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Research Review in Organizational Justice

ABSTRACT

The article aims at presenting the current state of knowledge in the field of organizational justice and its importance for the organization. It includes an overview of changing perception of justice as an idea over the centuries and discusses organizational justice as a part of the field of management science.

In the article the author describes three main components of organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactive justice. Additionally, selected research in the area of organizational justice and its impact on the organization and its members has been presented. Conclusions from the presented literature review contain possible directions for further research in the field of organizational justice.

KEYWORDS: organizational justice; distributive justice; procedural justice; interactive justice.

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INTRODUCTION

People as "social animals" enter into interpersonal interactions, including organizational interactions, devoting their time and commitment to them, cooperating or competing with each other, showing love, solidarity or hostility and aggression (Sztompka 2012). Regardless of the motives behind it, everyone wants their work, actions, commitment to be appreciated and to bring the expected benefits. In the world of organizations, such benefits are: remuneration, incentives, social recognition or other forms of appreciation by members of the organization, particularly by superiors. Depending on the extent to which this contribution to the organization is appreciated, the employee perceives the organization as a fair player or not. Without being aware of it, an employee making such an assessment of the organization enters the area of management known as organizational justice (Cropanzano & Molina, 2015).

Although the topic of organizational justice has been present in management sciences for over 40 years (Greenberg, 1990), it still seems that the awareness of the role and essence of organizational justice among management staff is low. This is probably partly due to its limited presence in education programs, both during university courses and training courses for professionals, but also from the fact that this topic is not very often present in trade publications.

The intention of the author is to present the elements that make up organizational justice and the consequences that positive or negative assessment of equity in the organization has for the organization and its members.

JUSTICE

The term *justice*, although present both in everyday life and in science, causes some interpretation problems on closer inspection. These problems arise both from the various contexts in which the term occurs, and from the historical changeability of philosophical, theological and economic views on justice (Kleszcz, 1999).

Originally, the term *justice* referred to the principle of the division of goods and social roles, based on the equalization of benefits and harms, the manifestations of which can already be found in the Old Testament—"an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Wróbel, 2013). In theology, justice is a moral virtue, and a just person is one who acts honestly and in accordance with the law (Bugdol, 2014).

Aristotle applied the term *justice* to the distribution of goods and divided justice into two types: distributive justice and compensatory justice. Distributive justice refers to the distribution of both goods (e.g. money, privileges) and obligations (e.g. tax burdens). According to Aristotle, it should be based on proportional equality. In turn, compensatory (commutative) justice is nothing more than fair reward for good or paying back for evil (Kleszcz, 1999).

The definition of justice, considered to be classical today, was proposed by a Roman jurist, Gnaeus Domitius Annius Ulpianus, according to whom justice is the unchanging and permanent will to guarantee everyone's rights (Sadowski, 2008). Ancient Greek philosophers also dealt with the issues of justice. For Plato, a just man is the best man morally, and his theory of the four virtues was based on the virtues of wisdom, bravery, self-control, and justice (Bugdol, 2014). In modern times, Chaim Perelman proposed a definition of justice according to which it is a principle of conduct which requires that individuals belonging to the same category be treated in the same way (Gomułowicz, 1989).

The concept of justice was also subject to interpretation by economists. One of the precursors of economics, David Ricardo, considered the necessity to pay off government debts incurred by England for the wars at the time as a generational injustice. In his opinion, this debt would be repaid either by raising taxes or by increasing the state's debt, which will be repaid by the taxes of future generations (Lüchinger, 2007).

The industrial revolution led to the emergence of ideological and political movements in the nineteenth century, contesting the existing social order, especially labour relations, leading to a significant economic stratification in society. Probably the greatest influence on the development of political and economic thought and on actual social changes had the views of Karl Marx, who criticized labour relations in his time and exposed the existing exploitation of the working class by the class of owners (Żyro, 1966). It is worth emphasizing, however, that he did not consider this state of affairs unfair. In his opinion, justice is a derivative of real social relations, and thus, they determine what is and what is not considered just. Thus, a change in the perception of justice is possible only when the system of functioning of a given community changes. In his opinion, each production system creates its own framework of justice, thus capitalism with its unequal division of labour and goods is just because it is consistent with its systemic conditions (Lipowicz, 2014).

