Justice: Concept clarification, social context integration,  
time and links with morality**

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## **Perspectives on Organisational Justice: Concept clarification, social context integration, time and links with morality**

### ***Summary:***

Organisational justice is concerned with people's fairness perceptions in organisations, and has been a popular field of study in the social sciences for at least 25 years. This paper reviews the core concepts, models and questions of organisational justice research. Four research areas that are particularly critical for the future of the field will be highlighted: concept clarification, social context integration, time and links with morality. These areas have received increased attention lately, but there are still relatively few empirical studies and theoretical frameworks that grapple with these issues. Concept clarification is vital for improved consistency of the field, and internal validity of studies. Situating organisational justice in social contexts and in time will be crucial to improve external validity and the useability of organisational justice findings in organisations. Understanding the links between morality and justice at an individual, and at the organisational and societal levels is necessary if justice researchers want to live up to the promise of their field for society. For each of these four areas, recent developments will be reviewed and avenues for future research discussed.

## **Introduction**

Organisational justice is concerned with people's fairness perceptions in their employment relationship. Over the last 25 years, organisational justice has become one of the most popular research areas in organisational behaviour, and has contributed to our understanding of people's experiences and reactions in work contexts (Colquitt *et al.* 2005b). Justice perceptions have been shown to have effects on people's motivation, well-being, performance, attitudes, behaviours and other outcomes relevant for organisations and organisational members (Folger and Cropanzano 1998). Since a wave of reviews and meta-analyses of justice in 2001 (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt *et al.* 2001; Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a; Cropanzano *et al.* 2001b), the face of organisational justice has changed again, and many of these changes have been reported in the recent handbook of organisational justice (Colquitt *et al.* 2005a). As pointed out in previous reviews, there is still a maze of ideas within organisational justice, and it can be difficult to identify the major issues and directions within this maze (Cropanzano and Greenberg 1997). In this review, I will argue that four areas of recent research interest are particularly critical for the future of the field: concept clarification, the integration of social context, understanding justice dynamics over time, and the links between organisational justice and morality. Before discussing in more depth why these areas are important, what our current state of knowledge is, and how research and theory could be developed in these areas, I will give a brief general overview of the field of organisational justice. This brief overview firstly introduces what organisational justice is, then reviews current theories of organisational justice, and finally presents the effects of justice.

## **What is Organisational Justice? Definition and Dimensions**

The social science definition of organisational justice is based on people's perceptions, such that an act is just because someone perceives it to be just. This differs from philosophical justice concepts where an act is just when it complies with a normative ethical/philosophical system. In philosophy and ethics, different normative rule systems determine what is just or unjust (Colquitt *et al.* 2001). While organisational justice needs to be distinguished from the philosophical justice concept, it remains related to the field of normative justice theories in various ways. (For an early review, see Greenberg and Bies 1992).

“At its most general level, organizational justice is an area of psychological inquiry that focuses on perceptions of fairness in the workplace. It is the psychology of justice applied to organizational settings” (Byrne and Cropanzano 2001: 4). The organisational justice framework helps to investigate individuals' experience of different aspects of their employment. While the first contributions centred around the perceived fairness of outcomes only (distributive justice), further new dimensions were added, including the fairness of the procedures used to determine outcomes (procedural justice), respectful and sensitive treatment (interpersonal justice), and adequate and sufficient communication (informational justice) (see Folger and Cropanzano 1998). The terms ‘justice’ and ‘fairness’ are used interchangeably in this field (see for example Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; French 1964; Sheppard *et al.* 1992).

Organisational justice as a field in social science is rooted in a few seminal papers in the 1960s, focusing on the equitable distribution of outcomes in social interactions (Adams 1965; Blau 1964; Homans 1961). The term ‘organisational justice’ was first used by French in 1964 to refer in general to fairness issues in personnel management (French 1964), but it was Greenberg who first used the term specifically to refer to people's *perceptions* of fairness

(Greenberg 1987). In the recently published handbook of organisational justice, the history of justice is categorised into the distributive, procedural, interactional and integrative “waves” (Colquitt *et al.* 2005b), which are closely aligned with the introduction of different justice dimensions. The following sections give an overview of the dimensions of organisational justice that are commonly distinguished today:

### *Distributive Justice*

Distributive justice is the perceived fairness of outcome distributions (Adams 1965; Leventhal 1976a). Typical outcomes that are distributed in the general employment context are, for example, pay, benefits or redundancies. According to distributive justice research, a distribution is perceived to be fair if it is consistent with chosen norms of allocation.

Early contributions focused on the equity norm of allocation, according to which outcomes should be distributed in proportion to merit (Homans 1961). Adams (1965) formalised equity in exchange relationships in his “equity theory” which posits that people compare their own input/outcome ratio to the other person’s input/outcome ratio. If the ratios are unequal, then inequity is perceived. A person who perceives their own ratio to be lower than the “just ratio” is predicted to feel guilty; a person who perceives their own ratio to be higher is predicted to feel angry. People strive to remove the unpleasant state of inequity, either by altering inputs or outcomes, by cognitive distortion of inputs or outcomes, by leaving the exchange relationship, by altering the other’s inputs or outcomes, or by changing the object of comparison.

Subsequently, other distribution rules such as equality and need were introduced (e.g., Deutsch 1975; Leventhal 1976b; Sampson 1975). The equality rule defines the same outcome for all as fair. A need-based allocation distributes outcomes proportionate to the need of individuals. Lerner (1974) pointed out that different types of relationships call for different rules of distribution. The rule of equality is often used among friends, while the rule

of need is more likely to be used in close relationships, where people identify and have empathy with each other. Individual rules may be more or less influential depending on context, goals and motives, and a number of rules could be considered simultaneously (Leventhal 1976a).

### *Procedural Justice*

The second category of fairness is procedural justice, which refers to the fairness of the process that leads to outcomes. This dimension was introduced by Thibaut and Walker (1975), who conducted their research in courtroom settings and distinguished the fairness of the verdict from the fairness of the process leading to the verdict. They investigated the role of process control (being able to voice one's opinion during the procedure) and decision control (the ability to influence the outcome). In simulated dispute-resolution procedures, process control was shown to increase acceptance and fairness perception of verdicts, even if the outcome could not be influenced. This finding has become known as the "voice phenomenon". Consequently, procedural justice was transferred into a non-legal context by Leventhal (1980). Leventhal identified six criteria of perceived procedural fairness. Typically, procedures are perceived to be "fair" when they are consistent across people and over time, free of bias, accurate (relying on good information), contain mechanisms for correcting wrong decisions, adhere to prevalent conceptions of morality, and are "representative" (i.e., take into account opinions of all groups affected), which implies process control and decision control. The voice phenomenon has been confirmed in a number of contexts, such as citizen encounters with police officers, or students and their teachers (Lind and Tyler 1988), and performance appraisals (Greenberg 1990). This research relied largely on survey methods.

The introduction of procedural justice led to researchers starting to employ a model consisting of two dimensions of fairness: distributive and procedural.

### *Interactional Justice*

Interactional justice was introduced as a third dimension of justice by Bies and colleagues (Bies and Moag 1986; Bies and Shapiro 1987; Bies and Shapiro 1988; Bies *et al.* 1988), who claimed that people also judge the fairness of the interpersonal treatment they receive as organisational procedures are enacted (Bies and Moag, 1986). Former models had either confounded the issue of formal procedures with concerns about interpersonal treatment, or neglected interactional aspects altogether (Bies and Moag, 1986; Bies, 1987). Early research suggested four central concerns of interactional fairness: truthfulness (honesty), justification (explanations), respect (politeness) and propriety (no prejudicial statements or improper questions) (Bies 1987; Bies and Moag 1986). These elements have been confirmed in a number of contexts, such as recruitment (Bies 1986), or police and courtroom interactions (Tyler 1988).

Greenberg proposed to split interactional justice into two main elements: the quality of treatment (respect and sensitivity), and explanations and information regarding decision-making (Greenberg 1993). These two elements were consequently treated as separate dimensions of justice by some authors (Colquitt 2001) and were named informational justice and interpersonal justice.

Interpersonal justice regards the quality of personal treatment, respect and sensitivity (Greenberg 1990). Honesty, respect and politeness generally increase interpersonal justice perceptions (Colquitt *et al.* 2001). According to Bies (2001), the concerns regarding interpersonal treatment include everyday encounters, not just the ones in formal decision making contexts. Thus, a wide number of treatments such as deception, invasion of privacy, derogatory judgments and disrespect, may fall into the scope of interpersonal justice (Roch and Shanock 2006).

Informational justice focuses on the amount and quality of information provided concerning procedures and outcomes (Colquitt 2001; Greenberg 1990). Clarity, adequacy and

sincerity of communications regarding a decision are important antecedents of informational justice. A meta-analytic review found that explanations had the strongest beneficial effects on people's reactions when they were excuses rather than justifications, when they were given after unfavourable outcomes, and when they were given in contexts with instrumental, relational and moral implications (Shaw *et al.* 2003).

#### *The construct discrimination debate*

The question of whether we should distinguish two, three or four dimensions of justice has been debated at surprising length within the justice literature. Some authors have argued that interactional justice elements (interpersonal and informational) form part of procedural justice (e.g., Sweeney and McFarlin 1993; Tyler and Bies 1990). According to this view, procedural justice judgments *include* considerations of structure and quality of treatment and there is no need for a separate interactional construct (e.g., Lind and Tyler 1988).

Bobocel and Holmvall (2001) provide a summary of research on the difference between procedural and interpersonal justice. Overall, this review points towards the possibility that both types of justice are distinct. As different definitions and operationalisations are possible, additional variance might be explained and antecedents are likely to differ. The authors refrain from any final conclusions and recommend that a wider variety of research methodologies be employed to improve our insights into the phenomenon of organisational justice, specifically utilising longitudinal methods and distinguishing clearly between the constructs of interactional and procedural justice.

Recent meta-analyses of research (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001; Colquitt *et al.* 2001) also argue for a separation of procedural from interactional justice based on the level of correlations among the three types of justice, as well as on the different relationships they have with their correlates. This is also the view put forward in the recent review by Bies (2005).

