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Organizational Justice Research: Present Perspectives and Challenges

Pesquisa em Justiça Organizacional: Perspectivas Atuais e Desafios

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Abstract

The article provides an overview of organizational justice research, particularly as it relates to cultural differences. Global migration and internationalization of business require a better understanding of how individuals perceive, construct, and resolve justice issues in organizations. I present four different ways to systematize justice perceptions which help in understanding the process by which individuals make justice-related evaluations. These four elements can be combined into an overall framework that pinpoints where cultural differences are likely to emerge. Focusing on distributive justice as a key area of cross-cultural research, I suggest a reconceptualization of equity theory that promises to advance both theoretical and practical work. I also highlight those areas where additional research is needed.

Keywords
Organizational Justice Research, Cultural Differences, Cross-Cultural Research.

Resumo

O artigo apresenta um panorama da pesquisa em justiça organizacional, especialmente no que tange às diferenças culturais. A migração global e a internacionalização dos negócios demanda melhor entendimento de como os indivíduos percebem, constroem e resolvem questões de justiça nas organizações. O texto apresenta quatro diferentes modos de sistematizar as percepções de justiça para a compreensão do processo no qual os indivíduos fazem avaliações relativas à justiça. Os quatro modos podem ser combinados em um enquadre geral que aponta onde as diferenças culturais provavelmente emergem. Focalizando a justiça distributiva como a área chave da pesquisa transcultural, sugere-se a reconceitualização da teoria da equidade que promote um avanço tanto teórico quanto prático. Também são vislumbradas aquelas areas onde pesquisa adicional é necessária.

Palavras-chave
Pesquisa Sobre Justiça Organizacional, Diferenças Culturais, Pesquisa Transcultural.

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Justice is arguably one of the most important issues underlying any human interaction. As soon as two individuals need to interact with each other to exchange needed or desired goods, issues of justice and fairness emerge. Imagine two people stranded on an empty island. They need to regulate and solve problems such as the organization of food gathering and how much food each person is allowed to eat. Or imagine, if one gathers the firewood, is the other person allowed to share the fire? These questions arise in any social interaction independent of cultural context, and questions equivalent to this desert island scenario are routinely studied in organizational justice and reward allocation research.

Humans as a biological species are inherently social. We would not have survived if we were not able to organize our social relationships, ensure that everyone is receiving enough to get by and ward off predators and enemies that are likely to do us harm. Hence, all human groups and cultures have a concern for justice. This concern is most likely evolutionary adaptive, as rudimentary justice behaviours can be observed in higher primates such as chimpanzees, rhesus monkeys, or gorillas, suggesting an evolutionary or biological mechanism for justice (e.g., Brosnan, 2006). Within the realm of organizational research, Allan Lind (2001) argued that all humans are faced with the fundamental dilemma of whether they should submit to the group or whether they should retain their self-identity. In most situations, these two goals are mutually exclusive and a balance needs to be struck. The best solution to this dilemma in Lind's view is to use principles of justice, since these principles specify boundaries for power abuse, criteria for decision-making, and adequate interactions that limit the potential for exploitation and allow individuals to engage in group activities without the fear that advantage will be taken of them. Hence, justice concerns are universal, independent of culture. Yet, how cultures resolve justice issues and the criteria that are used to solve justice dilemmas are likely to vary between human populations. This cultural diversity provides some challenges for our conceptualization and understanding of justice, and it is these issues that I will focus on here.

BREAKING DOWN JUSTICE COMPONENTS

Level of Abstraction: The How

There are a number of ways of how we can understand justice concerns, actions, and perceptions. The first way of differentiating justice is in terms of the level of abstractness. Morris and Leung (2000) proposed a two-stage model that differentiated between justice rules and justice criteria. Justice rules are abstract principles that guide decisions, whereas justice criteria are the implementations of any specific rule. Leung and Tong (2004) expanded this model by adding justice practices, which are the concrete actions that are used to implement justice criteria. This distinction is of great relevance for understanding justice effects at a global level, because different rules can be preferred across cultural groups to solve a particular problem, or the specific actions and behaviours that people use to enact justice are likely to be shaped by situational and cultural norms.

