

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AS DETERMINANTS
OF MEMBER SATISFACTION: A TEACHERS'
ASSOCIATION EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

In contrast to business firms, labor organizations have been reluctant to use general attitude surveys as a means of assessing member satisfaction. Drawing upon popular research in the organizational justice field, this study surveyed members of a teachers' association regarding their perceptions of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. Also surveyed were member attitudes toward dispute resolution handling. Results are noteworthy for several reasons. First, findings demonstrate the importance of the constructs of justice and fairness in the evaluation of member satisfaction and union/ association performance. Second, on a practical note, the study illustrates the ease by which survey questionnaires can be used and analyzed by public sector labor organizations. The article begins with a review of the organizational justice literature.

Behavioral scientists have long appreciated the importance of justice and fairness as basic conditions affecting employee job satisfaction and organizational performance. For example, recent research findings show that positive employee perceptions of justice influence product and service outcomes and compliance with organizational rules and procedures. Additionally, issues of justice are key components in proactive human resource management practices, including performance appraisal and compensation systems [1]. Given the importance of justice to organizational members, it is not surprising that justice concerns are championed to be "the first virtue of social institutions" [2, p. 3].

As defenders of employee rights, labor organizations have long fought for justice and fairness in the workplace. Formalized grievance/arbitration procedures, collective bargaining gains, and labor's legal agenda attest to this concern. However, while researchers have systematically surveyed employees about their perceptions of organizational justice and job satisfaction in the business sector [3], the union environment is largely devoid of meaningful studies explaining union member justice perceptions. This is true regarding justice perceptions of 1) member satisfaction with unionism, 2) labor organization performance, or 3) behavioral interactions between union members and labor officials.

Furthermore, the grievance/arbitration process has been called the cornerstone of the collective bargaining agreement since it is the vehicle for adjudicating employee complaints [4]. Nevertheless, given the importance of this procedure to resolving labor-management disagreements, little attention has been given to the perceptions union members hold toward this conflict resolution procedure [5]. The purpose of this research, therefore, was to apply organizational justice concepts to the labor setting as a means of assessing member perceptions of union fairness. Specifically, we surveyed members of a teachers' association about their perceptions of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice as determinants of member satisfaction with unionism. Additional attention was given to feelings of fairness toward the association's complaint resolution procedure.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE

The concept of organizational justice occupies a prominent place in the organizational behavior research. Justice studies are grounded in the belief that employees who are treated fairly are more likely to hold positive organizational attitudes and/or behaviors. These can include having increased levels of output or improved service quality [6], or positive attitudes toward organizational commitment and acceptance of the organization's goals and values.

The constructs of organizational justice are commonly discussed in these areas—procedural, distributive, and interactional justice. Importantly, each of these areas may be predictive of different union member attitudes, the total of which can influence a variety of labor's effectiveness outcomes.

Procedural Justice

Procedural justice is one's perception of fairness regarding how decisions are made to allocate organizational resources. The central treatise of procedural justice is that individuals view organizational processes as most fair when those processes are influenced by participant control [7]. Control can be of two types—*decision control*, which is actual influence over the decision made, and *process control*, which relates to an individual's access to the procedures and control over the evidence presented [1, p. 121]. Importantly, process control

enhances procedural justice because it satisfies a drive to have one's ideas heard, even though being heard may have no effect on the decision reached [8].

Research has identified salient components of procedural justice [see e.g., 9, 10]. For example, participants of justice studies display high perceptions of procedural fairness when the concerns of all individuals are heard, clarification of information is allowed, all sides affected by a decision are represented, and accurate and complete information is presented and evaluated when acted upon. Extending these early research findings, recent studies have identified the importance of receiving useful feedback about decisions and the opportunity to appeal or challenge decisions as meaningful components of perceived procedural justice. Based on these findings, sample questions used in this study include: "In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, the concerns of all members affected by the decisions are heard," and "In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, requests for clarification and additional information are allowed."

Distributive Justice

While perceptions of procedural justice are associated with organizational system evaluations, distributive justice perceptions tend to be associated with outcomes received. Grounded in equity theory research, distributive justice attempts to operationalize fairness in terms of input/output ratios and an individual's reactions to various resource distributions [11]. Interestingly, much of the interest in studying matters of procedural justice is due to its effect on distributive justice perception. Theory and research suggest a connection between procedural and distributive justice that exists independent from the outcomes produced by the procedures [12, 13]. For example, study findings have demonstrated that individuals care less about procedures when they lead to positive outcomes rather than when they lead to negative outcomes [14].