Much less conclusive evidence exists regarding the question of whether the two elements of interactional justice, namely interpersonal treatment and the provision of adequate and timely information, should be treated as separate dimensions or not. The study by Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter and Ng (2001) is the only meta-analysis of organisational justice differentiating between these elements. Their review of 183 justice studies finds that procedural, interpersonal and informational justice have different correlates, and measuring the three separately explains incremental variance in fairness perceptions. Further support for the existence of four distinct justice dimensions is given in Colquitt's study (2001), which developed and validated measures for the four dimensions of fairness. A four-factor model fits the data better than one, two or three-factor models.

At present, we have only a very small pool of informational justice studies to draw conclusions from. "Only studies separating clearly between four elements will further our understanding of these issues, whether there are four dimensions of organisational justice, or three dimensions and explanations/excuses as antecedent" (Paterson *et al.* 2002, 395).

#### *The global justice construct*

Since the reviews in 2001, increased attention has been paid to organisational justice as a global construct, including all of its dimensions. Colquitt and colleagues term this phase the "integrative wave" of justice research (Colquitt *et al.* 2005b).

Cropanzano and Ambrose (2001) have discussed the advantages of a monistic view of justice that combines the different dimensions of organisational justice into one. This perspective is based on the fact that procedural evaluations are often largely based on outcomes, and that the same event could be a process in one context and an outcome in another context. For example, a policy change can be the outcome of a negotiation, but the new policy may be seen to impact upon future procedural fairness. Receiving increased and better information may be an outcome in itself, but it also forms part of informational fairness. Colquitt (2001), who is a central proponent of the four-dimensional model, also

acknowledges that some individuals may view justice as one single factor only. This might contribute to the high correlations between procedural and distributive justice that have been found in some studies.

In a more recent review, Ambrose and Arnaud (2005, 78) argue that the interdependence of distributive and procedural justice is too often ignored and they see “the majority of contemporary justice research as focusing on ‘within justice’ questions”.

Research that considers overall fairness as well as other psychological constructs might contribute more to our understanding than research focusing on individual dimensions of fairness and their relationship to each other.

### **Theories of Organisational Justice**

The two main questions that general justice theories have tried to answer are (1) why fairness matters to people and (2) how fairness judgments are made. Both questions are important for our understanding of organisational fairness, and they may be interrelated: the motivation for taking justice into account may impact how justice judgments are made. These two types of theory have been termed “process theories” and “content theories” in the review by Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel and Rupp (2001). A third issue that has received increased attention since the 2001 reviews is why and how people react to their fairness perceptions. Recent integrative theories have a bearing on all three of the questions of how and why fairness judgments are made, and why people react to fairness judgments (Blader and Tyler 2005). In the following section, I will firstly review the motives of justice, or why people care about fairness, before presenting three of the most popular and widely applicable theories of organisational justice.

### ***Justice motives: why people make fairness judgments***

Different explanations have been brought forward for why people care about justice or fairness (for a detailed review, see Cropanzano *et al.* 2001b).

According to the *instrumental model*, individuals are concerned about fairness because it is a control mechanism to ensure predictability and favourability of their (long-term) outcomes (Tyler 1987). An alternative explanation has been given by Lind and Tyler (1988). Their group-value model, later named *relational model*, postulates that individuals care about fairness because receiving fair treatment indicates status and worth within a group. Yet the previous models do not explain why people are concerned with justice even when there is no direct economic benefit and only strangers are involved. Folger (1998) reasoned that there must be yet another reason why people care about justice. He argues that people can see virtue as a value in itself. It is also an expression of human dignity: a *moral virtues model* of justice.

Folger expanded on his moral virtues model, sketching a “deontic theory of fairness” (Folger 2001). This theory acknowledges multiple interests: The presence of selfish motives does not preclude concerns for others at the same time. Multiple interests mean that one of them cannot hold absolute sway. But all injustice experiences constitute negative transgression experiences, involving some type of pain, which is held to apply equally to ourselves and even to complete strangers.

Another attempt to integrate the three different types of content theories has been made by Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel and Rupp (2001a), who argue that the three motives of justice fulfill different psychological needs: the instrumental motive corresponds to the need for control, the relational motive to the needs for belonging and self-esteem, and the virtue motive to the need for a meaningful existence. These different needs could be seen as different forms of self-interest: interest in economic outcomes, in interpersonal outcomes, and

the interest in protecting one's self-image or in avoiding feelings of guilt (Schminke and Ambrose 1997).

Gillespie and Greenberg (2005) propose that the ultimate goal of fairness is belonging. This is achieved through the more concrete goals of fair relationships with entities and fairness in events. Similar arguments have been brought forward for trust and uncertainty/security as the ultimate goal of justice (Colquitt *et al.* 2005a). These views have in common that there is a hierarchy of goals, with an ultimately self-interested goal at the top. A recent review of self-interest as a human motive disagrees with this, arguing that other motives exist, notably empathy and moral duty (Cropanzano *et al.* 2005a). Cropanzano and colleagues argue that some acts are simply intended to benefit another person. The goal of belonging can for example not explain experimental evidence showing that individuals are willing to sacrifice financial self-interest in reaction to unfairness, even when there is no material or symbolic benefits, and even when they and the victim are in different social groups, or there are no future opportunities to interact with either the victim or the transgressor (Turillo *et al.* 2002).

To summarise, we have little clarity on what the ultimate goal of justice is, and whether there are altruistic goals of justice or only self-interested goals. However, we do know that people care about fairness for a number of reasons, and these include instrumental, relational and moral concerns.

### ***Integrative Theories of Organisational Justice***

The most recent phase of organisational justice research, which has been termed the “integrative wave” (Colquitt *et al.* 2005b), has brought forward theories that can relate to various dimensions of justice (Colquitt and Greenberg 2001), and that can add insights into different aspects of justice, such as how and why justice judgments are made, and how and why people react to justice. The theories build on three types of approaches: Fairness Theory

builds on counterfactual thinking, Uncertainty Management builds on heuristic mechanisms, and the Group Engagement Model builds on social identity processes.

Fairness theory rests on the ideas and findings of counterfactual thinking.

Research has shown that, in many situations, individuals judge their own treatment and outcomes on the basis of how well off others are and how well off they themselves could be. Fairness theory holds that people examine three counterfactuals when they make justice judgments and try to assign blame: “would”, “could” and “should” (Folger and Cropanzano 2001). Blame is only assigned for unjust behaviour if an unfavourable condition (event or non-event) has occurred (“would” it be better otherwise?), the harm-doer has acted with discretion (“could” he or she have acted in a different way?), and the action has violated an ethical principle (“should” he or she have acted differently?). This theory also helps to explain reactions to injustice, and how various factors may need to be present simultaneously in order to evoke negative reactions towards a decision maker. However, further empirical support is necessary to strengthen and clarify the predictions from fairness theory. Novel behaviours are likely to induce counterfactual thinking, as it is easy to imagine an alternative for an unexpected or novel action: the obvious alternative is the status quo or the ‘normal’ expected behaviours. Due to its focus on blame, fairness theory is particularly useful for explaining negative reactions towards individuals or organisations.

Fairness heuristics theory departs from a different logic: the “fundamental social dilemma” (Lind 2001a). By identifying with, and contributing to, a social group, people can improve their chances of achieving goals and enhancing their self-worth and social meaning. However, sacrifices for, and identification with, a group can limit freedom of action and one becomes vulnerable to rejection and exploitation. The decision whether to cooperate is thus an important and consequential one. When we don’t know whether another party is trustworthy, then we use general justice heuristics to decide quickly whether to cooperate or

not. This theory assumes that people use justice judgments as cognitive shortcuts that can help them to decide how to act at any time. Once the general fairness judgment (the ‘fairness heuristic’) is built, people try to interpret all incoming fairness information in a way as to make it compatible to the heuristic. According to this theory, the fairness heuristics change only when there are either signs of changing relationship, or unexpected or irreconcilable treatment (Lind 2001a). Fairness heuristics theory stresses the role of information availability. It is assumed that when the most relevant information is not available, people use other information to assess what is fair and how to react to the situation: the heuristic substitutability principle (Van den Bos 2001).

Fairness heuristics theory departed from uncertainty about trust and was later broadened to include other types of uncertainty in the uncertainty management model. This model describes how fairness-related information can remove uncertainty and mitigate the discomfort of uncertainty, even if fairness experiences are not related to uncertainty (Lind and Van den Bos 2002; Van den Bos and Lind 2002). These models may be particularly helpful in order to explain relationship judgments over time.

While fairness theory and fairness heuristics theory focus mainly on how people make fairness judgments, the group engagement model by Tyler and Blader (2000; 2003) deals with the question of what makes individuals cooperate in groups, organisations and societies. This model argues that identity judgments are the primary factors shaping cooperative behaviour in groups, and that identity variables mediate the link between justice and cooperation: the social identity mediation hypothesis (Blader and Tyler 2005). Specifically, procedural and interactional justice from supervisors and from the organisation drive identity judgments, which in turn influence engagement. Important identity-related variables are the status, or standing, of the group (pride) and one’s status within the group (respect). These will shape the extent to which employees define themselves as members of the group

(identification). The main impact of resource judgments (shaped by distributive justice and outcome favourability) on psychological and behavioural engagement is also an indirect one, via identity judgments.

Empirical tests support these predictions (Tyler and Blader 2000, 2002). However, there are alternative explanations for the links between justice and cooperation to be investigated further (e.g., social exchange and attribution approaches), and so far we do not have sufficient evidence to claim specific causalities. For example, while the theory proposes that positive fairness perceptions lead to high levels of identification with the group, it is equally feasible that high levels of group identification promote positive fairness perceptions (Blader, 2002).

In particular, the group engagement model is suited to explain positive attitudes and values, and cooperative behaviour within social contexts. Fairness heuristic theory and fairness theory do not explicitly link justice and cooperation (Blader and Tyler 2005).