Focus on Justice Perceptions: The When

Second, distinction can be made about the temporal focus of justice perceptions. Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp (2001) distinguished between event versus social entity perceptions. Event perceptions are related to the evaluation of specific organizational events such as promotion or pay raise decisions, whereas entity evaluations are global evaluations of social entities such as supervisors, groups, or organizations. Experimental justice research typically focuses on event perceptions (e.g., the fairness of a justice manipulation), whereas entity perceptions are investigated through the use of field surveys evaluating the perceived overall fairness of supervisors or organizations. Cropanzano et al. propose a unified framework in which objective justice-related elements are first evaluated by individuals (event

perceptions) and these perceptions are then integrated into perceptions about a social entity (entity perceptions) (see Lind's 2001 Fairness Heuristic Theory for a process mechanism). This differentiation is important for at least four reasons. First, it clearly recognizes the difference between the actor (organizational decision maker) and the perspective of observers, partners, or recipients. Although logical, this distinction is often confused in empirical work, especially cross-cultural experimental work. Second, individual differences can influence how much people pay attention to justice-related events. One well-known variable is equity sensitivity (capturing the extent to which individuals pay attention to justice violations, Huseman, Hatfield & Miles, 1987). In addition to individual differences, there are also cross-national differences in equity sensitivity (Chhokar, Zhuplev, Fok, & Hartman, 2001; Mueller & Clarke, 1998). Third, events need to be interpreted by the observer, partner, or recipient of any interaction. Perceptions of the event are important, but perceptions are likely to be influenced by personal, situational, and cultural context variables (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). Finally, these perceptions may or may not lead to a behavioural or attitudinal reaction. Individuals often have choices about whether and how to react to actions of perceived injustice, and these choices also differ across situations and cultural contexts. It is important to consider this element of choice, because it is often neglected in reviews and treatments of cross-cultural differences in justice. It is well possible that individuals in a particular context do not react to an action because of a perceived lack of choice or a perceived inability to express their negative reactions, but nevertheless feel that an injustice was committed. Ignoring the influence of choice or situational constraints may lead to incorrect conclusions that justice does not matter in a particular cultural context. It may just be that the researcher missed this crucial variable that limits the expression of perceived injustice.

Dimensions of Justice: The What

A further differentiation that needs to be made is in terms of the dimensions of justice. There is now relative consensus that there are at least three dimensions of justice. Distributive justice is concerned with perceptions of the distribution of rewards, whether people believe that their outcomes and rewards match their inputs or investments (Adams, 1965). The second component is procedural justice, which refers to the procedures that determine these outcomes (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986), as the third component, is focused on the treatment of individuals by decision-makers and whether they show respect and sensitivity and explain decisions thoroughly. A large number of studies investigated whether interactional justice is independent and separate from the two other forms of organizational justice (Bies & Moag, 1986) or whether it is part of a larger procedural justice construct that includes both structural and social aspects (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Lind & Tyler, 1988). There is increasing consensus that interactional justice applies to both distributive and procedural justice. More specifically, Greenberg (1993) argued that there are four different components of organizational justice ordered along two independent dimensions. The first dimension is the classical differentiation of justice focusing either on procedures or outcomes. The second dimension refers to the focal determinant (either structural or interpersonal). Greenberg (1993) maintained that procedural and distributive justice are concerned with structural aspects of organizational decision-making. The focus is on the environmental context within which the interaction occurs, e.g., the procedures used to determine an outcome and the perceived fairness of the final outcome. The concept of interpersonal justice, in contrast emphasizes the treatment of individuals, and therefore the emphasis is on social enactment of structural elements. These two dimensions can be integrated, leading to four justice components: procedural (procedures, structural), distributive (distributions, structural), informational (procedures, social), and interpersonal justice (distributions, social). This unifying framework has helped to clarify how justice perceptions

at the entity level can be organized. Adopting this perspective, Colquitt (2001) developed and validated a new measure that differentiates these four components. A large number of studies have used this framework. The most comprehensive assessment of this measure across different cultural contexts was done by Fischer, Ferreira et al. (2011). They studied employee samples in thirteen societies including Argentina, Brazil, Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Turkey, the UK, and the US. The sample sizes ranged from 75 in Egypt to 628 in the Philippines, with the average sample size being 251.5. Using multi-group confirmatory factor analysis, they found strong support for a four-dimensional structure that fitted well across all countries. At the same time, they also reported that perceptions of justice are more highly intercorrelated in power-distant and collectivistic samples. It appears, that in more hierarchical and group-oriented contexts, employees discriminate less between different aspects of justice and perceive the organization more holistically. This fits with extensions of the relational model of authority (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Interestingly, score reliabilities were lower in collectivistic settings, partially explaining why justice effects may sometimes be weaker in some non-Western samples.

