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A Historical Lens on Organisational Justice:*Evolution, Perspectives, and Implications*

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ABSTRACT

Fairness perceptions in the workplace have long been recognized as a central determinant of employee motivation, performance, and organizational harmony. Organizational justice refers to employees' subjective assessments of fairness concerning outcomes, procedures, and interpersonal treatment. This paper provides a historical and conceptual analysis of the evolution of organizational justice, tracing its development from early notions of relative deprivation (Stouffer et al., 1949) to contemporary, multidimensional frameworks. The review identifies three major intellectual phases—distributive, procedural, and interactional justice—and examines how each stream has cumulatively shaped the field. The paper highlights the interplay among these perspectives and underscores the integrative movement that positions justice as a multifaceted construct influencing employee attitudes and behaviors across organizational contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of justice has been entrenched in human society ever since the olden days and has usually been associated with the wider interests of morality, fairness, and societal order. In earlier times, justice was seen more in the social and philosophical sense, that is, in the equity of the apportionment of resources in society. The concept of justice took on a new dimension with the advent of modern organizations where workplaces became the major arenas of interaction,

decision-making, and interpersonal relationships. A modern-day workplace would see employees not just making judgments in cases of fairness but also when it comes to the processes and methods by which decisions are implemented. The current paper identifies the conceptual development of the topic of organizational justice and how the classical philosophical views began to inform psychology and organization. It also examines the greater continuities between traditional conceptions of justice and their new organizational analogy.

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CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

This is the concept of equity in the allocation of resources that was laid down by Aristotle in his work as the fundamental idea of justice (Ross, 1925). Subsequently, Locke (1689/1994) and Hobbes (1651/1947) further enforced justice as an ideal of normativity based on human rights and social contracts. Classical management theorists like Taylor and Follett, however, did not pay much attention to the perception of fairness in the workplace (Kanigel, 1997; Barclay, 2003).

The contemporary notion of organizational justice originated in the middle of the 20th century with the emergence of organizational behavior and human relations studies. Theories of psychology, including cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), balance theory (Heider, 1958), the frustration-aggression hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939), and

others, were used to explain how employees assess fairness in social interactions. The term organizational justice was subsequently formalized by Greenberg (1987b) to reflect the perception of employees on the fairness in the distribution of outcomes, decision-making, and treatment toward others. The discipline developed in three main dimensions of justice:

- Distributive justice—fairness of results (Adams, 1963; Homans, 1961).
- Procedural justice—fairness of procedures that control the decision-making process (Thibaut and Walker, 1975; Leventhal, 1980).
- Interactional justice—judgment of fairness in the treatment and communication among people (Bies and Moag, 1986).

Together, these dimensions offer a holistic approach to the perception of fairness concerning the dimensions of organizational behavior and attitudes.

Interactional Justice Movement

Procedural Justice Movement

Distributive Justice Movement



Figure 1: Movements of Organisational Justice Theory

Source: Author's Compilation

The Distributive Justice Movement

Initial studies focused on the responses of employees to the results allocation and social exchange inequity.

Social Comparison and Relative Deprivation: Stouffer et al. (1949) showed that the judgments of fairness are not based upon absolute outcomes but rather based on comparisons with referent other people, a point that has been corroborated by Festinger (1954) social comparison theory. Later studies by Davis (1959), Merton and Rossi (1957), and Crosby (1976; 1982) expounded on the effects of relative deprivation on relative satisfaction and relative injustice.

Social Exchange Perspective of Homans: The issue of perceived lack of balance between investments and rewards, which leads to resentment and dissatisfaction, prompted Homans (1958; 1961) to argue that fairness is based on a reciprocal exchange. His work, though insightful, did not

pay much attention to behavioral reactions to perceived injustice.

Adams' Equity Theory: Adams (1963; 1965) made a significant contribution to the distributive justice literature by hypothesizing that people judge fairness by input-to-output proportions in comparison to referent individuals. Perceived inequity, be it underpayment or overpayment, brings about psychological distress, and the individual is driven to ensure the restoration of equity either behaviorally or cognitively. Equity theory is still fundamental in the study of organizational behavior, despite criticisms based on the definition (Pritchard, 1969).

Multiple Allocation Norms: The expansion of distributive justice was made by Leventhal (1976) and Deutsch (1975), who stated that fairness could be based on equality or need, as well as on group goals instead of equity. This was

developed to further conceptualize distributive justice and recognized that various norms can run together.