Prominent economists of the 20th century also dealt with issues of justice. John Maynard Keynes argued that an unfair distribution of wealth must be avoided and the role of the state in this respect is to combat unemployment by supporting investment, i.e. state interventionism, which will translate into a fairer distribution of wealth (Bugdol, 2014). A different approach was presented by an Austrian economist Fridrich von Hayek, who, although admitted the redistributive role of the state, considered it unfair for the state to act in a way that would lead to lowering the status of citizens or threaten their privacy. He emphasized that for a fair

game on the market, broad access to information is necessary, e.g. on prices or wages, which will enable market players to make rational decisions (Sankiewicz, 2011). On the other hand, Milton Friedman, a neoliberal economist, believed that the market should determine its interactions, and that the "invisible hand" should be the only tool of justice (Haber, 2018).

It can be noticed that they held different positions in terms of economic and social solutions and perceived the concept of justice in different ways, but they considered the existence of some form of justice necessary for the efficient functioning of the economy, both on a macro and a micro scale.

Based on the reflections of economists, the concept of social justice was created. Although the term is used not only by scientists and journalists, but also in the legal system, it is a concept that does not have a strict definition. The implementation of the principles of social justice as an element of social solidarity is to lead to the improvement of the fate of people who are in a worse situation, especially not through their fault (Wróbel, 2013). Since justice concerns interpersonal relations, the way of creating social order, then, looking at it from a broader perspective, it can be stated that each type of justice is social justice, because justice occurs only when one individual (or social group) is related to another (Sztompka, 2012). The feeling of lack of social justice was the source of many conflicts, in which, on the one hand, there was the state, and on the other hand, the excluded social masses (at least in their opinion). This led to numerous social upheavals of a revolutionary nature, which resulted in permanent social changes - for example, the French Revolution, the American War of Independence, the Bolshevik Revolution, or the so-called "Arab Spring" (Zysberg, 2018).

As can be seen from the above, there are many approaches to what justice is and what is (or is not) fair. However, all researchers dealing with the subject of justice, despite different approaches to its definition, believe that it is of particular importance for socio-

economic development, both in the macro (economy) and micro (interpersonal relations) scale.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

The concept of organizational justice was promoted in the 1980s by Jerald Greenberg, who searched for both the causes of ineffective employee behavior and new mechanisms for studying employee behavior (commitment, effectiveness, or counterproductive activities) (Greenberg, 1987). Nowadays, in management sciences, organizational justice is understood as the general feeling of an employee, referring to what, in his or her opinion, is fair in the workplace, including, in particular, the distribution of goods (e.g. remuneration, promotion opportunities), procedures (e.g. promotion criteria, bonuses) and social interactions (e.g. way of communication, respect) (Turek, 2011). This means that organizational justice is not an objective standard or the state of the organization's functioning, but only a subjective assessment by members of the organization of what is going on inside it.

Historically, the first element of organizational justice which has been identified and named is distributive justice. According to Adams' injustice theory, employees compare their contribution to work with the benefits obtained, with the contributions and the benefits obtained by other employees (Adams, 1963). On this basis, they make an equity assessment.

If an employee puts more effort and commitment to work than others, but does not receive a proportionately higher benefit, he considers this imbalance to be unfair. A return to balance will be achieved by this employee most likely by reducing his or her involvement in work (Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2018). It is also important that people feel unfair not only when they receive too low wages, but also when they receive excessive wages. The pace at which the sense of injustice appears in both cases is

different (Michałkiewicz, 2009). Adams emphasizes the importance of the norms and values of individuals and the culture or subculture that influenced the formation of an individual as an element in the perception of the correlation between input and expected outcome (Adams, 1963). His theory applies not only to professional relationships, but also to all other social situations, including family relationships (Adams, 1965). In practice, it is difficult to unequivocally assess the contribution of others, and even more the benefits achieved by them, due to the limited access to objective data. Moreover, it is not only the assessment of the actual effects achieved by others that is of great importance, but also the subjective expectations of one's own benefits obtained from work (Bugdol, 2018).

Over time, it has been found that the assessment of distributive justice applies not only to the issue of capital distribution, but also to the distribution of all other resources of an organization (Greenberg, 1990). Morton Deutsch extended this concept because, in his opinion, apart from fair distribution based on results, it is also necessary to take into account the principle of equality and individual needs. Thus, each employee should be able to receive similar wages, development opportunities and chances to meet their own needs (Deutsch, 1975). This leads to a conflict between the internal elements of distributive justice, because, on the one hand, everyone wants to be treated in an equal manner to the others (equality), on the other - in a fair way, but also in an individual way (need) (Mello, 2015). Maintaining the right balance between these needs is a real challenge for people managing the organization. Additionally, ensuring an appropriate level of individual approach to the employees affects their job satisfaction (Kozak, 2014).