As with procedural justice, distributive justice has its identifiable components. Individuals' perceptions of distributive justice are linked to how they feel rewarded based on their job responsibilities, education and training received, experience obtained, and/or the effort put forth in doing their job. Additionally, one's belief in the quality of work performed and the stress and strains of work contribute to distributive justice perceptions. The following are distributive justice sample questions from our questionnaire: "You are fairly rewarded through your agreement, considering the responsibilities you have" and "You are fairly rewarded through your agreement for the amount of effort that you put forth."

Interactional Justice

Interactional justice is one's perception to being unfavorably or unjustly treated during some encounter with an individual in the organization. It is derived from the group-value model of justice [15], which holds that people value their

relationship with other individuals, groups, or organizations. Interactional relationships provide individuals with the opportunity to validate the correctness of their beliefs and behaviors and to feel accepted, respected, and valued [16]. Furthermore, through the quality of the relationship developed, individuals acquire internal feelings of self-identity and self-worth [17]. The cornerstone to interactional justice perceptions is the importance of being treated fairly by the other person to the relationship. Receiving fair treatment signifies that one is being treated in a dignified and respectful manner. Conversely, individuals may act negatively and exhibit symptoms of distress when they feel they have been unfairly treated by others.

Components of interactional justice include personal feelings regarding the respect and dignity one receives, the kindness and consideration received through the relationship, and concerns shown toward one's individual rights. Interactional justice concepts suggest individuals value the communication they receive, since important and meaningful information contributes to a favorable self-image. Accordingly, when decisions are clearly explained or when adequate justification is provided for decisions made, perceptions of interactional justice are heightened. This is also true when one is given useful feedback on decisions or the implications of the decisions are discussed. Sample questions from the union perception scale include: "When decisions are made about you, your association officials treat you with respect and dignity," and "When decisions are made about you, your association officials offer you adequate justification for the decision."

Grievance Systems

A grievance system services to adjudicate employee problems and resolve interpretations of the collective bargaining agreement. Several research studies have shown that the manner in which union officials handle member grievances is a significant determinant of member satisfaction with grievance procedures and outcomes and with unionism in general [18, 19]. Accordingly, since social psychological studies suggest that perceptions of procedural and distributive justice are intertwined with an individual's satisfaction with compliant handling, grievance resolution within labor organizations becomes a logical extension for studying organizational justice concepts [20]. For example, in one study of workplace justice and job satisfaction, it was found that procedural justice, rather than distributive justice, was a significantly better predictor of workers' satisfaction with a grievance system in a majority of the samples studied [21]. Therefore, with the central role played by grievance processing in promoting due process, positive perceptions of justice enhance union instrumentality.

Unaccountably, there have been only a few studies assessing the grievance-filing perceptions of union members [22]. Hopefully, to advance the study of grievance processing and procedural and distributive justice, we developed

specific questions to investigate the fairness of the teachers' association dispute resolution system. Sample questions include: "My association protects me against unfair actions by my employer," and "To my knowledge the outcomes of disputes in this association are fair." This scale had a reliability coefficient of .94. In a study of informal due-process systems, the quality of representation received from advocates played an important role in shaping participants' attitudes of procedural justice [23]. We measured this finding through several questions, including: "The representation provided by the association was technically competent," and "I was kept informed of the progress of my complaint."

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected through an anonymous survey distributed to 1,600 members of a teachers' education association located in the southwest United States. Usable returned questionnaires numbered 551, representing a 34.6 percent response rate.

Respondents had the following demographic characteristics: 75 percent were female, 85 percent were white, while 9 percent were Hispanic, and about 2 percent each were African American and Asian American. Approximately 75 percent were between the ages of forty to sixty. Professionally, 89 percent were teachers, and the remainder held positions such as media specialists, counselors, or support personnel. Forty-three percent have between eleven and twenty years of active service. Interestingly, 45 percent either held or currently hold official association positions.

The union justice questionnaire was adapted from that used by Moorman [24]. The questionnaire was simply modified by changing the words "employee" and "organization" to "bargaining unit member" and "association" as appropriate. The response continuum for all items contained 7 points (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither disagree nor agree, and 7 = strongly agree). The value of coefficient alpha for procedural justice (8 items) was .83; for distributive justice (6 items), .84; and for interactional justice (10 items), .85. In gratitude for distributing the questionnaire we prepared and presented to association officials a complete analysis of survey results.