Justice Motives: The Why

Finally, the underlying concerns that give rise to justice can be further differentiated. This relates to the larger question of why we as a species care about justice, why is justice important? The possible motives underlying justice effects have been extensively debated in the literature (e.g., Colquitt, Greenberg & Scott, 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2001; Folger, 1998; Gillespie & Greenberg, 2005; Greenberg, 2001; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Thibaut & Walker, 1975). The three most popular approaches have been the instrumental approach (emphasising a human concern with control over outcomes (e.g., Folger, 1977)); the relational or group-value approach (emphasising identity-concerns such as self-worth, esteem, and acceptance by others as communicated by fair treatment; Lind & Tyler, 1998; Tyler & Lind, 1992) and the moral virtue or deontic approaches (people care about justice because it reinforces basic values of human dignity and worth; Folger, 1998). More recently, fairness heuristic theory (FHT, Lind, 2001) and uncertainty management theory (UMT, Lind & van den Bos, 2002; van den Bos & Lind, 2002) postulate that individuals are concerned about possible exploitation in their relationships with groups and authorities, and monitor justice as a means of gauging whether they can trust particular groups and authorities (see for example, Jones & Martens, 2009). Both theories assume that humans have a need for predictability and uncertainty reduction.

Evidence suggests that there are different justice motives, but that specific justice motives may relate to several justice dimensions (e.g., Barry & Shapiro, 2000; Kim & Leung, 2007; Jones, Scarpello & Bergmann, 1999; Shapiro & Brett, 1993). Procedural justice as the most commonly studied justice dimension, for example, has strong links to both instrumental control and non-instrumental belonging motives (e.g., Barry & Shapiro, 2000; Shapiro & Brett, 1993). The debate has therefore shifted to a discussion of the relative ordering of these needs (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2005; Cropanzano et al., 2001, Gillespie & Greenberg, 2005), with an emerging consensus around a number of basic needs or goals that drive concerns with justice. These are then translated into more specific needs or goals during particular interactions with decision-makers, explaining why there is mixed empirical evidence concerning these needs. Gillespie and Greenberg (2005) see belonging as the most important motive, whereas Colquitt et al. (2005) add security (including both trust and uncertainty) as a second basic motive. These two basic goals may then be expressed in terms of control, esteem, or morality concerns within more specific justice-related events and encounters (that is at lower levels of the goal hierarchy). Although the motives are distinct, they jointly influence justice-related concerns.

Bringing the Elements Together

As I have just discussed, justice as a global variable can be broken into elements related to the what, when, how and why. People are concerned about justice for at least two major reasons that shape their attentiveness to issues of justice. Depending on whether belonging or security are concerns, people will pay attention to justice. Decision makers have options in terms of how they resolve organizational dilemmas. The selection of criteria and practices are at the discretion of the decision-maker, but are shaped by the social and cultural context. Similarly, employees evaluate these criteria and practices used in particular organizational events in terms of justice, and then these perceptions are integrated into entity perspectives about the overall organization. The emerging perceptions differ depending on whether focus is on outcomes or processes and whether it is about the structural features of the organization or how the organizational structures are enacted by managers and supervisors. Finally, justice perceptions (both event and entity perceptions) may or may not be translated into actions, depending on the situational constraints and the choice of the perceiver. See Figure 1 for a visual depiction of these links.

In the following sections, I will briefly outline some of the work that has been done on illuminating cultural processes involved in justice judgments. I will separate the discussion by the dimensions of justice and level of abstraction. In the final section, I will come back to justice effects.

DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Distributive Justice Rules

Equity theory (Adams, 1965) remains the dominant theoretical approach to distributive justice. Drawing upon earlier research and philosophical treatise going back to Ancient Greek philosophy, Adams argued that individuals compare their ratio of inputs and outcomes in social interactions with those of others. Applied to organizational settings, the most likely and relevant situation is where employees evaluate the out-