Over time, the model of organizational justice based solely on distributive justice began to be questioned. Gerald S. Leventhal criticized it, stating that distributive justice boils down only to the assessment of the final distribution of goods, while the very

process of achieving a fair distribution is not taken into account at all. Moreover, he points out that the theory of distribution overestimates the importance of distributive justice in social relations, since fair distribution is only one of many forces influencing the perception and behavior of employees. Thus, he opened a new area of research on organizational justice—procedural justice, which assesses the fairness of procedures used to share goods (Leventhal, 1980).

Research in this area has shown that employees perceive the organization as fair not only when the division reflects their commitment. The likelihood of such an assessment is much higher when workers are convinced that the decision-making process behind the distribution of goods was fair and impartial. Thus, the need to develop fair and impartial procedures that apply to all employees, allow for the correction of possible wrong decisions and the consistent application of ethical standards was recognized (Juchnowicz & Kinowska, 2018). It is worth noting, however, that research in the field of organizational justice has shown that employees tend to judge an organization as fair if they consider the procedures in it to be fair, even when they notice an unfair distribution of goods within the organization (Silva & Caetano, 2016).

In the 1970s John Thibaut and Laurens Walker conducted research on two aspects of procedural fairness: process control and decision control. The first aspect deals with the degree of influence of the interested parties on the decision-making process and the circumstances in which it is carried out, and the second – the influence on the reasons for making decisions. These studies have shown that stakeholders consider a process fairer if they have a higher level of influence on its course, even if the final decision is the same as in the case of low (or no) influence on the course of the process (Greenberg, 1990).

Subsequent studies have shown a relationship between the perception of distributive and procedural justice. Joel Brockner and Batia M. Wiesenfeld have analyzed a series of studies on

distributive and procedural justice, which clearly show the relationship between the two. When there is a low level of distributive justice in an organization, stakeholders tend to pay more attention to procedural justice. In turn, low procedural justice prompts employees to attach more importance to distributive justice (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). On the one hand, such attitudes of employees result from the perception of procedures as relatively stable elements of the organization, thanks to which they have a sense of relative procedural security. As a result, unfavourable distribution effects are not seen as unfair. On the other hand, in the absence of (or low level of) procedural justice, employees perceive the relations within the organization as "businesslike," thereby increasing their expectations in terms of distribution effects (Cohn et al., 2000).

Gerald S. Leventhal has identified six rules of procedural justice that must be applied in order for the process and its outcomes to be seen as fair:

- the principle of consistency (procedures must be consistent both in comparison between employees and in time),
- principle of non-bias (all procedures must treat all employees in the same way),
- the principle of accuracy (while implementing the procedures, it is required that decision-makers read all the information relevant to the implementation of the procedure and use it properly in the process),
- the rule of repair (procedures must include the possibility of appealing against a decision or another mechanism to remedy any wrong decisions),
- the principle of participation (all interested parties should be able to participate in the process),
- the principle of ethics (all decisions resulting from the application of the procedure should be based on moral and ethical values accepted by employees) (Leventhal, 1980).

Leventhal emphasized that employees will take into account only the rules that will prove to be the most important for them in a given situation—so they can use all six of them or only one or two of the rules to make a subjective assessment of the fairness of the process (Leventhal, 1980) .

The application of these principles makes it possible not only to strengthen the motivation and commitment of employees, but also to mitigate conflict situations. What is important, the implementation of the above principles may also mitigate the imperfections of the distribution system. This has been called by researchers the "fair process effect" (Cropanzano et al., 2007). However, it should be remembered that the employee's motivation is influenced by a number of other factors, both positive (trust, work efficiency, innovation) and negative (nepotism, corruption, lobbying or sexual harassment) (Wziątek-Staśko, 2016).

Distribution of resources, as well as appropriate procedures, may not be enough for employees to perceive the organization as fair. Research by R.J. Bies and J.F. Moag showed that the way of communicating with employees is an important element. It turns out that employees evaluate not only the distribution effects and the course of the process, but also the manner in which the process and its results are communicated to them. People expect to receive information, explanations about the process and its results. In the absence of such information or in case of its low quality, they will believe that they have been treated unfairly (Greenberg, 2000). Thus, regardless of fair remuneration and fair procedures, employees want to feel good, fairly treated by the organization in order to judge it as acting fairly. In order to maintain interactive justice, the mere transfer of information is not sufficient, care must also be taken to treat everyone with respect (Cropanzano et al., 2007). On the part of managers, this means the need to follow the principles of respect for employees, fair communication with them and giving clear and understandable explanations (Turek, 2011).