FINDINGS

Data gathered at a point in time provides important information for both practical and academic analysis. It also provided a baseline from which later studies can be analyzed.¹

¹ Without baseline data from this association it is difficult to make comparative judgements from this study. For example, has the association improved or regressed regarding the three constructs of organization justice? Analysis problems are also present due to the absence of organizational justice studies applied to other unions or employee associations.

Figure 1 presents the eight procedural justice items along with item means and standard deviations. All scale items have an approximate mean of 5.0 (slightly agree), with an average procedural justice rating of 5.2. We concluded that while association members perceive the organization as providing procedural fairness, they do not give the association high marks on this justice construct.

	Mean	s.d.
1. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, the concerns of all the members affected by the decisions are heard.	5.2	1.3
2. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, requests for clarifications and additional information are allowed.	5.5	1.2
3. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, all the sides affected by the decision are represented.	5.1	1.4
4. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, the decisions are supplied with consistency to the parties affected.	5.2	1.3
5. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, accurate information upon which the decisions are based is collected.	5.4	1.2
6. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, complete information upon which the decisions are based is collected.	5.1	1.3
7. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, opportunities are provided to appeal or challenge the decisions.	4.8	1.5
8. In general, when decisions about bargaining unit members are made in this association, useful feedback about the decisions is provided.	5.2	1.3
Average Rating	5.2	

Figure 1. Procedural justice questions with item means ($N = 551$, $\text{Alpha} = .82$).

Figure 2 shows the mean rating for the six distributive justice questions. Here the means range between 3.0 and 4.0 with an overall mean rating of 3.5 (slightly disagree to neither disagree nor agree). Of the three organizational justice constructs, distributive justice received the lowest perception from association members and clearly represents a weak area of member satisfaction. Of particular concern to union officials should be member perceptions regarding fair rewards for the stresses and strains of member jobs (mean 3.0) and perceptions of fair treatment based upon the amount of effort put forth on the job (mean 3.2).

Figure 3 presents the means and standard deviations for the ten items comprising the interactional justice construct. The means of the ten items are highly consistent, ranging between 5.2 and 5.7. The overall mean is 5.5 (slightly agree to agree). As with the procedural justice means, members give the association positive ratings for interactional fairness but those ratings are not overly high.

As discussed in the literature review, member satisfaction with unionism is largely contingent upon effective grievance administration and complaint resolution. Performance outcomes relative to grievance handling and the justice perceptions of members should be of high concern to those in the labor movement, particularly officials of individual unions or associations. Figure 4 shows

	Mean	s.d.
1. You are fairly rewarded through your agreement, considering the responsibilities that you have.	4.0	1.8
2. You are fairly rewarded through your agreement, taking into account the amount of education and training that you have had.	3.6	1.9
3. You are fairly rewarded through your agreement in view of the amount of experience that you have.	3.5	1.8
4. You are fairly rewarded through your agreement for the amount of effort that you put forth.	3.2	1.8
5. You are fairly rewarded through your agreement for the work that you have done well.	3.4	1.8
6. You are fairly rewarded through your agreement for the stresses and strains of your job.	3.0	1.7
Average Rating	3.5	

Figure 2. Distributive justice questions with item means ($N = 551$, $\text{Alpha} = .84$).

	Mean	s.d.
1. When decisions are made about you, your association officials treat you with respect and dignity.	5.7	1.3
2. When decisions are made about you, your association officials deal with you in a truthful manner.	5.6	1.2
3. When decisions are made about you, your association officials treat you with kindness and consideration.	5.7	1.2
4. When decisions are made about you, your association officials show concern for your rights as a bargaining unit member.	5.6	1.2
5. When decisions are made about you, your association officials are sensitive to your personal needs.	5.3	1.3
6. When decisions are made about you, your association officials offer you adequate justification for the decisions.	5.2	1.3
7. When decisions are made about you, your association officials clearly explain the decisions to you.	5.4	1.3
8. When decisions are made about you, your association officials discuss the implications of the decisions with you.	5.2	1.4
9. When decisions are made about you, your association officials provide you useful feedback regarding the decisions.	5.3	1.3
10. When decisions are made about you, your association officials help you understand the reasons for the decision.	5.3	1.4
Average Rating	5.5	

Figure 3. Interactional justice questions with item means
($N = 551$, $\text{Alpha} = .85$).