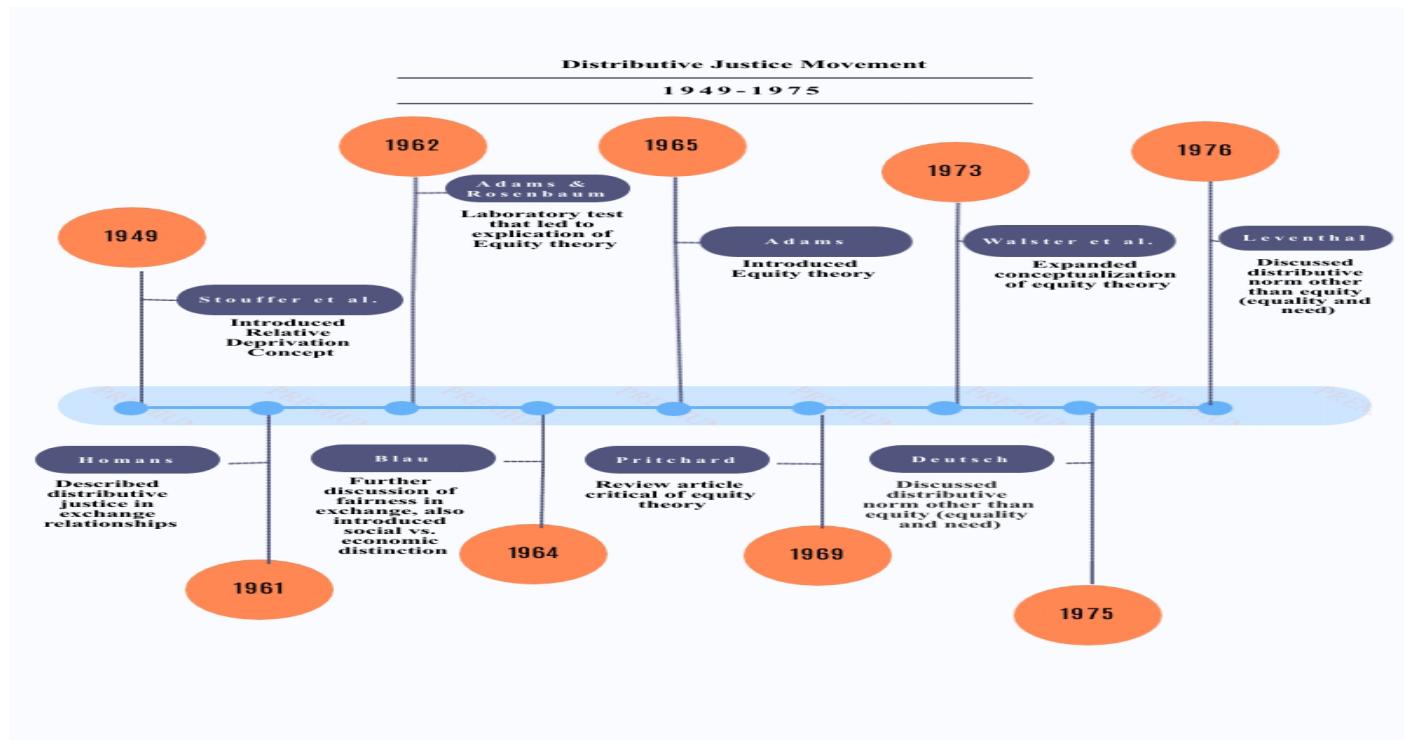


Figure 2: Distributive Justice Movement (1949 – 1975)

Source: Author's Compilation

The Procedural Justice Movement

With the maturity of organizations, scholars started to focus not on outcomes but on the processes behind the decision-making.

Dispute Resolution Studies by Thibaut and Walker: Thibaut and Walker (1975) established that people mea-

sure fairness through the level of control that they possess during the processes, regardless of the outcomes. Their study defined the psychological meaning of voice and process control as important factors when creating perceptions of fairness.