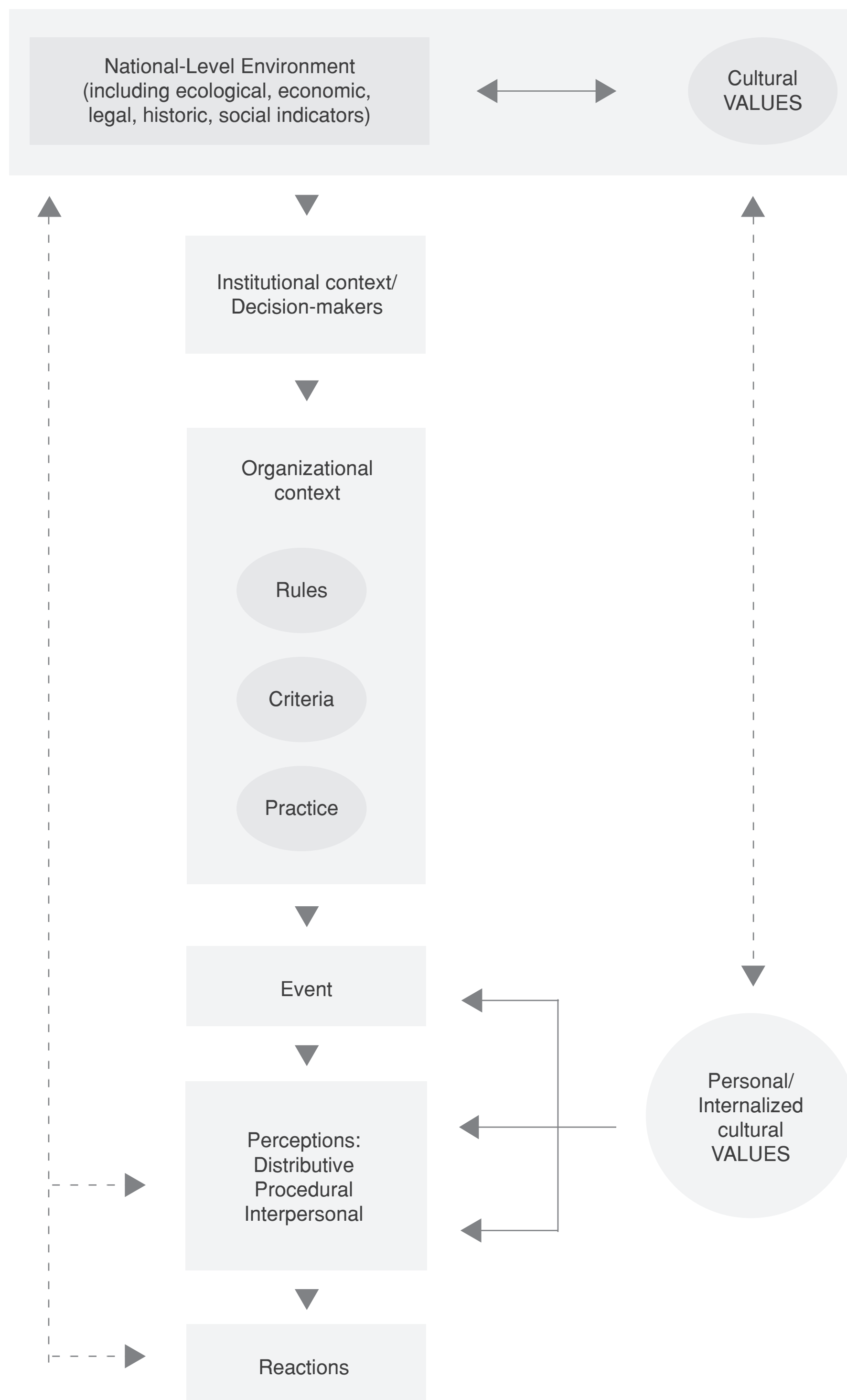

FIGURE 1. Theoretical Model of Organizational Justice and Culture.

comes that they receive based on management decisions. In addition to equity, both equality (all individuals receive the same amount, independent of any other distinguishing features) and need (allocation to the most needy, independent of work performance) have been specified as additional rules (Deutsch, 1975).

Leung (1997) reviewed the available literature and suggested that equity is universally preferred in business settings (see also Deutsch, 1975). However, a more systematic review and meta-analysis of 25 experimental studies by Fischer and Smith (2003) challenged this conclusion. They found consistent and significant cross-cultural differences in equity over equality (measured as the relative allocations of grades, points, or money in laboratory settings). Most importantly for our purposes, correlations with nation-level indicators suggested that equity was more often used in samples coming from nations in which income was distributed unequally and in which power was distributed very unequally. Extending this work to real organizations and using survey methods, Fischer, Smith, Richey et al. (2007) measured perceptions of organizational allocations in samples from the UK, US, East and West Germany, New Zealand, and Brazil. They found that higher Mastery values (Schwartz, 1994) at the country level were associated with greater use of equity. Although somewhat inconsistent (power distance versus mastery values), both dimensions share a common core of a cultural emphasis on differentiating between individuals based on their status and abilities. These studies have all used an event focus. In a more recent meta-analysis of survey studies capturing an entity perspective, Fischer and Maplesden (2006) examined survey-based measures of distributive justice (commonly conceptualized as tapping equity, with work effort as relevant input) among employees (thus, excluding experimental studies and student samples). Focusing on mean levels of reported distributive justice across 30,528 employees from 29 nations, levels of perceived distributive justice were found to be higher in contexts where embeddedness and conservation values prevail compared with those in which autonomy is emphasized and where power is distributed more equally (using indicators based on Schwartz, 1994). Therefore, the findings across these various studies are quite consistent, independent of whether the focus is on events or entity perceptions. Equity becomes more prevalent when cultural values of hierarchy, dominating others, and fitting into conservative and close-knit groups are emphasized.