Interactive justice has grown in popularity for two main reasons. First, procedural justice has a strong influence on the behavior of employees in the event of undesirable distributional and procedural effects, and interactive justice can counteract negative employee reactions to low levels of distributive and procedural justice. Secondly, interactive justice is a tool that can be used by managers of all levels to achieve results—many managers (especially lower-level ones) have little impact on distribution effects and often little or even no effect on the applicable procedures, but they can have full control over the way of communication with their subordinates. Thus, they can use the tools of interactive justice to weaken the negative effects of those elements of organizational justice that are beyond their control (Greenberg, 2000).

The above-mentioned types of justice constitute the classic approach to organizational justice and represent the mainstream research and scientific considerations in this area. Regardless of them, the literature mentions (although much less frequently) also other types of justice:

- information justice (this concerns providing all employees with the same information, not distorted or manipulated)—sometimes this type of justice is treated as an element of interactive justice (Cropanzano et al., 2007)
- qualitative justice (it consists in treating employees in the same way, i.e. building the same quality of interpersonal relationships)
- technological justice (consisting in adequately meeting the technical needs of the entire organization) (Bugdol, 2014).

Summarizing theoretical considerations on organizational justice, it should be emphasized that employees perceive it through three dimensions: fairness of obtained results (distributive justice), justice of formal processes related to the distribution of goods (procedural justice) and fairness of interpersonal transactions in which they participate in the workplace (interactive justice) (Cropanzano et al., 2007). A synthetic list of the elements of these

three dimensions together with their components is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Components of organizational justice.

1) Distributive justice
• Equity: rewarding employees according to their performance
• Equality: providing each employee with a fairly similar reward
• Need: providing benefits in accordance with the needs of individual employees
2) Procedural justice
• Consistency principle: procedures must be consistent both in comparison between employees and over time
• Non-bias principle: all procedures must treat all employees in the same way
• The rule of repair (procedures must include the possibility of appealing against a decision or another mechanism to remedy any wrong decisions)
• The principle of participation (all interested parties should be able to participate in the process)
• The principle of ethics (all decisions resulting from the application of the procedure should be based on moral and ethical values accepted by employees).
3) Interactive justice
• Interpersonal justice: showing employees respect and courtesy, respecting their dignity
• Information justice: sharing with employees the information they need

Source: Jeffrey A. Mello, *Strategic Human Resources*, Cengage Learning, Stamford, USA, 2015.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Organizational justice has been the subject of numerous studies. These studies over the years have reflected advances in the perception of organizational justice, hence, historically, distributive justice was the first to be studied, and the most recent research subject has been interactive justice. Initially, only one

aspect of organizational justice was explored, but later the need for a comprehensive approach to the subject began to be recognized. In order for research in the field of organizational justice to be comparable, a standardized Scale of Organizational Justice was developed, which is the starting point for designing many studies, although it is sometimes modified due to requirements of a specific national culture (Shibaoka et al., 2010).

Much of the research has been conducted on distributive and procedural justice in relation to the general population, without focusing on a particular sector of the economy or a specific occupational group. The aim of such research is to confirm general hypotheses and/or to compare the perception of organizational justice in different national cultures. Research on distributive and procedural justice conducted in Bulgaria, France, Spain, Poland, Russia, the USA and Hungary did not show significant differences in the perception of justice by the citizens of these countries, despite the evident cultural differences between the studied nations (Cohn et al., 2000). Another area of research includes research conducted in selected industries (e.g. health care (Shapoval, 2019a)) or specific professional groups (e.g. teachers (Akman, 2018) or hotel receptionists (Shapoval, 2019b)). These studies confirm the importance of organizational justice and its impact on employee behavior, providing a valuable hint for managers. It is worth emphasizing that research conducted on a selected professional group is definitely a minority, so it is likely that this direction of research will be more explored in the future, which will also result from the greater practicality of applying the results for specific industries or professional groups. Interestingly, the issues of organizational justice in the non-governmental sector do not attract the attention of researchers. The third sector ensures that important social needs are met, while engaging a significant number of volunteers—over 20% of inhabitants in Europe undertake such activities (Kossowska & Łaguna, 2018). However, it can be presumed that volunteers, although they are not financially

rewarded for their work, also feel the need to be appreciated for their work, and thus expect fair treatment in this regard.