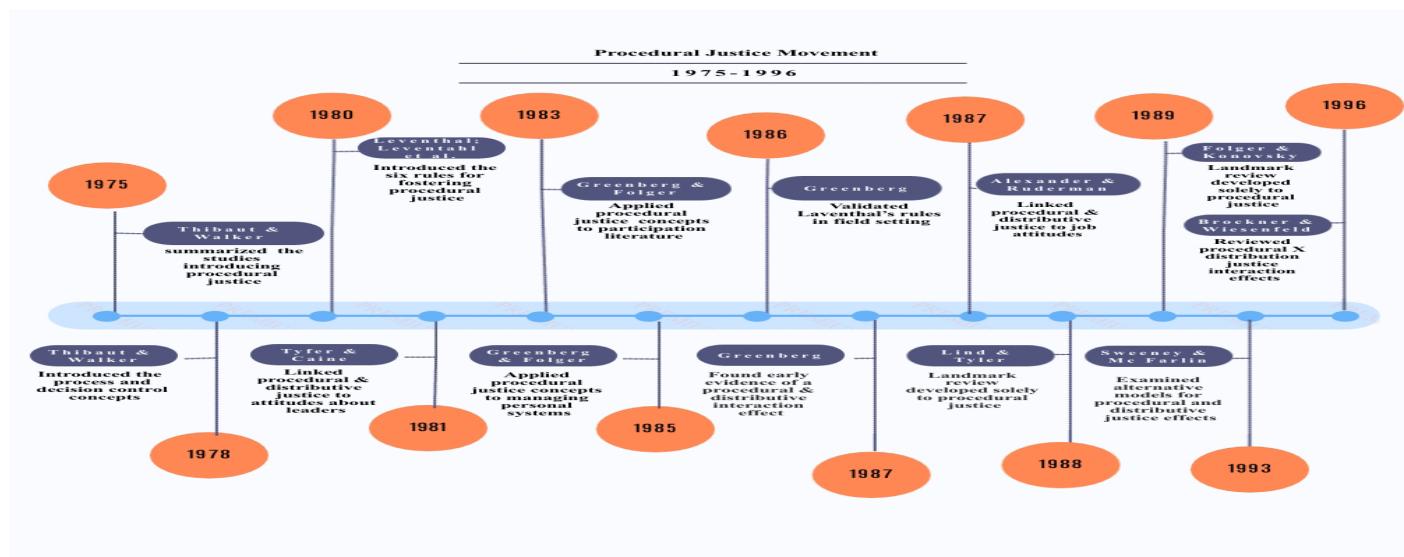


Figure 2.3: Procedural Justice Movement (1975 – 1996)

Source: Author's Compilation

Fair Procedure Criteria by Leventhal: Leventhal (1980) applied procedural justice to the organizational environment and pointed out six principles of fair procedures, which consist of consistency, suppression of bias, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality. These requirements offered a viable outline for assessing organizational policies, including performance appraisal and compensation.

Diversification into Organizational Behavior: Procedural justice, as formulated by scholars such as Greenberg and Folger (1983; 1985), was integrated into organizational studies and is associated with participative decision-making, leadership, HR systems, and employee voice. The seminal work of Lind and Tyler (1988) has further defined procedural justice as a fundamental construct that affects

job satisfaction, compliance, and organizational commitment.

The Interactional Justice Movement

The third significant change came when researchers realized that judgments on fairness are also predetermined by the interpersonal treatment when carrying out the procedure.

Communication-Based Rules of Bies and Moag: Bies and Moag (1986) explained four norms of fairness in interpersonal treatment, such as truthfulness, justification, respect, and propriety, arguing that the four norms form a different dimension of justice. Interactional justice is concerned with the quality of communication and social context of decision-making as opposed to procedural rules.