Equality is another important justice rule, but this has been studied less frequently. In one of the rare studies in organizational settings mentioned before, Fischer et al. (2007) found no cross-cultural differences in reported equality-based allocation in the six business contexts that were studied. We clearly need more research with more diverse samples to get a better understanding of how equality rules are being used in organizations.

Similarly, need has not been studied much in cross-cultural management research. Existing laboratory research with students suggests considerable differences across nations (e.g., Berman & Murphy-Berman, 1996; Berman, Murphy-Berman & Singh, 1985; Chen, 1995; Giacobbe-Miller, Miller & Victorov, 1998; Murphy-Berman, Berman, Singh, Pachauri & Kumar, 1984). Surveys of business employees also point to large differences in reported frequency of need-based allocations (Fischer et al., 2007; Fischer, 2004), that seem to be related to economic variables, specifically unemployment rates. A clearer understanding of the economic context on the decision-making in organizational contexts is needed. Given the current economic turmoil, this should clearly take some priority as these decisions focusing on need affect the most vulnerable members of organizations and society.

Distributive Justice Criteria

One of the obvious gaps in cross-cultural research has been the lack of attention to distributive justice criteria that are used for implementing rather abstract justice rules. The equity rule is open to various interpretations and can be implemented quite differently. Adams discussed various potential inputs (e.g., effort, education, experience, age, attractiveness) and both positively (e.g., pay, various benefits, rewards intrinsic to the job) and negatively valenced

outcomes (e.g., poor working conditions, monotony, fatigue, uncertainty, insults, rudeness). Individuals were thought to negotiate the relevance of these various inputs and outcomes for any given exchange, leaving the door wide open for variation across cultures. The existing literature has focused primarily on inputs in terms of work related effort and outcomes as material benefits such as pay or promotions.

Let us consider some of the available evidence that suggests broader criteria. Focusing on age first, there is considerable evidence that managers in some cultural contexts use seniority when making decisions (see Fischer, 2008 for a review).

What makes seniority interesting is that it is both an egalitarian as well as a differential allocation principle (Martin & Harder, 1994). Seniority implies equality because employees are all treated equally and it is up to the individual to decide to stay in the company and gain seniority in the long run. It is also differential due to the link with exactly these individual differences. Rusbult, Insko, & Lin (1995) suggested that seniority might be "a temporarily extended version of the equality rule (i.e., a rather long-term version of turn-taking), if a member remains in the group long enough, he or she eventually will reap the benefits accruing to senior members" (p. 26). A study by Fischer (2008) with German, US, British, and New Zealand employees demonstrated that allocation based on seniority was more often found in organizations that were rated as more egalitarian, supporting Rusbult's extended equality argument at the organization level.

These findings changed at the country level. A number of theorists have tied seniority to greater power distance and inequality. Mendonca and Kanungo (1994) suggested that status and position as reward criteria will be more acceptable in higher power distance nations. A number of studies reported greater use of seniority in Asian samples compared to US samples, mainly studying business students (Chen, 1995; Hundley & Kim, 1997; Rusbult et al., 1995). This preference may be linked cultural expressions of respect (Hundley & Kim, 1997). Other studies with actual employees have suggested that this preference for seniority may be decreasing (Chen, Wakabayashi & Takeuchi, 2004). Fischer (2008) showed no significant effect of power distance on frequency of seniority-based allocation across businesses in the US, UK, New Zealand, and Germany. Nevertheless, greater uncertainty avoidance was associated with greater reported use of seniority. This may be plausible since uncertainty avoidance refers to the tendency to avoid ambiguities and uncertainties in everyday life and to rely on the tried and tested. Rewarding seniority is one way to increase the familiarity of organizational members and to reduce uncertainty by relying on those who know the system well.

Need is another interesting example and challenge for researchers. How should we define need and what is legitimately considered needy in various cultural contexts? Laboratory studies using students have employed different need manipulations, including descriptions of poor financial situation and family illness (e.g., Murphy-Berman, et al., 1984), being either single, married with one child and two incomes, or married with two dependents and one income (Giacobbe-Miller, et al., 1998), or in terms of age, or in terms of justified or unjustified debt (Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka & Isaka, 1988). Therefore, although age was considered part of the seniority principle when discussed previously, it could also be conceptualized as a form of need in some cultures.

Re-evaluating the evidence, these studies raise the legitimate question of whether justice rules and the associated criteria are empirically independent of one another, and the extent to which they are all extensions of a general equity principle, assuming different inputs are relevant in different cultural contexts. Even equality could be conceptualized as a special form of equity, if we acknowledge that equity is equality of outcome per unit input (Rutte & Messick, 1995). Equality can only be judged in relation to some standards (e.g., relevant inputs or outcomes). Leung (1997) maintained that collectivists are more egalitarian with their in-group members who have an equal status, whereas they use more differential norms with outsiders. Considering the potential input into this ratio, group membership could be seen as the relevant input in an exchange situation, so that all members of an in-group would receive the same reward.

