



Umbrella Summary

Organizational Justice

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is organizational justice?

Organizational justice is the extent to which an organization treats people fairly. Organizational justice includes fairness related to outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal interactions. Fair workplace outcomes and decisions (e.g., equitable/favorable pay, raise, promotion) are called distributive justice (Adams, 1965). Procedural justice means that outcomes are determined through procedures that are based on accurate information and standard ethics, represent everyone affected by the procedure, include opportunity for input and appeal, are free from bias, and are used consistently (Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Interactional justice refers to people feeling they were treated with dignity and respect and feeling they received sound information about the procedures and decisions (Bies & Moag, 1986; Lind & Tyler, 1988).

There are many available measures of the different types of organizational justice. Some measures assess more than one type of justice, whereas others measure only one type. Some take a more comprehensive approach (e.g., by examining many different types of work outcomes), and some have a more narrow focus (e.g., on only one type of outcome, such as pay, or on only one event, such as a performance review). Some directly assess perceptions of fairness (i.e., extent to which something is perceived as fair), whereas others ask for perceptions of conditions that are deemed fair (e.g., extent to which a person is treated with respect; Colquitt, 2001). Finally, measures can assess justice in terms of the organization or in terms of individual decision makers (e.g., supervisors; Colquitt & Shaw, 2005). Unfortunately, more than a few measures claim to assess a certain type of justice, though some of the items address other types of justice (Colquitt, 2001). In short, there is no primary and most-preferred measure, and the existing measures vary in a number of important ways. Nonetheless, the scales developed by Colquitt (2001) provide a straightforward approach to measuring justice perceptions. Descriptions and examples of those items for each type of justice are provided below.

- ▶ **Distributive justice:** Items focus on perceptions of outcomes such as pay level, work schedule, job responsibilities, and the extent to which people felt fairly rewarded for their efforts. Example items include, “The following items refer to your (outcome). To what extent does your (outcome) reflect the effort you have put into your work? To what extent is your (outcome) justified given your performance?”

- ▶ Procedural justice: Items focus on whether outcomes were based on bias-free, consistently applied, representative procedures that offer an opportunity for employees to voice their opinions and appeal the decisions. Example items include, “The following items refer to the procedures used to arrive at your (outcome). To what extent have you been able to express your views and feelings during those procedures? To what extent have those procedures been free of bias?”
- ▶ Interactional justice: Items focus on whether the decision maker/communicator was kind, considerate, respectful, and forthcoming. Example items include, “The following items refer to (the authority figure who enacted the procedure). To what extent has (he/she) treated you with respect? To what extent has (he/she) refrained from improper remarks or comments? To what extent has (he/she) explained the procedures thoroughly? To what extent were (his/her) explanations regarding the procedures reasonable?”

Why is organizational justice important?

Organizational justice is important because it is associated with many job attitudes, stress indicators, and behaviors. Perceptions of organizational justice are moderately related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Rupp, Shao, Jones, & Liao, 2014). With respect to stress indicators, justice perceptions are moderately associated with burnout and stress (Robbins, Ford, & Tetrick, 2012). In terms of behaviors, justice perceptions have a moderate connection to task performance and helpful extra-role behaviors, such as volunteering (Rupp et al., 2014). In addition, justice perceptions are moderately connected to turnover intentions (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001) and modestly connected to actual turnover (Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee, & Michell, 2017).

The extent to which justice perceptions are related to attitudes, stress indicators, and behaviors is quite similar across distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. This is especially helpful when an organization cannot change the outcomes (e.g., increase pay, provide bigger raises). Even if an organization cannot deliver favorable outcomes, using fair procedures and respectful, thorough communication related to those outcomes are associated with positive attitudes and behaviors. For example, procedural and interactional justice perceptions have a moderate connection to task performance, whereas distributive justice is modestly related to task performance (Rupp et al., 2014), and “employees are 43% less likely to retaliate after a decision if an adequate explanation is provided” (Shaw, Wild, & Colquitt, 2003, p. 451). Thus, there are a number of promising opportunities to potentially improve workforce outcomes through employee perceptions of fairness.

QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Justice perceptions are moderately related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- ▶ Justice perceptions are moderately associated with burnout and stress; employees who feel treated fairly are less likely to experience burnout and stress.
- ▶ Justice perceptions are moderately connected to task performance and helpful extra-role behavior; employees who feel treated fairly are more likely to perform well and demonstrate helpful extra-role behavior.

- ▶ Justice perceptions are moderately connected to turnover intentions and modestly connected to turnover; employees who feel treated fairly are less likely to plan to and ultimately leave.
- ▶ Even if an organization cannot deliver favorable outcomes, using fair procedures and respectful, thorough communication related to those outcomes are associated with positive attitudes and behaviors.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers that would like to assess organizational justice should consider the scales developed by Colquitt (2001).

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