We do not know whether one of these theories explains overall fairness dynamics better than the others. More likely, the suitability of any one of the presented theories may depend on boundary factors. Cropanzano and colleagues proposed in their review that the type of fairness processing may depend on the availability of information, on time pressure and on cognitive resources available (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a). They have classified process theories of justice on a controlled-automatic continuum. When a careful evaluation of all information leads to a deliberate fairness judgment, the process is said to be controlled, while a quick judgment without deliberate or conscious attention that relies on readily available information is labelled automatic processing. Controlled or systematic processing may be most appropriate when there are time and cognitive resources available (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a). In other situations, these cognitive resources are not available and people may process automatically instead.

However, as argued by Lind (2001b), the theories propose different logics, and a different processing context does not necessarily imply that people will switch from one logic to another (e.g., from social comparisons to moral transgressions and blame). To underline this point, Lind cites empirical evidence for heuristics use (a supposedly “low processing capacity route”) when plenty of processing capacity is available.

A more useful distinction among the different theories of justice may be the one proposed by Taylor (2001), who differentiates theories according to whether they are focused on a) adverse outcomes or the source responsible for the outcomes, or b) concerned with a single event or a relationship over time. She classifies fairness theory as relating to unfavourable outcomes (reactions to unfairness), and to one off events, with a focus on the actor to whom blame is assigned rather than on the event itself. Fairness heuristics theory on the other hand relates to the source responsible for outcomes (a relationship) over time, as the heuristic is relatively stable, and so is the identity judgment in the group engagement model.

However, current theorizing does not give any detailed account of how judgments of both positive and negative events are connected to entity judgments over time, and which processing considerations are salient under which conditions (referent comparison, identity considerations, heuristics use). Longer term or cumulative effects of processing justice judgments have so far only been proposed tentatively (e.g., Greenberg and Wiethoff 2001), and empirical evidence is lacking.

### **Justice effects**

A great deal of research has investigated the consequences of perceived justice or injustice. The findings repeatedly indicate a significant impact of organisational justice on behavioural, attitudinal and organisational outcomes.

Some of the most widely researched areas have been outcome satisfaction (e.g., Folger and Konovsky 1989; Lowe and Vodanovich 1995; Sweeney and McFarlin 1993), job satisfaction (e.g., Masterson *et al.* 2000; Singer 1993), organisational commitment (e.g., Folger and Konovsky 1989; Lowe and Vodanovich 1995; Sweeney and McFarlin 1993), trust (Konovsky and Pugh 1994), evaluation of authority (Lind and Tyler 1988), organisational citizenship behaviours (Masterson *et al.* 2000), negative reactions (Greenberg 1994) and performance (Greenberg 1988). Studies have also investigated other outcomes, including likelihood of legal action (Bies and Tyler 1993), co-operation (Pfeffer and Langton 1993) or experienced stress (Zohar 1995).

In a recent review of behavioural justice effects, Conlon and colleagues differentiate between “the good, the bad and the ugly” effects (Conlon *et al.* 2005). Good effects of justice judgments are, for example, task performance and compliance; bad effects (of injustice) include turnover, absenteeism, and employee withdrawal; and ugly effects are instances of counterproductive behaviour.

There is general agreement that fairness perceptions have an impact on attitudinal, behavioural and organisational outcomes, but there is much less clarity about which dimensions of fairness influence which types of outcomes, and the relative strength with which different dimensions of fairness may shape personal and organisational outcomes.

Different models have been brought forward to hypothesise and explain the relationship between dimensions and outcomes. These models have relied mainly on individual studies and anecdotal support until the meta-reviews by Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter and Ng (2001) and by Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) have made a significant contribution to combining and condensing previous findings on the relationship between fairness dimensions and outcomes. Only limited support was found for each model, supporting it only for some outcomes, not for others. Thus, there is still a lot we need to find

out about the relationship between the different organisational justice dimensions and various outcomes, and in particular there is still a shortfall of research on interpersonal and informational elements of justice.

Looking at broader categorisations of behaviour (e.g., withdrawal behaviours or resistance) may further improve the generalisability of findings. Past research has focused on behaviours on factory floors, while today's practitioners may need more insight into white-collar deviance (e.g., incivility, sexual harassment and cyber-loafing). Another problem with outcome research is that pre-specified forms of expressing reaction to injustice are built into most research, while there is a wide range of possible reactions. Given the current state of research we are not yet able to predict reactions to injustice (Greenberg 2001b).

#### *The fair process and the fair outcome effect*

The effects of individual justice dimensions have been found to interact with each other in various ways. Most research investigating interaction effects has not clearly distinguished between outcome positivity and outcome fairness (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996). Examples of interactions are that procedural justice appears to be more strongly related to work attitudes when outcomes are low than when they are high. Also, outcomes are more strongly related to work attitudes when procedures are unfair than when procedures are fair (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996). The "fair process effect" is the finding that people are more satisfied with decision outcomes when they get a voice (Folger *et al.* 1979). Van den Bos, Wilke, Lind and Vermunt (1998) found that, under fair process conditions, even unfavourable outcomes could be perceived as fair. Van den Bos (2001) gave participants different types of process or outcome information and either positive or negative outcome satisfaction. The results support the idea that when information about outcomes of others is not available, people tend to use procedural information that is available as a substitute to assess how to react to the outcome. In the conditions in which participants knew the outcome

of the other participant, outcome judgments did not differ as a function of whether participants were or were not allowed voice. In this case the process information was not used.

While this finding is one of the most central findings of the organisational justice literature (for reviews, see Brockner and Wiesenfeld 2005; 1996) there appear to be cases when the interaction is different. For example, under a prevention focus (avoiding loss) rather than promotion focus (achieving gain), individuals may report least fairness when a bad result has been obtained via fair procedures (Cropanzano *et al.* 2007). In a promotion focus (achieving gain) situation, the fair process pattern holds, and previous experimental research has mostly focused on promotion rather than prevention. Similarly, van den Bos (2002) has found a reversal of the fair process effect when comparison goals rather than interpretation goals were activated. Participants comparing a fair process to an unfair outcome may in fact react even more strongly to the unfair outcomes (Van den Bos 2002). Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996) report on the important role that the type of outcome plays: in their review, they found less positive effects of procedural justice when outcome favourability is high, for self-referenced reactions. The opposite effect was found for authority-referenced reactions. The recent list of contributions that found a reversal of the fair process interaction suggests that more research on the context and boundary conditions of justice effects is important in order to better predict reactions to injustice.

An effect of outcomes on process perceptions has also been observed, and was termed the fair outcome effect. Some studies have found a small effect of outcomes on process perceptions. People perceived the process as less fair when the outcome was unfavourable, and as fairer when the outcome was favourable. This assumes that no explicit information on procedural fairness was available (see Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a). Van den Bos (2001), for example, used an *explicit* no-voice (participants know that there could be the

possibility of voice) and an *implicit* no-voice procedure (participants do not know that there is a possibility for voice). Procedure judgments showed strong interaction effects *for implicit* no-voice. However, there is a scarcity of studies employing other research methods, such as field studies, to show that the effects found in the experiments occur in real-world situations. One of the rare exceptions is a case study by Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis (2002), which supports the general idea of the process-outcome interaction, but identifies some unexpected conceptualisations of distributive and procedural justice within this phenomenon.

The above research suggests that the impact of different types of fairness may have to do with the order in which information is received, and the type of information available. When information on one dimension is lacking, other dimensions may serve as a proxy to estimate fairness. Less or even no interaction effects appear to occur when the information on each of the various dimensions is clear and unambiguous.

Further interaction effects may exist between the four dimensions of justice. Bies and Shapiro (1987) investigated interactions of explanations (informational justice) and other justice dimensions in lab and field studies, and found that people with negative outcomes were more likely to accept a procedure as fair when an explanation was offered: an effect which could be termed a “fair information effect”. The meta-review by Shaw, Wild and Colquitt (2003) supports these findings: both explanation provision and explanation adequacy were found to be positively related to procedural and distributive justice perceptions.

Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel and Rupp (2001a) propose that there are likely to be more than just two-way interactions: outcome, process, interpersonal and informational elements could mutually impact each other. So far we know close to nothing about possible four-way interactions between distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational justice. Targeted laboratory studies and further studies measuring all four types of justice may be able to detect additional interactions.

To summarise, research in numerous settings indicates that perceptions of distributive, procedural, and interpersonal justice have important effects on attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Outcome favourability and fairness attributes appear to interact in creating justice effects, and the exact nature of justice effects depends on contingency factors, many of which remain to be investigated.

### **Moving the Organisational Justice Agenda forward:**

The core concepts, models and questions of organisational justice research have been briefly reviewed in the previous section. The remainder of this review will focus on four broad areas of current research interest which, I shall argue, will be crucial for the future of the field. First, recent developments in justice research allow for increased *conceptual clarity*, which will improve our understanding of justice, and promises to increase the consistency and internal validity of research. Second, researchers have begun to investigate the important role of *social context* for justice. Aspects of social context are central moderators of justice effects, but have received surprisingly little attention until recently. Third, a few contributions point towards the role of *time* for justice judgments and effects. Findings are rather tentative at this stage, but the integration of the time dimension will be crucial for better predictions of justice dynamics and theory development. Fourth, different contributions have shed light on the intersections of justice and *morality*. Understanding the moral aspects of organisational justice at an individual, organisational, and societal level provides new meaning for justice research, and can help the field to live up to its promises. For each of these four areas, recent developments will be reviewed and avenues for future research discussed.

#### ***Conceptual Clarity***

Conceptual clarity of the field of organisational justice is increased through differentiating outcome favourability from distributive justice, separating event judgments

from entity judgments, separating justice type and justice source, and through improved measurement.

### *Differentiating outcome favourability from distributive justice*

In general, social exchange theories have shown that people react more positively to outcomes that are perceived as beneficial than to negative outcomes (Blau 1964; Homans 1961). According to these theories, the favourability of outcomes has an effect on reactions that is independent of distributive fairness. Cropanzano and colleagues explain the difference between outcome favourability and distributive justice as follows: “the former refers to whether an event is beneficial to a particular respondent, whereas the latter refers to the morality or appropriateness of a given allocation” (Cropanzano *et al.* 2005b, 1172).