Following this reasoning, different justice criteria can be effectively subsumed under one general rule of justice. It might be more parsimonious and practically relevant to use one single rule and examine how it is implemented differently across cultures. From a practical perspective this provides more powerful scope for managers. For one, it allows managers to use the same underlying principle (equity) and then their task is to negotiate culturally relevant input and outcome criteria with their staff. This would also allow for an effective strategy for appreciating and dealing with cultural differences. If there is an underlying principle that all employees can relate to, this could be stressed to highlight their communality. Negotiating what is considered relevant in a given work situation is more easily achieved compared with a situation where managers are confronted with seemingly exclusive and non-overlapping justice rules or criteria that show no immediate room for agreement. This idea obviously needs further discussion but could open the avenue for more effective management of culturally diverse workforces.

Distributive Justice Practices

Research on practices is largely missing from the organizational and management literature. Using my previous arguments, the implementation of justice rules and criteria may need to be negotiated between managers and employees. Interestingly, once the focus is on the implementation of justice criteria, this may blur the clear separation of justice dimensions. For example, Greenberg (1993) suggested that the enactment of distributive justice (negotiating the criteria and rules to be used, communicating the decision outcome, etc.) can be seen as part of interpersonal justice. These distributive practices have not been systematically investigated, we do not know how employees perceive these criteria, and this provides a major avenue for further research.

Procedural Justice

Much of the research on procedural justice across cultures has been studied as part of conflict and negotiation research (see Leung & Stephan, 2001), an area that has attracted a significant amount of research. Here I will primarily focus on justice issues arising in organizational settings as part of organizational decision making.

Procedural Justice Rules

In the US literature, a series of procedural rules have been discussed, most importantly those suggested in a seminal paper by Leventhal (1980). Thibaut and Walker (1975, 1978) proposed an additional procedural control rule consisting of decision control (the extent to which any of the involved parties can unilaterally determine the outcome of the decision) and process control (the amount of control over the process, e.g., the development and selection of information that serves as a basis for the final decision). Folger (1977) identified this latter process as 'voice'.

We have some evidence of cultural differences in relation to voice or process control. Cohn, White and Sanders (2000) studied nationally representative samples in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Russia, France, Spain, and the US. They found strong effects of voice and little cross-cultural variability. The one cultural difference found was that in Eastern and Central European nations, being consistent and following labor regulations had a stronger effect on justice perceptions than in Western European nations and the US. One mechanism that may explain this difference are more positive perceptions of leaders following formal rules in Eastern European contexts that are characterized by nepotism and corruption (Pearce, Bigley, & Branyiczki, 1998). In a study with students in the US, Mexico, The Netherlands, and the UK, Price, et al. (2001) reported no differences in voice effects. In

summary, the limited evidence available from these studies suggests strong support for the importance of voice.

Fischer and Maplesden's (2006) previously mentioned meta-analysis included levels of procedural justice. Across 76,367 participants from 29 countries, they found few significant and meaningful correlations with nation-level indicators, indicating that other, probably more proximal variables at the organizational level are more important for procedural justice levels than macro-level economic and cultural variables.

Procedural Justice Criteria

As discussed before, procedural rules might be favored universally but the actual criteria for implementing them might be quite different. The negotiation and conflict resolution literature is more advanced in this area than the procedural justice literature (Leung & Stephan, 2001).

Procedural Justice Practices

As before, there is hardly any research on the actual justice practices (implementations of criteria) across cultural contexts. I can only put forward some speculations based on theories of cultural differences. For example, the cultural dimension of universalism versus particularism (Trompenaars, 1993) might be important. In universalistic settings (for example, Germany is often cited as universalistic country) rules are applied consistently and no variations due to situational demands can be justified. In contrast, in particularistic settings (such as Brazil) rules in specific situations might be more liberally interpreted. The Brazilian concept of *jeitinho* is a good, but controversial example. In Brazilian society, rules and regulations are easily broken if the interaction partners are willing to do so. This form of behavior might be construed as corrupt from a Western perspective, but in a highly bureaucratic and centralized setting it may be the only strategy to get things done effectively and efficiently, at least in the short term. What is important to note here is that these practices may be effective, but they may not be seen as fair. Our research (e.g., Ferreira et al., 2012) certainly suggests that Brazilians are giving a *jeito*, but do not like to admit it and clearly attach some negative stigma to it when doing it.