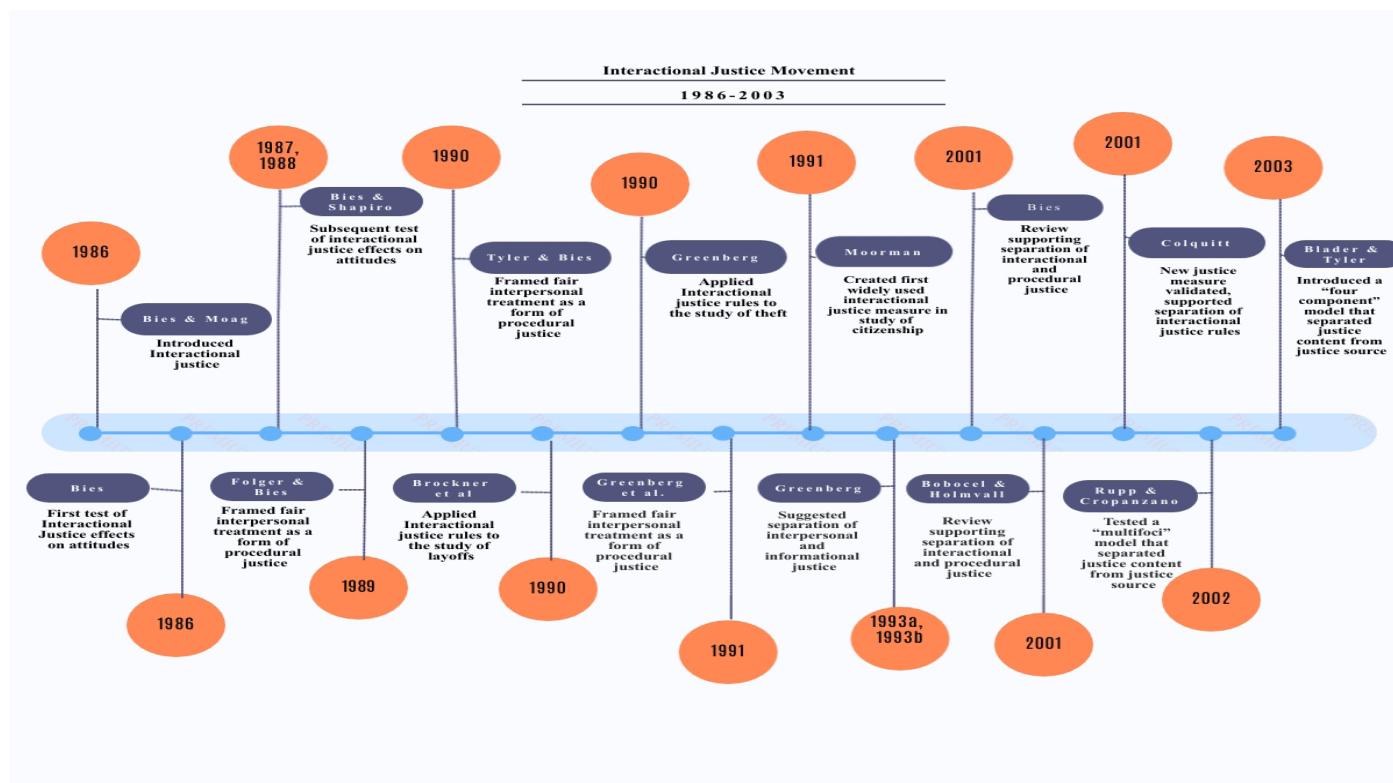


Figure 2.4: Interactional Justice Movement (1986 – 2003)

Source: Author's Compilation

Subsequent Developments:

Subsequent developments (Folger and Bies, 1989; Greenberg et al., 1991) extended interactional justice to aspects of managerial interactionism like feedback, sincerity, and employee consultation. There was a lot of controversy over whether interactional justice can be considered conceptually distinct from procedural justice, although current studies tend to regard it as a distinct dimension.

Integrative Justice Movement

The notion of overall justice is an evaluation of fairness in an organization in its entirety that goes beyond the parameters of individual dimensions of justice. Similar to distributive, procedural, and interactional justice perceptions, which can be rooted in various places, including the organization as an institution or certain organizational actors, overall justice can also be referred to (Rupp et al.,

2014). Besides, such assessments of justice can be directed to organizational systems or single occurrences. For example, the workers can determine whether an organization adhered to the principles of justice throughout a layoff procedure (Goldman & Cropanzano, 2014).

The theme of general justice has gained interest because of its conceptual and practical use in the field of organizational studies (Holtz and Harold, 2009). Overall justice is said to be more stable since it is concerned with consistent decisions made at the organizational level, and not just single cases. Scholars also add that general justice is more parsimonious and valid in terms of reflecting the perception of fairness in employers (Ambrose and Schminke, 2009; Holtz and Harold, 2009).

Based on the argument set forth by Cronbach (1970), according to which constructs with similar degrees of specificity are more predictive accurately, researchers posit that overall justice can be more predictive accurately than individual aspects of justice. Broad-based justice tends to be more in line with the general employee outcomes that are generally discussed within the context of organizational psychology and management research. Being a universal judgment of fairness, it portrays the broadest outlook on how people place their judgments on fairness in their workplace and captures the preeminent factors that dictate the attitudinal and behavioral reactions (Ambrose and Schminke, 2009; Earley and Lind, 1987).

Moreover, researchers argue that the emphasis on the idea of justice in general might help compile similar studies and conduct more cost-efficient measurements. Since it is not dispersed as much as the facets of justice, overall justice can easily be combined with other organizational constructs (Ambrose and Schminke, 2009; Greenberg and Colquitt, 2005).

Although it is possible that overall justice can be especially useful in forecasting the results of large-scale organizational activities, the facets of justice still have their purpose in smaller organizations with less strict hierarchies or in the context of a single work process. The Fairness Heuristic Theory assumes that perceptions of fairness across the world are stable and only change when there is new information contradicting former beliefs that are justice-relevant. It is also posited by research that the relations between event-specific and general justice perceptions may interact and influence reactions and behavioral results in employees (Choi and Choi, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The domain of organisational justice has changed in the last 70 years, evolving from rudimentary concepts of com-

parative deprivation to a multidimensional structure that includes outcomes, procedures, and how individuals are treated. The distributive, procedural, and interactional justice movements have collectively influenced the rise of modern insights into the nature of fairness in organisations, revealing that the fairness concerns of employees are manifold and interdependent, deeply embedded in organisational life.

Scientific advancement, as Kuhn (1963) pointed out, is achieved by a compromise between progressive change and paradigm shifts. The whole justice movement represents such a shift, with its predecessors as the base and broadening the field of investigation. The next possible step in organisational justice studies may involve integrative views, cross-cultural examinations, or equity in technologically mediated workplaces—areas that are increasingly relevant in the digital era.

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