Yet outcome favourability is not only an additional antecedent of reactions, but may also be an antecedent of distributive justice (Greenberg 1994). This is because people are motivated to perceive self-serving, favourable outcomes as distributively fair. Outcome negativity has been found to be related to distributive justice in a significantly stronger way than to procedural justice (Cohen-Charash and Spector 2001, 293). However, people still appear to be distinguishing between outcome favourability and distributive justice in many cases. Justice perceptions are not solely explained by egoism, and unfairness to one’s own advantage often provokes unease (Folger and Cropanzano 1998).

The meta-analytic review by Skitka, Winkler and Hutchinson (2003) found that, generally, outcome fairness can be distinguished from outcome favourability. In particular, the fair process effect is weaker when the criterion is distributive justice than when it is outcome favourability, and the effect of distributive justice on attitudes is stronger than the effect of outcome favourability. Skitka and colleagues conclude that “it is not appropriate to confound or conflate outcome fairness and outcome favourability, nor is it appropriate to claim that one is studying distributive justice when one has only measured or manipulated the

latter rather than the former” (2003, 329). Despite this, most studies of organisational justice have confounded the effects of outcome favourability and distributive justice. Even very recent lab studies often claim to manipulate distributive justice, when in effect they also manipulate outcome favourability (see, for example, Colquitt *et al.* 2006; Roberson 2006).

The separate effects of outcome favourability and distributive justice have been discussed, as well as the effects of outcome favourability on distributive justice. Another possibility is that interaction effects may exist between outcome favourability and distributive justice. The effects between procedural elements of justice and outcome positivity have been found to interact, and a similar pattern may in fact also exist for distributive (in)justice, which has typically been operationalised as (in)equity. Inequity can be either positive or negative. Negative inequity is given when perceived outcomes are less than deserved, and positive inequity is perceived when outcomes appear to be more than deserved. In past studies, findings on reactions to inequity have been shown to be asymmetric: people were much more sensitive to negative inequity than to positive inequity (Greenberg 1982). Although this has not been expressed in interaction terms in the past, it could be seen as a moderating influence of outcome favourability on the role of distributive justice. The findings discussed above indicate that distributive justice appears to matter more for people’s reactions when outcomes are negative. This remains to be tested in further studies that clearly separate outcome favourability from distributive justice.

#### *Event versus entity judgments*

A further source of confusion in studies of organisational justice is the differentiation between events versus entities as targets of justice judgments. Justice judgments can be made regarding events (e.g., a particular performance appraisal or a meeting with the supervisor) or entities (e.g., the organisation as a whole, the supervisor). In general, people distinguish

between long-term behaviour and one-off events, and between evaluations about what someone does and what someone is like.

So far, we know little about how justice judgments of particular events and justice judgments regarding particular entities differ, and how they are related to each other. Most commentary on this issue is speculative. In their 2001 review, Cropanzano and colleagues proposed an integrative model of justice where events of different types (outcomes, process, interpersonal elements) are linked to event justice perceptions (distributive, procedural, interactional) which in turn are linked to judgments of social entities (distributive, procedural, interactional) (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a). Reactions then result from the judgments of social entities. The mixed paths and interactions proposed are highly speculative, and moderation effects could take place at any stage during the process. The first support for the hypothesized mediation of entity judgments has been found by Ambrose, Hess and Ganesan (2007). In a cross-sectional survey study of customer complaint handling incidents, they found that event attitudes mediate the effect of justice perceptions on system-related attitudes (Ambrose *et al.* 2007). The study by Ambrose and colleagues relied on random complaint incidences recounted by passengers while waiting for their flights at an airport, and many of the incidents collected may have referred to organisations with which the participants had no relationships previous to the incident related to the complaint. (This could explain the very strong link between overall attitude toward the organisation and satisfaction with complaint handling, of 0.78). However, the initial data by Ambrose and colleagues is promising, and longitudinal research is needed in order to investigate this issue further.

Furthermore, processes of justice judgments may differ with regards to events versus entities. Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel and Rupp (2001a), for example, propose that instrumental concerns and motives may weigh more heavily when looking at entity issues. A specific event, on the other hand, may be judged according to its specific context: a fair entity

might act unfairly in a specific instance, and vice versa. For empirical designs, this implies that clear and explicit distinctions should be made between the evaluation of entities and of specific events.

The “encounter perspective” proposed by Bies may be related to the differentiation between event and entity judgments. Bies (2005) notes that Greenberg’s (1993) taxonomy of four justice dimensions appears to be limited to the exchange context of specific decisions or allocations, while some justice concerns may not be directly linked with a specific allocation decision. As examples, he cites advance warnings about possible layoffs, information about impending changes, abusive bosses, broken promises, coercion, insults or a bad working environment. Therefore, he argues, the scope of justice applications should be expanded to take into account “encounters”, rather than just specific exchange contexts.

Colquitt, Greenberg and Scott (2005a) argue that the encounter perspective is really analogous to the entity perspective on justice (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a), in that overall entity judgments will take into account any encounter, while the event perspective looks at distinct exchanges. Yet it is not clear how far the two perspectives really map onto each other. For entity judgments, both casual encounters and exchanges appear to be relevant, and it remains to be investigated whether seemingly unrelated encounter experiences also have an impact on event judgments. Further clarification on this matter would be useful.

### *Multifoci justice*

Since a number of reviews of justice were published in 2001 (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a; Cropanzano *et al.* 2001b), more research has been conducted on what Cropanzano and colleagues called “source effects” (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a). It was Blader and Tyler (1999) and Byrne and Cropanzano (2000) who first integrated the effects of justice source into their thinking. In the past, procedural and distributive justice have typically been operationalised as stemming from the organisation as a source, and interactional justice classes as stemming

from the supervisor. However, Byrne and Cropanzano (2000) proposed that the organisation and the supervisor could each provide both procedural and interpersonal justice.

Blader and Tyler (2000) conducted a study that separately investigated system-originated procedural factors and leader-originating procedural factors. These two types remained distinct in a confirmatory factor analysis. Consequently, multi-foci models of organisational justice that separated justice source from justice content were tested by Rupp and Cropanzano (2002). In their study, they measured both supervisor-originating and organisation-originating procedural and interactional justice. Some support was found for this multi-foci perspective, as the four resulting factors of justice could be differentiated. However, the correlations within targets of justice were very high, being 0.79 between procedural and interactional justice perceived from the supervisor, and 0.75 between the procedural and interactional justice referring to the organisation. The type of justice on the other hand was less strong a factor than target of justice, with correlations of 0.36 between the two types of procedural justice and 0.49 for the two types of interactional justice. Further, Rupp and Cropanzano hypothesized that the relationship between multi-foci justice and multi-foci outcomes (e.g., performance and organisational citizenship behaviours) would be mediated by social exchanges with the corresponding sources of justice (2002). Their findings support the predictions more strongly for interpersonal justice than for procedural justice. Contrary to the predictions, organisational citizenship behaviours directed to the organisation were predicted more strongly through supervisor-focused justice than organisation-focused justice.

A different mechanism to link justice from different sources to different outcomes was proposed by Olkkonen and Lipponen (2006), who take an identity approach. In their model of identification and justice adopting a multi-foci approach, organisation identification and work-unit identification mediate the effects of justice at the organisational level and justice at

the work-unit level. A cross-sectional survey study provided indication that work-unit and identification may be mediators of the relationships between supervisor-focused interactional justice, and work-unit outcomes (extra-role behaviours towards the work unit). Also, the data indicates that organisational identification may be mediating the relationship between organisation-focused procedural and distributive justice and organisation-focused outcomes (i.e., turnover intentions and extra-role behaviours towards the organisation). However, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, the causality of the relationships remains unclear. Skitka (2003), for example, found that identification may in turn influence justice perceptions.

So far, there is some evidence that people distinguish between justice emanating from different sources – mainly their supervisor and their organisation. There is also some indication that the justice perceptions stemming from these sources are differentially linked to different outcomes. It is much less clear how these linkages work, which interactions take place, and which mediating effects, such as exchange relationships or identity processes, are in place.

Recently, co-workers have also been discussed as a source of justice. This would be a justice effect outside hierarchical authority relationships. Colquitt, Greenberg and Scott (2005a) remain sceptical as to whether it makes sense to include this third source of justice in investigations: “In examining this issue beyond hierarchical authority relationships we must be careful not to threaten the construct validity of organisational justice” (Colquitt *et al.* 2005a, 596). In particular, construct validity may be threatened when extending justice to co-worker effects, as it may be even more difficult to differentiate just behaviour from nice behaviour. While these warnings regarding construct validity are justified, this may be a fruitful area for future research and give new insights into justice effects. It remains to be

investigated what the non-hierarchical justice effects in the workplace are and how they add to different outcomes.

### *Research recommendations*

To summarise, conceptual clarity in organisational justice research can be improved by differentiating 1) between outcome favourability and distributive justice, 2) between judgments regarding events and regarding entities, and 3) between the source and the type of justice judgments. These differentiations are important to increase clarity in investigations of justice; for example, when manipulating justice in lab studies, or when measuring justice.

Measures of distributive justice should be differentiated from measures of outcome favourability (Tyler and Blader 2002). “Conflating an unjust outcome with a harmful one creates interpretative problems because it is unclear which concept – justice or economic interest – is driving observed relationships” (Cropanzano *et al.* 2005b, 1172). Measuring both outcome favourability and distributive justice in the same studies will give better insights into the correlation of the two. It also shows how much additional variance in dependent variables is explained by distributive justice, when controlling for outcome favourability. This practice is likely to decrease the amount of unique variance explained by distributive justice, but it will increase research rigour.

In their recent review of measuring organisational justice, Colquitt and Shaw raise the need for clearly defining the source of justice in question – for example, procedural justice may refer either to the supervisor or to the organisation (Colquitt and Shaw 2005). Additionally, it is important to define whether the measure should capture justice perceptions in a specific context, such as a particular initiative or encounter, or whether general justice perceptions are of interest. The differentiation between justice perceptions regarding a specific event, versus perceptions regarding an entity (e.g., justice of a supervisor or an organisation in general) is related to this choice of measure context. Generally, justice

measures should be adapted to the context, and it should be clear whether events or entities are measured. More studies, including both event and entity measures, could help understanding the relationship between both types of judgments. Further studies are also needed to shed more light on the multi-foci models of justice, and may also include justice from the part of co-workers. Of course, for some research questions and in some contexts, only one type of justice judgment may be relevant.