	Mean	s.d.
1. My association protects me against unfair actions by my employer.	5.6	1.3
2. Complaints are handled in a fair and unbiased manner.	5.3	1.3
3. On the whole, the dispute resolution process is administered fairly.	5.3	1.3
4. To my knowledge, the outcomes of disputes in this association are fair.	5.4	1.2
5. When association members have a good case they can expect a fair outcome.	5.4	1.3
Average Rating	5.4	
<p>Members Filing a Complaint Answered the Following Questions (N = 80, Alpha = .95)</p>		
1. In your opinion, did you win or lose your case?	Won 50%	Lost 50%
2. My dispute resolution process was fair.	4.6	1.8
3. I was satisfied with the outcome.	4.1	2.1
4. I was kept informed of the progress of my complaint.	4.7	1.7
5. My dispute was held in a confidential manner.	5.2	1.6
6. The representation provided by the association was technically competent.	4.9	1.8
Average Rating	4.7	

Figure 4. Dispute resolution questions with item means (N = 551, Alpha = .94).

respondent perceptions for dispute resolution. Means for the five item scale were highly consistent with an average rating of 5.4 (slightly agree to agree), with an item range between 5.4 and 5.6. This finding parallels the means received for the procedural and interactive justice scales. While the teachers' association received favorable marks for grievance administration and the resolution of member disputes, these means, again, are not overly strong.

As stated previously, approximately 45 percent of respondents currently or previously held official association positions. There was a statistically significant difference ($p > .01$) in perceptions of the dispute resolution system, with those who did *not* (currently or previously) hold positions rating the system at 5.2 vs. a 5.6 rating by those that did. While not a large practical difference, this is an important finding. Individuals who were aware and knowledgeable of the process rated it as more fair, as fairness theory supports.

Eighty members of the study had filed a formal complaint through the association's dispute resolution procedure. Of these, one-half believed they won and one-half believed they lost their cases. Winners and losers combined gave their association only slightly positive marks for dispute resolution. One could argue that the perceptions of members are somewhat ambiguous since they are close to "neither disagreeing or agreeing" for each individual scale item. This is particularly true for the item "satisfaction with outcomes"—mean 4.1.

When we examined the perceptions of the winners and losers separately, the winners rated the dispute system much more favorable, at 6.0 vs. 3.2 ($p < .01$). Moreover, the winners rated all fairness scales higher. Winners rated distributive justice at 3.7 vs. 2.9, procedural justice at 5.6 vs. 4.7, and interactional justice at 6.1 vs. 5.1. All of these differences were statistically significant ($p < .01$). Clearly, ratings of the dispute resolution system co-varied with perceptions of fairness.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to apply the concepts of organizational justice to member satisfaction and the effective administration of one labor association. While the findings were informative and of assistance to this teachers' association, our broader hope is to encourage the use of attitude surveys among other unions/associations with the intent of improving both member satisfaction and union instrumentality. Figures 1 through 4 provide all the questions needed to develop a union justice questionnaire, with the additional ability to understand member perceptions regarding dispute resolution effectiveness. The item means from this study can serve as baseline data for comparisons with future survey results; however, when using organizational-specific statistics, a caveat is in order.

Item means present a statistical analysis of member perceptions at a point in time. However, the means in themselves fail to explain the causes for the statistical outcomes. For example, this survey showed that the distributive justice

perceptions of association members were largely unfavorable. Members did not feel fairly rewarded through their contracts for the inputs they brought to their jobs. Certainly this is a red flag for improving contract outcomes and a warning to union officials to enhance their negotiating performance. While officials of this association were concerned with the members' low distributive justice perceptions, they largely attributed these beliefs to past school financing problems leading to small economic bargaining gains—a condition they felt would change with the next round of negotiations and a recently improved school budget. With this explanation, the low means become understandable.

Beyond the practical implications of organizational justice perception and member satisfaction, we believe both the justice and labor literature would be advanced by additional research in these two areas. For example, studies need to examine the procedural justice perceptions of union members and the effects of those perceptions on such areas as organizational commitment, loyalty, and work-group cohesiveness [15, p. 179; 25].

The present study did not examine causal relationships. For example, we cannot know whether winners of a grievance perceived higher levels of fairness as a result of their grievance event. Similarly, we cannot ascertain whether being a union official led to higher perceptions of fairness. In both of these cases, however, there are strong positive relationships. Additional research needs to further examine such issues.

As previously noted, the manner in which a labor organization deals with member grievances appears to be an important correlate of member satisfaction with it. This linkage should be further substantiated by examining the importance between procedural and distributive justice perceptions and grievance administration and complaint outcomes. Since grievance systems are institutionalized, might not procedural rather than distributive justice perceptions more strongly lead to the positive evaluations of those systems?

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