Organizational justice is an object of concern, mainly because of its strong influence on employee attitudes. The sense of organizational justice influences organizational trust, which, in turn, enhances the productive behavior of employees (Aryee et al., 2002). Organizational justice increases work commitment and the satisfaction obtained from it, whereas lack of organizational justice leads to counterproductive behavior of employees, professional burnout or an increase in the number of conflicts at work (Turek, 2011).

Feeling organizational justice has a positive effect on trust in an organization, with equity being seen as the foundation for building trust in an organization (Bugdol, 2010). Research has shown that there is a correlation between distributive and procedural justice and trust in organizations, and interactive justice translates particularly into relationships between people (Bugdol, 2014). This is confirmed by numerous studies which show that the lack of interactive justice translates into a strong increase in distrust and causes anger and feelings of betrayal among employees (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). This, in turn, reduces the effectiveness of the organization and its members. Other studies have found a correlation between distributive, procedural and interactive justice, and employee satisfaction with performance assessments conducted by employers. However, this requires the organization to properly prepare an employee performance evaluation system and to communicate it properly to employees (Palaiologos et al., 2011). In addition, the sense of justice and the resulting trust in the organization have a significant impact on employee turnover (Brashear et al., 2005).

Organizational justice directly affects the level of employee involvement, with the sense of procedural justice having a particularly strong impact on commitment (Bugdol, 2014). Research has shown a positive correlation between distributive and pro-

cedural justice and employee engagement, with a particularly strong correlation with regard to job satisfaction in distributive justice (Bakhshi et al., 2009). Employees who are positive in their assessment of the decision-making process in the organization feel more committed to the organization and show a lower propensity to leave it. At the same time, length of service also contributes to the latter, which encourages staying in the organization (Niesiobędzka, 2014).

In turn, the sense of organizational injustice leads to an increase in counterproductive behavior among employees, both as one-off acts and long-term activities that may harm the organization. This type of behavior can manifest itself in a wide range of activities, from gossiping at work, engaging in activities other than work or being late to work and leaving it early, to the appropriation of organization property (Macko, 2009).

The lack of a sense of organizational justice also contributes to aggression among employees. Especially the lack of procedural and interactive justice plays an important role here. Analyzes have shown that maintaining a high level of organizational justice can be an element mitigating aggressive behavior among employees (St-Pierre & Holmes, 2010).

A significant aspect of experiencing organizational injustice is the impact it has on the health of employees. Numerous studies show that there is a correlation between long-term experience of injustice in the workplace and the health of employees. Lack or low sense of organizational justice increases the risk of insomnia in people not previously affected by this problem and its severity in those who have previously suffered from it (Toshio Hayashi et al., 2017). The combination of low distributive justice and low procedural justice is associated with increased levels of depression among members of such an organization (Bennett J. Tepper, 2001).

Existing studies show that employees who rate highly organizational justice in their workplace show 45% lower mortality from cardiovascular problems than employees who consider organi-

zational justice in their workplace to be at a low or even average level (Elovainio et al., 2006). The above examples are only a small part of the research conducted on the influence of organizational justice on the health of employees, but they show that the issues of organizational justice go far beyond the thresholds of the organization and may constitute a real social problem in case of long-term deficits in organizational justice.

Organizational justice has been present in management science for several decades. Research in this area has been conducted both in the commercial sector and (to a lesser extent) in the public sector. The growing importance of the third sector in the modern economy may provide a new area for research in the field of organizational justice. Additionally, numerous studies conducted on selected professional groups raise questions whether organizational justice affects different professional groups in the same way. This seems particularly interesting for those groups that, due to the nature of their work, have access to objective data that allows them to better assess the level of equity in the organization (e.g. HR staff or members of organizational supervisory bodies). Undoubtedly, a factor influencing the perception of the elements of organizational justice is the culture and environment in which the organization's stakeholders operate. The above selected aspects of the organization's operation mean that the subject of organizational justice and its impact on the attitudes of employees (as well as other stakeholders of the organization) will be the subject of numerous further studies that will serve as guidelines for the management staff of the organization, contributing, on the one hand, to the success of the organization, and, on the other hand, increasing the quality of cooperation between employees for the benefit of organizations and their own.

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