Generally, measuring organisational justice is not straightforward, but more clarity and differentiation in measurement promises significantly to improve conceptual clarity within organisational justice.

### ***The Social Context of Justice Perceptions***

A further area of current and future interest in organisational justice is the role of social context. Context has been relatively neglected in justice research, which may be partly due to the paucity of justice research using qualitative methods. Contextual variables can be antecedents of justice perceptions, or they can moderate the perceptions of and reactions to organisational justice (Colquitt *et al.* 2005a). Context can include both sensitivity moderators and expectations moderators (Colquitt and Greenberg, 2003). The former make individuals more sensitive to justice information or judgments, whilst the latter impact the conceptualisation of justice. These effects may take place at different stages: 1) between elements in the environment and the event appraisal of justice, 2) between the event justice and entity justice, 3) between event justice and reaction, and 4) between entity justice and reaction (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a).

Research on three particular aspects of social context will be reviewed here: team environments, culture and power.

#### ***Justice in teams***

Justice as a team-level phenomenon has been introduced by Mossholder, Bennett and Martin (1998). The average justice perceptions in teams were called climate level, and the within-group variance was introduced as climate strength. At the team level, the climate level (average procedural justice perceptions in a team) was found to be related to both team performance and team absenteeism (Colquitt *et al.* 2002).

The level of agreement on justice judgments within a team (justice climate strength) was found to be an important moderator of climate level, such that the relationship between procedural justice team perceptions and outcomes is more beneficial in stronger climates (Colquitt *et al.* 2002). Colquitt and colleagues identified team size and demography as antecedents of variance in teams (Colquitt *et al.* 2002). Also, Naumann and Bennett (2000) found that perceived cohesion and supervisor visibility were associated with higher agreement on procedural justice.

As with individual justice perceptions, team climates may relate to different foci. Liao and Rupp (2005) identified four forms of justice climate: organisation-focused procedural and informational justice climate, and supervisor-focused procedural and interpersonal justice climate (related to work outcomes). Furthermore, the team level experience is likely to interact with different level experiences within an organisation, leading to a multi-level model of justice experiences and effects. First evidence for this was found in a study on multi-level decision-making processes, where voice could be allowed both at the team level and by organisational authorities (Price *et al.* 2006). People's reactions and fairness judgments were most beneficial when people were allowed voice in their team and the team in turn was given voice by the organisational authorities. When voice broke down at one of the two levels, reactions were not significantly different from a breakdown at both levels. This study stresses the importance of investigating different levels of fair treatment simultaneously, in order to be able to understand and predict responses.

While these studies have demonstrated that team effects of justice are powerful predictors of reactions, so far we know little about how these team effects emerge, and why team contexts are moderators of justice effects. Roberson (2006) investigated the emergence of justice climate from a sense-making perspective, and gathered conversational data from teams that were exposed to different levels of procedural and distributive fairness. While it was predicted that teams that experience unfair procedural justice and unfavourable outcomes would be more likely to engage in sense-making, and that their sense-making process would be more elaborate, this was not the case. Contrary to the predictions, teams that experienced fair procedural justice treatment and unfavourable outcomes engaged in more sense-making than teams in other conditions, which could be due to attribution processes that were at play. Increased sense-making activity within the team (for example, discussing more and longer) increased both procedural and distributive justice climate strength.

The team context may also impact the choice of justice norms that individuals within the team apply (Colquitt and Jackson 2006). The fairness criteria that have been found for individuals, may become more or less important in team settings. In two scenario studies, Colquitt and Jackson found that the in team contexts, equality, consistency and decision control become more important rules. In addition, team size and composition mattered for the choice of rules, such that the accuracy rule was more important in small teams, whereas the consistency and bias suppression rules were more important in diverse teams. Future research could also investigate whether fairness overall becomes more or less important in teams.

The team perspective points towards the important role that colleagues outside hierarchical reporting relationships can play for justice dynamics. Of particular interest in this context is recent research on the role of vicarious justice judgments. The field of organisational justice has so far concentrated mainly on perceptions regarding one's own treatment. Most of the research on vicarious justice experiences has not been conducted in

organisational settings – examples are tests of the deontic theory of fairness (Folger 2001), research on the just world hypothesis (Lerner 1980), or research on the persistent injustice effect (Davidson and Friedman 1998). Yet first contributions in organisational contexts also indicate that the justice experiences and the justice judgments of one's peers do matter (Colquitt *et al.* 2002; Lamertz 2002). For example, research showed that a person's reaction could be strongly influenced by social reports of others having received similar treatment (Van den Bos and Lind 2001). De Cremer and Van Hiel (2006) have found that the impact of others' treatment on a person's reactions is moderated by helpful and supportive behaviour of the person receiving fair or unfair treatment. Their findings, which are replicated in scenario, survey and laboratory studies, support a main effect for others' procedural justice on one's own feelings and actions. This includes interaction between others' procedural justice treatment and others' concern for the actor on one's own emotions and behaviours. There was some evidence for a mediating effect of emotions, but other mechanisms, such as reciprocity, cannot be excluded.

This area is bound to receive further research interest. Finding out about team level justice dynamics, and the role that the treatment of colleagues plays in the workplace, could help to refine our understanding of justice in the workplace.

### *Justice and culture*

Culture is an important part of social context, and Greenberg (2001a) argued that cross-cultural research will help us to better understand organisational justice. The investigation of justice in different cultural settings has recognised that justice norms and even the importance of the concept of justice itself differ between cultures (Greenberg 2001b). Culture may in particular impact upon the following: the rules for judging justice, the goals of fair treatment, the choices made when applying principles, the process of forming

judgments, and the effects of justice on outcomes (Colquitt *et al.* 2005a). Previous research has pointed out the different principles underlying employment, and how cultures differ along dimensions such as power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long- or short-term orientation (Hofstede 1993). The dimensions of individualism and power distance have been employed particularly often by justice researchers when trying to explain cross-cultural differences in justice judgments and effects.

Justice researchers have found different justice rules or norms in different cultures (Greenberg 2001). Cropanzano and Greenberg (1997) describe that some collectivistic societies seem to prefer equal allocations, and individualistic societies favour equity. However, in a society there may be more immediate situational demands depending on context. Societies, just like individuals, have goals that are salient at a time. Chen (1995) found that North Americans, despite living in a more individualistic culture, were more likely to make equal allocations of rewards, whereas Chinese, despite their more collectivistic culture, were more likely to use the equity rule of allocation. This finding was explained by the goals that were salient in those societies, such that whilst American organisations were trying to become more humanistic, the Chinese were striving for improved profitability.

McFarlin and Sweeney (2001) have investigated the role of cultural differences in the context of procedural justice in performance evaluation. They found that the degree of collectivism versus individualism, as well as the degree of formality, will strongly impact the preferred evaluation style in different cultures. Typically, more feminine cultures tended to have informal performance evaluations, whereas masculine cultures preferred formal procedures. In low power-distance cultures, a high degree of input was given, while high power distance cultures may be more comfortable with an autocratic evaluation. Some cultures prefer explicit feedback, whilst others choose only very subtle, nonverbal feedback.

Thus, it may depend on the cultural context, whether certain procedures and types of interaction are perceived as fair in performance evaluations.

But cultures differ not only in their judgments of justice, but also in their reactions to justice. Blader, Chang and Tyler (2001) found that although procedural injustice prompted retaliation in both US and Taiwan, the Taiwanese were less likely to retaliate. Americans are more likely to take action when interpersonal expectations are violated. Among Hong Kong Chinese and American employees, power distance was found to moderate the effects of distributive and procedural justice on absenteeism, job satisfaction and performance (Lam *et al.* 2002).

Kim and Leung found that even the relative impact of individual dimensions of fairness for overall fairness judgments differ between cultures (Kim and Leung 2007). In a cross-cultural study with samples in the US, China, Korea and Japan, they found that distributive justice was related to overall fairness less strongly for the US and Japanese samples than for Chinese and Korean samples. No country differences were found for the relative importance of procedural justice (which has both relational and instrumental connotations). Interactional justice was related more strongly to overall fairness for Americans and Japanese than for Chinese and Koreans. These results can mostly be explained through materialism and power distance.

Leung and Tong (2004) developed a three-stage model of justice rules, criteria and practices, to organise cultural differences. Justice rules are defined as abstract principles to decide the fairness of decisions, while criteria are the specifications within rules, and practices are concrete behaviours and arrangements that operationalise justice criteria. For example, equity may be used as a rule of distributive justice. Criteria within equity are the different forms of input that count as important, such as loyalty, status, performance, or

family size. These criteria can be operationalised in various ways (justice practices): examples include different indicators of performance, such as work output or effort.

Recently, Leung (2005) has reviewed and summarised research on justice across cultures within the three-stage framework developed by Leung and Tong (2004). Leung concludes that substantial differences exist between cultures in their preferences for justice rules. Similarly, differences have been found for distributive, procedural and interactional criteria of justice, although there is less research in this area and few criteria have been investigated. These include voice and inputs for equity. The differences in justice norms and justice criteria have been explained mainly in terms of individualism-collectivism, and power distance. Finally, the evidence on different justice practices is very rare and scattered. Leung presents mostly speculative relationships: for example, collectivists should be more likely to prefer process control mechanisms that are group-based, while individualist cultures should prefer individual process control. However, it is the level of practices that may be particularly crucial in understanding justice across cultures.

The fact that the large majority of justice research has been conducted in the US (Greenberg 2001a) means that it may not translate well into other cultures (McFarlin and Sweeney 2001). Cross-cultural investigations promise further insights into the phenomenon of organisational justice, as well as into culture and the specific cultures under investigation, and will enable researchers to assess the generalisability of existing theories of justice (Greenberg 2001b), and to potentially develop better theories.