Interpersonal justice

Interpersonal justice can be differentiated into an interpersonal behavior component (enactment of procedures and interactions with decision-makers) and an information component. It is generally stressed in the literature that decision-makers should treat employees with dignity and respect. Although it may be seen as a universal philosophical rule, Fischer and Maplesden (2006) found that across 67,060 participants from 23 countries, greater power distance (Hofstede, 1980) was associated with lower levels of interpersonal justice. This indicates that individuals in hierarchically structured societies do not feel as fairly treated by their supervisors as individuals in more egalitarian settings. We do not know how these interpersonal justice rules were implemented though, and there may be considerable differences across cultural contexts. In Pacific Asia, the concept of face is very important and may strongly determine how respect is shown to other people. These behaviors may be highly contextual, depending on the status of the interaction partner and whether the situation is public or private (for a review see Smith, Fischer & Vignoles, 2013). A famous study by Smith, Peterson, Misumi and Tayeb (1989) examined whether a supervisor discussing a worker's problems with co-workers behind the person's back was considered acceptable. This behavior was certainly seen as acceptable in Japan and Hong Kong, but not in the US and UK. We know very little about the culturally appropriate implementations of interpersonal justice practices, and these still need to be systematically investigated.

Justice Perceptions

The first part of this review examined the use of justice rules and their implementation through criteria and the actual behavior of decision makers. The experience and perception of these events by employees is the crucial issue. Evaluations in turn may lead to behavioural and attitudinal reactions. In this area, we are dealing with a black box and have little knowledge about what is happening. A study by Fischer and Smith (2004) with UK and German employees suggested that similar decisions can be perceived quite differently depending on the value orientation of individuals. Individuals who endorsed self-enhancement values (Schwartz, 1992) perceived allocations using equity as fairer than those who endorsed self-transcendence. Seniority was also seen as fairer by those with self-enhancement values compared with those emphasizing self-transcendence. In short, events may be perceived quite differently by individuals, depending on their personal and cultural value orientations. This creates a significant challenge for managers, especially in multicultural work teams, since expectations and perceptions need to be successfully managed. Yet this very much remains a black box and we need more research to understand the psychological processes involved in evaluating justice events.

Reactions to Perceived Injustice

In this final part, I am turning to the effects of justice on work behavior and motivation. This aspect has generated the most research within Western nations (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), but we do not know how well findings from the US and Western Europe can be generalized to the rest of the world. A fair number of studies have demonstrated that employees in Taiwan (Farh, Earley & Lin, 1997), Hong Kong (Lam, Schaubroeck & Aryee, 2002), China (Begley, Lee, Fang, & Li, 2002; Brockner, Ackerman, Greenberg, et al. 2001; Tyler, Lind & Huo, 2000), the UK (Fischer & Smith, 2006), former East Germany (Fischer & Smith, 2006), Turkey (Erdogan & Liden, 2006), and the US (Tyler et al., 2000) are influenced differently by justice perceptions, depending on their value orientation. However, the nature, direction, and explanation of such effects are debated (Fischer, 2008).

There is relatively little work on the effects of culture on justice-outcome relationships. Most of the research has been done in relation to power distance (e.g., Begley et al., 2002; Brockner et al., 2001; Lam et al., 2002). Brockner et al. (2001) argued that in high power distance contexts, justice does not matter as much as people do not expect justice (a normative explanation). However, we could equally interpret the same pattern as suggesting that procedural justice in high power-distant cultures does not provide informative value about inclusion and respect in groups as people are firmly integrated in hierarchies already (an uncertainty explanation, see Lind, 2001). Further complicating the picture, we could say that the effect runs in the opposite direction, with individuals endorsing power distance values showing stronger procedural justice effects as they need to monitor potential exploitation by distant supervisors (a control explanation, e.g., Lam et al., 2002). The closely related dimension of collectivism has also attracted some researchers' attention. Individualism-collectivism, independent-interdependent self-construals and related value dimensions at the individual level (openness to change, traditionality) have been found to change justice-work attitude relations (e.g., Brockner, De Cremer, can den Bos, & Chen, 2005; Farh et al., 1997; Fischer & Smith, 2006). Findings have been found in both directions, with some people finding that collectivist values strengthen procedural justice effects as experienced justice affirms basic moral values held by collectivists (Brockner et al., 2005), whereas others reporting that more modern (individualistic) values strengthen justice effects (Farh et al., 1997). Hence, previous research has focused on power distance and collectivism, but has shown conflicting results (see Fischer, 2008 for a more detailed review).