#### *The role of power*

Perceptions of justice and predominant justice norms may be co-determined by the distribution of power. For example, Leventhal posits that when influential members are dissatisfied with distributions, then procedures may be questioned and thus become more salient (Leventhal *et al.* 1980). In effect, this would mean that powerful members determine

which justice dimensions are more salient in an organisation. Greenberg and Cohen (1982) propose that it may also depend on the relative power of organisational members, to which extent actual allocations or reallocations in a given situation are consistent with any justice norm.

We do not really know through which mechanisms the principles of justice that support the powerful come to be endorsed by the less powerful (Cohen and Greenberg 1982). One mechanism could be through ideological discourse and framing. Watson states, “research on perceptions of fairness is complicated by the ways in which powerful alliances (e.g., change agents) control and disseminate ideas, norms and values – ideology – that encourage others to understand and interpret changes through management’s preferred cognitive frame of reference” (Watson 2003, 155). He investigated how ideological discourse by managers in change situations attempts to construct impressions of fairness and legitimacy. Watson (2003) found evidence that leaders use numerous strategies to influence employees’ perceptions of fairness. For future research, it would be interesting to investigate recipient or audience reactions to ideological discourse: how far are employees really influenced, and does this translate into cooperation?

Structural conditions can be a further mechanism through which the powerful can influence justice judgments. Ambrose and Schminke (2003) found that under different structural conditions, the relative effects of procedural and interactional justice were different. In mechanistic organisations, procedural justice and perceived organisational support were strongly linked, and in organic organisations, interactional justice and supervisory trust were more strongly linked. The different organisational forms investigated in this study (mechanistic versus organic) also imply different power relationships. Investigating these links further could be a fruitful area of research. For example, future studies could include measures of span of control, leadership style, and dependency.

Of course, the type of power strategy or power exercise may have an impact on the resulting justice mechanisms. A laboratory study by Molm, Quist and Wiseley (1993) compared the use of power strategies that are based either on rewards or punishments. Over time, the instrumental strategies of power tended to overcome reactions to injustice. Thus, participants complied with the power exercise. However, punishment power strategies were perceived as less fair than rewards, and were seen as more intentional. Both punishment and reward were seen as less fair than reciprocity.

The studies above suggest that power matters in relation to organisational justice, and that various areas remain to be investigated, such as ideological framing, structural elements and different styles of power exercise.

A recent conceptual paper by Fortin and Fellenz (2007) provides a first taxonomy of grouping power effects within organisational justice. By applying Lukes' three-dimensional framework of power exercise (Lukes 1974, 2005), they identify three types of mechanisms managers may use to influence and manage the formation of fairness perceptions. The first category is called 'responding', and corresponds to the view implicitly taken by most justice researchers to date. Fairness perceptions and consequent positive reactions are created by organisations through responding to set criteria of justice. The second category is called 'preventing', and is based on the idea that the less powerful may be prevented from raising their justice concerns or from reacting to justice concerns. The third category, 'shaping', considers the possibilities of shaping employees' conceptualizations of fairness; for example, through social construction of meaning, suggesting particular referent standards, and socialisation. Thus, particular criteria of justice may be meaningless in any one context, and actions that are generally perceived as unjust may not lead to negative reactions in a specific setting. This approach not only suggests new justice mechanisms with a view to power, but

also raises new moral questions for justice researchers and managers. (See the following section on justice and morality.)

Overall, the way that justice judgments and reactions are influenced by power has received very little attention, yet this is likely to be an important area in order to understand justice mechanisms in real organisations.

*Research Recommendations:*

While researchers have acknowledged the important role of social context, much research remains to be done in this area. “Organizational justice researchers recognize the important role organization context plays in justice perceptions, yet few studies systematically examine contextual variables” (Ambrose and Schminke 2003, 295).

If context really is an important determinant of justice perceptions and effects in real life, then both justice theory and justice research need to integrate context variables in order to develop predictions and explanations that are valid in the field. Three areas of immediate relevance to justice theory and research have been discussed: team contexts, culture and power. In order to investigate these phenomena further, a greater diversity of approaches may prove helpful. In particular, there is currently very little qualitative research addressing the impact of social context on justice. For example, Greenberg recommended “conducting detailed ethnographic analyses aimed at determining precisely what constitutes justice in various cultures, including systematic field interviews and participant observation studies” (Greenberg 2001b, 372).

Different disciplinary foci may be of particular use here, too. The sociological traditions of power research, for example, could be extended to organisational justice. New theoretical developments are also needed to guide research in these areas. Current justice theorizing (as described earlier) takes little notice of social context. One exception is the

group engagement model, but it is currently limited to identification processes. Current theories might be extended to take other aspects of social context into account.

### ***Justice over Time***

Employment relationships are not just the simple aggregate of individual interactions. Typically, organisational members actively make connections between different events and experiences. Justice perceptions at any one time are related both to past experiences and present circumstances, and are likely to impact upon expectations of future treatment. Yet temporal effects remain under-researched in organisational justice. As Ambrose and Cropanzano put it, “Despite the abundance of research, longitudinal examinations of fairness are notably rare. As a result, scholars have a good snapshot of justice at any one instance but have relatively less knowledge about the unfolding effects of justice and injustice over time.” (Ambrose and Cropanzano 2003, 266). The lack of temporal consideration in organisational justice also limits the applicability for organisational justice theory in situations of change: “If change is systematic, then any perspective on organizational justice that does not deal with change is inherently limited” (Cropanzano and Prehar 2001, 266). In the following, a few initial developments that shed some light on temporal justice effects will be introduced, but there is no well-developed stream of research in this area so far.

One of the first contributions to highlight the important role of time for justice effects was Folger’s research on the “frustration effect” (Folger 1977). Folger found that if people are given the opportunity to voice their opinion in decision-making contexts, they become frustrated if this is repeatedly followed by unfair outcomes. Finally, they may react more negatively to voice (being asked for their opinion) than to not being asked. Thus, some type of cumulative effect is overriding the famous “voice effect”, which had been repeated so often in one-off encounters.

More evidence for cumulative effects of unjust events has been found by Gilliland and colleagues. They found that, when judging an actor (entity), there is a threshold at which no amount of just acts can compensate for unjust acts (Gilliland *et al.* 1998). Similarly, Taylor (2001) proposed that minor injustices build up over time, and that there is a “threshold effect” associated with them.

Further, expectations appear to play a crucial role over time. Van den Bos and colleagues found that expectations could also reverse the voice effect (Van den Bos *et al.* 1996). People who do not expect voice at all, even react more negatively to voice than to no voice.

A number of contributions suggest that individuals may *interpret* their experience in the light of previous fairness experiences. People who have experienced repeated injustices are, for example, less likely to accept explanations, and will perceive new acts as more unjust (Davidson and Friedman, 1998). Davidson and Friedman have termed this phenomenon the persistent injustice effect (1998). Shapiro and Kirkman propose that perceived injustice may be the result of expected or anticipated injustice (2001). In the context of self-managed work teams, they found some evidence for the effect that “anticipated” injustice would increase the likelihood of perceived injustice (Shapiro and Kirkman 1999).

On the other hand, people may *compare* their experiences with expectations or with previous experiences. Brockner and colleagues found that individuals “who have experienced high levels of the procedural elements in the past are likely to believe that high levels of those elements will and should be present in the focal situation.” (Brockner *et al.* 2001, P 189). When studying the reactions of layoff survivors (Brockner *et al.* 1994), they found that survivors who had received advance notification and clear explanations in the past (elements of informational fairness) were more likely to be affected by the lack of these elements. Similarly, research by Brockner and colleagues found that individuals who were highly

committed to their organisations may react more negatively to unfairness than less committed employees (Brockner *et al.* 1992).

Clearly, there are two different and potentially contradictory explanations regarding the effect that prior experiences and expectations can have on later justice experiences. On the one hand, previously experienced injustice may heighten the likelihood or impact of consequently perceived injustice (an assimilation effect), while on the other hand previously perceived justice is expected to heighten the likelihood or impact of consequently perceived injustice (a contrast effect). This contradiction has already been pointed out by Tax and colleagues, who investigated the role of prior customer service experiences on customers' justice judgments of, and reactions to, complaint incidents (Tax *et al.* 1998). These authors identified the following competing predictions for the role of prior service experience before a complaint incident:

- 1) "The effect of dissatisfaction with complaint handling on trust and commitment will become smaller as the prior experience becomes more positive and approach zero when prior experience is highly positive" (Tax *et al.* 1998, 65)
- 2) "The effect of dissatisfaction with complaint handling on trust and commitment will start from zero and become larger as prior experiences become more positive" (66).

Tax and colleagues call this second effect the "double deviation effect" (65), where the initial event sparks high expectations for recovery "particularly for loyal customers" (66), and then leads to even stronger disappointment when the recovery attempt is also perceived as unjust. They found that "prior positive experiences mitigate, to a limited extent, the effects of poor complaint handling" (60). Thus, the first prediction was supported, and more positive prior experience leads to less (not more) perceived injustice. It remains unclear whether under different boundary conditions the opposite effect may occur, and what these boundary conditions might be.

Recently, Van den Bos and colleagues even found some evidence for both contrast and assimilation effects within one study (Van den Bos *et al.* 2005). It was found that the reaction of employees to fair experiences with a particular supervisor was more positive toward subsequent neutral messages when they came from their old supervisor, than when they came from a new supervisor. This assimilation effect was found to affect their satisfaction with supervisor's communication and acceptance of the supervisor. On the other hand, a contrast effect was found in that participants reacted more positively to a neutral demand from a new supervisor when they had earlier unfair experiences of a different supervisor.

We don't know when contrast and assimilation effects of justice occur, but clearly this is an important area for future research. Some of the extant theories of organisational justice may be adapted to integrate past experience. Fairness theory for example (Folger and Cropanzano 2001) suggests that past experiences may shape the available counterfactuals ("would", "should" and "could") over time. Judgments of "should" may be influenced through the legitimacy created through past experiences (Brockner *et al.* 2001). This theoretical perspective could explain contrast effects.