In a recent paper, Fischer (2012) reviewed the existing theories and linked them to justice concerns of belonging and control that I outlined above. The basic idea is that if justice concerns are related to human needs, then these effects can be expected to be stronger or weaker depending on the context, because different contexts allow for different satisfaction and salience of needs (Kenrick et al., 2010). Linking this reasoning to cultural and economic differences, individuals in different cultural and economic contexts may exhibit different justice-work attitude relations as they have different needs and therefore pay differential attention to violations of various justice dimensions. This argument is consistent with work examining attitude-behaviour relations (e.g., Cohen, Shariff & Hill, 2008; Fazio & Powell, 1997; Glasman & Albarracin, 2006) that has demonstrated that attitude accessibility strengthens the attitude-behaviour link. Therefore, Fischer (2012) argued that the salience or accessibility of needs and motives related to justice within a cultural context strengthens the link between justice perceptions and work outcomes. If individuals are working within a cultural environment in which certain motives, such as belonging, are central in people's lives, then the link between justice and work outcomes should be strengthened if a particular justice dimension is related to a need for affiliation or belonging.

Fischer (2012) conducted a 3-level meta-analysis with 54,100 participants from 36 countries, showing that (a) justice correlations vary across cultural contexts, (b) macro-economic income inequality and country-level values can systematically explain this variability, and (c) by assessing the pattern of associations with contextual variables, useful insights into the motives and concerns underlying justice effects can be found.

One of the key findings was that there was strongest support for the view that people care about justice because it addresses their affiliation or belonging needs. Both procedural and distributive justice correlations with OCB, satisfaction and withdrawal, and interpersonal justice correlations with satisfaction were strengthened in contexts where collectivism is high. These findings suggest that all three justice dimensions communicate symbolic values of belonging and inclusion to employees. People care about fairness of outcomes for non-instrumental and relationship reasons, even if the justice dimension has clear economic implications. This is a major insight into the motives underlying justice effects, especially because distributive justice effects are often discussed as mainly driven by instrumental and control motives.

Fischer used GLOBE's dimension that differentiates between in-group and institutional collectivism. Both had an effect suggesting that collectivism is important but these dimensions probably work through different mechanisms. Institutional collectivism measures the extent to which individuals think institutions should place collective interests and goals over individual interests and goals. In-group collectivism is the emotional attachment to family and close kin. The PJ-OCB relationship suggests that expectations and values attached to relationships with larger institutions in more collectivistic settings leads employees to reciprocate if they feel included and acknowledged as full members of these institutions.

In-group collectivism, that is, the attachment to small in-groups and families, also moderated justice effects. In this case it appears likely that affiliative relations to small groups (family) generalize to larger settings and authorities because individuals are socialized into valuing and maintaining close relationships with others and therefore are more satisfied if these values are upheld. This analysis therefore supports the previous reasoning by Brockner et al. (2005) and confirms the general importance of needs to belong.

Fischer (2012) also found strong support for control motives. A relative consistent and stable effect of income equality for procedural and interpersonal justice was found, but surprisingly, distributive justice effects were not influenced by income inequality. Fair procedures ensure fair outcomes in the long run, so employees can expect that fair procedures will increase positive work outcomes such as satisfaction and trust. Similarly, interpersonal justice increased commitment and satisfaction, and decreased withdrawal intentions, in countries where income is unequally distributed. These findings indicate that both procedural and interactional justice also have important instrumental concerns (e.g., Shapiro & Brett, 1993).

These findings also demonstrate that meta-analyses can generate new findings by pointing to important moderator variables that went unnoticed in previous research. The overall pattern found in the study shows that material concerns become important for employees if they are located in a context in which relative income inequalities are salient. Future research should pay more attention to these instrumental and materialistic concerns in addition to relational and belonging concerns, especially considering the current economic crisis and the strong economic inequalities in many majority world (developing world) countries.

AREAS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

As should be clear by now, we have made some considerable progress in understanding the justice process in the workplace. It is probably one of the most fundamental psychological mechanisms that influences the bonding of individuals to corporate organizations. Yet it is also clear that we need more research investigating a number of issues. Most importantly in a global perspective is our lack of understanding about culturally relevant justice criteria and practices. We have only anecdotal evidence about how justice rules are implemented. I also outlined some ideas of how equity theory can be reconceptualized to provide a more parsimonious account of distributive justice.

Similarly, the larger socioeconomic and macroeconomic context of business has also been largely ignored by justice researchers. I have reviewed some empirical studies that demonstrate that the economic situation matters, a stark reminder that organizational decisions are not made within an experimental vacuum. We also need more research on the antecedents and correlates of justice perceptions, especially as they focus on non-material outcomes such as health and well-being. In short, we have learned we have tremendous insights over the last few decades, but our quest for understanding (and applying) justice theory continues.

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