Fairness heuristics, on the other hand, suggest that a fairness judgment, once made, is likely to last until very clear information to the contrary becomes available. Equally, the group engagement model proposes that fairness effects rely on identity processes, which are likely to be relatively stable. This perspective might be better suited to explain assimilation effects.

We are currently lacking theoretical perspectives that focus explicitly on different processes over longer time spans. In particular, the course of repeated actions and reactions within relationships may lead to different temporal effects. Currently, justice theories are looking at justice perceptions within a particular relationship (either employee-supervisor or

employee-organisation), rather than looking at the overall relationship. A first attempt to relate proactive justice considerations by the decision-maker with the reactive justice judgments of the receiver is the model by Greenberg and Wiethoff (2001). The six steps outlined in this model describe the processes by which justice judgments and efforts to promote justice are made in organisations. The model departs from the occurrence of an event that demands a decision. The first step in the model is assessment. The inputs for this assessment are context cues, information cues and individual differences. The individual makes a judgment of event fairness. Once this judgment is made, then in a second step the individual reacts, taking into account eventual history of unjust treatment, the form of injustice, use of justifications, opportunities for expression, etc. This reaction or response will lead to response feedback: the manager or decision maker recognises the employee behaviour if justice related attributions were triggered (e.g., if the behaviour is unusual). The fourth step now depends on whether the manager or decision-maker wants to be fair or not. This step is entitled creation. It is the proactive creation of justice perceptions, and could include compensation, justification or impression management. Having experienced the creation step and proactively having dealt with justice issues, the manager may now incorporate justice considerations into further related aspects, enacting justice in both procedures and policies (enactment - step five). In a final step, feedback, justice may be incorporated in daily company routine and policies (step six). In practice, the steps might not occur exactly in the order proposed, and the process is likely to be complicated by numerous additional factors. However, the model by Greenberg and Wiethoff presents a first attempt to integrate a longer temporal perspective into justice theory. This model proposes that previous perceptions of justice act as a moderator of the link between fairness perceptions and reactions to the fairness, in the focal situation. Assimilation and contrast effects could similarly be interpreted

as the consequence of an interaction effect between present experience and previous justice perceptions.

A particularly interesting empirical contribution to the links between reactive and proactive justice has been a recent article on antecedents and outcomes of fairness (Aryee *et al.* 2007). In a Chinese telecommunication company, Aryee and colleagues found that the perceived interactional fairness of a supervisor (i.e., how they are treated by their manager) is related to the interactional fairness of their subordinates. “Supervisors who experience interactional injustice at the hands of their immediate bosses may take out their frustration on subordinates” (Aryee *et al.* 2007, 192). This is one of the first studies to suggest that injustice may trickle down an organisation, and as such has a bearing both on justice mechanisms over time and on the role of power for justice (see above). The nature of hierarchical and vertical relationships, and justice judgments are likely to be intertwined in a complex way over time.

#### *Research Recommendations*

The field of organisational justice can benefit substantially from integrating aspects of time. This will require both theory development as well as targeted empirical research. In particular, entitlements and psychological contracts may be useful concepts to help integrate effects over time into justice theory. Once people believe that they are entitled to a certain benefit or treatment in their psychological contract, they are likely to react negatively when their employer does not meet their expectations (Heath *et al.* 1993). The importance of justice dynamics in changing employment relationships has been exemplified by research in the context of changed employment contracts (Saunders and Thornhill 2006). The dynamic construct of psychological contracts has been employed to describe the perceptions of obligations and expectations of both parties in changed and changing employment relationships (Guest 2004). Drawing on the framework of psychological contracts could bring a more dynamic perspective to fairness perceptions (Cropanzano and Prehar 2001).

Future research with more than two data points is necessary to gain insights into when and how people revise their judgments of justice and to find out about trajectories of justice perceptions. In particular, we do not know under what circumstances contrast versus assimilation effects hold, and what are the contingency factors and moderators of the stability of fairness perceptions. The strength of justice attitudes may be one such moderator (Krosnick *et al.* 1993). Apart from longitudinal studies, more controlled investigations (e.g., experiments or scenario studies) may be helpful in advancing knowledge in this area of mechanisms of contrast and assimilation effects of organisational fairness perceptions.

It has also been found that social processes and power distributions are likely to exert an impact on fairness dynamics over time. This area is under-researched. Tools from sociological studies, such as socialization and structural approaches, may be an interesting route for future research, and would also remedy the field's present lack of cross-fertilization from other disciplines.

### ***Justice and Morality***

While the roots of justice lie in the field of morality and ethics, it is only recently that the overlap between organisational justice and morality has received increased attention. Virtually any situation that can be analysed through an organisational justice lens could also be analysed in moral terms. However, morality and justice are not the same (Folger *et al.* 2005). Moral does not necessarily mean fair, as fairness is only one of many moral principles, and the concrete standard of morality will depend on the moral framework applied (Fortin and Fellenz 2007). Similarly, fair does not always mean moral, as some cases of unfairness may be less serious than what is typically called an immoral action, and unfairness may happen without fault of the actor (e.g., an accident can cause an unfair outcome) (Folger *et al.* 2005).

In their recent review, Folger and colleagues concentrated on the deontic model of justice and its links to fairness theory (Folger *et al.* 2005). The deontic model of justice points out the importance of moral principles as antecedents of justice reactions, and fairness theory (see above) describes how people react to moral transgressions and assign blame to perpetrators. While this is an important link between morality and justice, we can look at a much wider scope of linkages at different levels of analysis. At an individual level, the weighting of justice dimensions implies a value rational choice: An individual actor needs to choose between normative standards when reacting to fair or unfair treatment, or when making fair or unfair decisions. On a larger level of analysis, the treatment of particular groups and of disadvantaged groups is often discussed in moral terms, but seldom the focus of organisational justice research. We may see more of this in the future. Finally, there is the meta-level of the relationship between organisational justice as a field and as a research community, and morality or ethics. Relatively little research deals with the actual moral impact of organisational justice research in society. In the following discussion, contributions for these three levels will be reviewed: Individual morality and its relationship with just actions and justice perceptions, the just treatment of particular demographic groups, and the moral and ethical implications of organisational justice research.

#### *Individual morality and its relationship with just actions and justice perceptions*

Over recent years, a few authors have investigated the link between individual morality and justice preferences. For example, Ambrose and Schminke drew on Kohlberg's model of moral development (Kohlberg 1984) and investigated whether the relative importance of different justice dimensions depended on the perceiver's cognitive and moral development (Ambrose and Schminke 2001; Schminke and Ambrose 1997). According to Kohlberg's model, pre-conventional and conventional levels of cognitive moral development reflect ethical reasoning based on outcomes, whereas the post-conventional level reflects

reasoning based on rules, principles and procedures. Thus, for adults who are operating at the conventional ethicality level (and according to research, most adults do), focusing on ethics is focusing mostly on outcome ethicality. In line with this reasoning, Ambrose and Schminke found that distributive fairness was the most important dimension for participants high on utilitarianism. On the other hand, employees who were high on formalism (who reflected post-conventional ethical reasoning) seemed to focus more on the procedural justice rules of ethicality. Thus, educating adults to reach formalist levels of ethical development would probably lead to an increased focus on procedures and less focus on distributive justice. Patient and Skarlicki (2007) also found that people at higher levels of moral development were interpersonally more just than participants with lower levels of moral development in communicating bad news, when asked to empathise with the recipient of negative bad news. Thus, people at higher levels of moral development may be better able to translate the moral imperative of empathy into actions. This study is an important extension of moral development issues into the domain of proactive justice.

Trait morality may also be an important moderator of justice effects for recipients of fairness decisions (Colquitt *et al.* 2006). A laboratory study by Colquitt and colleagues supported that trait morality was one of the moderators of justice effects on task performance and counterproductive behaviour. This finding is in line with fairness theory, which holds that individuals' reactions to injustice represent reactions to moral transgressions. Individuals who are high in trait morality may be more sensitive to particular types of transgressions than others. However, the morality measure used in this case was the intersection of high agreeableness and high conscientiousness (from the Personality Item Pool 2001), and may not correspond to other conceptions of morality. Colquitt and colleagues propose that further research may use the Defining Issues Test 2 (Rest *et al.* 1999).

The work by Skitka and colleagues is another attempt to link individual morality and justice judgments. In the value protection of justice model (Skitka and Mullen 2002), personal identity concerns are an important antecedent to justice motives and judgments (while most of the literature looks at social identity reasons). Skitka and Mullen argue that moral positions or stands (moral mandates) are important determinants of how people think about fairness. Both in a real life case (Elian Gonzalez case, Skitka and Mullen 2002) and with regards to a number of political issues (Skitka 2002), the model was supported. Skitka found that having a moral mandate on abortion, civil rights or immigration was not linked to procedural justice judgments of the political institutions concerned with these topics, as long as those institutions posed no concrete moral value threat to these concerns. However, when a possible threat was posed to the perceiver's moral mandate, this moral mandate predicated procedural and distributive justice, as well as decision acceptance and moral outrage. Thus, our moral convictions may only become important determinants of justice judgments when a threat is posed to these moral convictions.

Other variables appear to be closely linked to individual morality and justice. For example, Lerner introduced the "belief in a just world" as a personal characteristic (Lerner 1980; 1981). According to Lerner, people need to believe that the world is a place where one generally gets what one deserves (Lerner and Miller 1978). Individuals may differ in how strongly they hold this belief. In a just world, people like to think that everyone deserves what they get. Lerner researched reactions to individuals suffering (through no apparent fault of their own) and showed that a high belief in a just world can be related to people blaming innocent victims in some cases (especially when the suffering could not be relieved).

Similarly, justice sensitivity appears to have moral implications. Justice sensitivity was first introduced as an individual difference in reactions to unfair situations by Schmitt, Neumann and Montada (1995). Three dimensions have been differentiated: sensitivity

towards experienced injustice towards self (justice sensitivity as victim), towards observing others being treated unfairly (justice sensitivity as observer), and towards profiting from unfair events (justice sensitivity as perpetrator). Schmitt found that high values of justice sensitivity as victim predicted a low willingness of West German respondents to transfer money to the economically weaker East of Germany. Justice sensitivity as perpetrator and observer, on the other hand, predicted more positive attitudes towards helping (Schmitt 1998). In line with this finding, Fletchenhauer and Huang (2004) found that participants in ultimatum and dictator games were more likely to follow equality norms (sharing with their peers) when they were high on justice sensitivity as observer and perpetrator, but the contrary was true for people high on sensitivity as victim.

“People with a high value of JS (*justice sensitivity*) victim appear to be rather strategic in their concern for justice and fairness. They protest against unfair situations when they themselves are the victims, but it seems that they are not willing to forego monetary rewards for the sake of preventing such unfair situations. Furthermore, a high level of JS (*justice sensitivity*) victim is related to a high willingness to exploit others if this seems useful and to rather ignoring unfair treatment of others”

(Fletchenhauer and Huang 2004, 1025).

Maera (2001) suggested that virtue ethics could provide new perspectives for organisational justice research, and that virtue ethics could propose different character traits that are likely to go together with justice. Future research on different character traits may help to shed further light on both reactive and proactive justice reasons and dynamics.

#### *The (in-)justice experience of demographic groups and different stakeholders*

On a larger scale, justice issues arise with respect to particular groups of people. A few years have passed since Maera reminded justice researchers that their research and theory should not forget less powerful groups: “We cannot forget, however, either in research

or practice that the view of the least powerful may in the end be the most important view in building just organizations and in doing research about how to build them. Those who do not have the power to distribute the burdens and benefits, and have probably had to bear more of the former and have enjoyed less of the latter, should never be far from our theorizing, empirical inquiry, or practice” (Meara 2001, 233). Yet still, there is surprisingly little research combining organisational justice and the (un-)fair treatment of disadvantaged groups.

Two of the rare empirical investigations in this area will be highlighted here: Jasso and Webster Jr. (1997) investigated fairness judgments and the gender wage gap through analysing data from 1974. They found that both female and male respondents used multiple standards to determine just pay for female versus male single workers. Both groups found a gender wage gap fair (on average women earning 15% less). This gap was smaller when women assigned a “fair” wage than when men decided. However, the male observers assigned higher earnings for both women and men overall. Future research should investigate whether the wage gap perceptions have changed since this data was collected, and what the processes are that underlie such wage gaps. Jasso and Webster propose that participants might either apply different base rates to males versus females, or they may evaluate years of schooling as deserving different rates of return for males versus females. Uncovering the mechanisms that underlie such different judgments may also inform education and policy in an attempt to further the causes of equality.

Apart from gender, race discrimination appears to be another field where justice judgments are highly relevant. Cropanzano and colleagues for example investigated the fairness perceptions of black respondents with regards to different types of affirmative action programmes (AAPs) (Cropanzano *et al.* 2005b). Overall, ‘race-conscious’ AAPs evoked more negative organisational justice perceptions than ‘race-blind’ AAPs. Distributive, procedural and interactional justice perceptions interacted to affect organisational

attractiveness and intentions to apply. Future research in this area may, in particular, investigate the justice rules or norms or standards used by different groups, in order to understand better what fairness actually means for people in this context.

Generally, justice concerns could be extended to a wider community of stakeholders of organisations. In a conceptual paper, Hosmer and Kiewitz (2005) recently called for a closer integration of business ethics and organisational justice through considering the fair treatment of all stakeholders, not just the employees of a firm. The authors propose that ethical decision making and actions of a firm will have an impact on productivity. Thus, objective fairness determinants (from the side of the manager) can be related to subjective fairness perceptions and, consequently, to reactions. “In short, the authors propose a normative stakeholder theory of the firm, based upon ethical principles that will have testable descriptive hypotheses derived from the behavioural constructs” (Hosmer and Kiewitz 2005, 67). Research linking normative ethical concerns of different groups and subjective justice perceptions of the members of these groups may open up new views on justice in larger contexts and in society.

### *Reflections on the impact of justice research*

Justice researchers have reflected little on the ethical role of the field as a whole. More reflection in justice research, and more attention to the actual impact of justice research, could help the field to realise its potential for positive societal change.

Shapiro, for example, criticized the field for focusing on questions that are of immediate value to managers, rather than attending to the needs of the victims of injustice (Shapiro 2001). She holds that the field should look towards helping to manage injustice feelings, to deliver bad news and generally to create a more just world and workplace.

Reb and colleagues, for example, have recently conducted an investigation into how to remedy different types of injustices (Reb *et al.* 2006). They found both in the field and experiment that, in accordance with the multiple needs framework of organisational justice (Cropanzano *et al.* 2001a), participants preferred instrumental remedies (e.g., monetary compensation) for procedural injustice and punitive remedies (disciplinary action) for interactional injustice. The taxonomy developed by Reb and colleagues includes remedies for the violation of control needs, meaning and virtue needs, and belonging or interpersonal needs. This line of research certainly addresses problems both of injustice victims and of organisations. However, it still remains to be seen how managers will apply this type of finding in practice.

Indeed, up to now, we do not really know how managers apply justice findings in organisations. Bies and Tripp warned that justice findings might even be used to perpetuate injustice in the workplace (Bies and Tripp 1995; 2001). MacCoun (2005) points out that knowledge about the “fair process effect” (giving people voice improves their acceptance of outcomes) may enable decision-makers to improve fairness perceptions without any costly outcome concessions. Thus, the desire for fairness can make employees vulnerable to exploitation. This danger has also been highlighted by Fortin and Fellenz (2007), who describe two “hypocrisies of fairness”. First, managers may apply justice knowledge in an instrumental way, and increase subjective justice perceptions without regard for moral justice. Second, justice researchers may claim to promote fairness while not being concerned with the actual moral impact of the knowledge that they provide for managers.

Does justice research help to promote values and change? Simply communicating fairness research findings to managers may not actually lead to increased fairness for employees. Future research in organisational justice will need to reflect on its role and impact in society, something also recently endorsed by Hosmer and Kiewitz (2005). It remains to be

seen whether findings from the field of organisational justice are used by managers for window dressing and impression management purposes, or whether they will benefit all stakeholders involved. Justice researchers could try to take an active role in promoting their findings for use for maximum societal benefit.

### *Recommendations for research*

The previous sections have examined the links between morality and justice research at different levels. More research on individual level morality may further our insights into mechanisms of promoting and reacting to justice. Virtue ethics could be a particularly fruitful area to be combined with organisational justice in this respect.

Further, justice researchers should conduct more studies regarding the fair treatment of particular demographic groups, investigating for example discrimination, affirmative action and sexual harassment. This could lead justice research to making new societal contributions and could give the field new levels of meaning and relevance. Similarly, different stakeholders in organisations should be considered, not just the employees. Drawing on additional disciplines (e.g., sociology and ethics) and employing mixed methods may help to bring this important research agenda forward. In particular, qualitative studies are needed to complement the largely quantitatively dominated field of justice: “Justice, as played out in life, has a complexity and dynamism that is difficult to simulate in the laboratory or to capture with traditional quantitative methodologies” (Taylor 2001, 250) This data could validate, challenge or explain findings in quantitative studies, as well as provide additional insight and make sure the field does not become separated from the actual experience of organisational (in-)justice among individuals and groups.

Finally, organisational justice as a field would benefit from more reflection on and research into the actual application of its findings. This should not be done as a navel-gazing exercise, but should focus the view of the field more towards the outside world and towards

justice experiences of individuals and groups. This reflection may also include the realisation that fairness perceptions are simply not always the issue that is most important: “In many situations, most individuals probably give little thought to questions of fairness” (Leventhal 1980, 47).

## **Conclusions**

Organisational justice is one of the most popular and promising fields in organisational behaviour. The explanatory power of the justice framework has been shown in numerous contexts, and fairness helps to explain a host of reactions that are of interest for organisations.

This review has focused on four areas that may move the organisational justice agenda forward: concept clarification, social context integration, time and links with morality. These areas have received increased attention lately, but there are still relatively few empirical studies and theoretical frameworks that grapple with these issues.

Conceptual clarity is vital for improved consistency of the field, and internal validity of studies. Through separating justice concerns from outcome concerns, and understanding different types of justice judgments more clearly, empirical investigations can be more targeted and will further new theory development. Concise measurement is a particularly important area in this respect. Measuring both outcome favourability and distributive justice in the same studies will help us to better understand the effects of, and interaction between, the two concepts. Measures that clearly indicate the source of justice (e.g., supervisor or organisation) can further increase clarity. Future research will also need to investigate whether the justice concept should usefully be extended to justice received from co-workers. Furthermore, studies that include both event and entity measures could improve our understanding of justice judgments.

Situating organisational justice in social contexts and in time will be crucial to improve the useability of organisational justice findings in organisations, and to improve external validity. Current developments such as studying justice in teams, vicarious justice perceptions, and justice in different cultures have already improved our knowledge of justice in real world contexts. It is proposed that future research should also pay more attention to power mechanisms and their interrelation with justice. Different disciplinary foci may be needed to gain new perspectives. For example, tools from sociological studies could be particularly useful. Generally, more longitudinal, qualitative and interdisciplinary research is expected to generate new insights in this area. New theoretical developments are also necessary to guide justice research that can integrate social context and time. This may include drawing on concepts from other areas of study, such as entitlements and psychological contracts.

Finally, this paper proposes a multi-level view of the intersection of justice and morality. Understanding the links between morality and justice at an individual, and organisational and societal level is necessary if justice researchers want to live up to the promise of their field for society. Bridging research in business ethics and organisational justice, as well as more critical self-reflection, are steps towards this goal. More research on individual level morality may, for example, focus on mechanisms of promoting justice, and could draw on virtue ethics. Employees are not the only stakeholders in organisations, and organisational justice research could usefully be extended to other groups. The literatures on the unfair treatment of particular demographic groups have so far not received much attention in organisational justice. Finally, critical reflection on the application of justice research and on the role of justice research should go hand in hand with critical research on the actual consequences of applying justice research in organisations.

I believe that the areas presented will be crucial for the future of organisational justice. Overall, there are more exciting research areas in organisational justice than ever before. The field may be ready for new approaches and for more responsibility.

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