

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

South African organisations are under immense pressure to comply with legislation on employment equity provisions. However, as discussed in chapter 2, it is not only a matter of meeting employment equity targets - attention needs to be focused on the question of how to implement employment equity. This includes the questions of fairness. Fairness principles provide an opportunity to mitigate some of the adverse organisational consequences stemming from individuals' resentment-based resistance to change. An organisation's obligation to employees entails far more than fair treatment with regard to the salaries and benefits given in exchange for labour (distributive justice) and with respect to the implementation of policies and procedures that determine those levels of compensation (procedural justice). In addition, organisations are morally obliged to treat their employees with sufficient dignity as humans (interactional justice). As organisations in globally competitive markets are less able to offer traditional rewards (lifelong employment, promotions, long-term compensation), one of the only means at their disposal to induce employees to stay is to foster an environment that communicates that it values the employees. In such instances, interactional justice plays a major role in influencing employees' attitudes and the behaviours required for successful performance, even under conditions of adversity and loss, which is often the case with AA.

The fairness of AA, from an organisational justice perspective, has not yet been researched in South Africa and little is known about how perceptions of AA fairness affect employees' commitment, and hence the success of organisations. One of the challenges facing organisations is to find a way of implementing AA programmes without creating negative employee attitudes.

This chapter provides an overview and a summary of the principal findings of the study and also outlines topics for future research. The focus in the discussion of the results will be on answering the research questions. To avoid overinterpretation of the research results, only the statistically significant findings with practical implications will be discussed.

9.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the major components (factors) of AA fairness and to develop a measuring instrument (questionnaire) which could be used to measure the perceived fairness of AA. The factor analysis extracted four factors related to AA fairness, namely *interactional justice*, *procedural justice(input)*, *procedural justice(criteria)* and *distributive justice*.

9.2

Perceptions of the fairness of AA are also influenced by the way AA employees are treated. Using factor analysis, four factors relating to the treatment of AA employees were identified: *task autonomy*, *respect*, *responsibility* and *realistic expectations on the part of supervisors*.

Another aim of the study was to determine how perceptions of the fairness of AA influence employees' commitment. With regard to employees' commitment, the factor analysis yielded four factors: *obedience*, *participation*, *satisfaction* and *loyalty*.

In an attempt to determine what biographical factors influence employees' perceptions of the fairness of AA, the various employee groups (ethnicity, gender, staff category, age etc.) were compared with one another.

Finally, the study attempted to determine the relationship between organisational justice, the treatment of AA employees and employees' commitment.

9.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to meet the research objectives, a literature and empirical study were conducted. The literature study focused on fairness principles, outlined AA practices that influence employees' perceptions of fairness and identified work behaviours associated with employees' commitment.

On completion of the literature study, a measuring instrument, namely a questionnaire, was developed. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information on respondents' biographical details, their perceptions of and attitudes toward AA fairness, their perceptions of the treatment of AA employees and their commitment.

By means of a disproportionate, stratified sampling method, a list of all permanent employees, categorised according to ethnicity, gender and staff category was obtained from the case bank. Table 9.1 provides a schematic representation of the grouping of respondents, the population and sample size of each group as well as the response rate.

With reference to table 9.1, the response is in line with the composition of the population - hence the response rate of 20,3 percent in this study is satisfactory.

TABLE 9.1: POPULATION, SAMPLE AND RESPONSE RATE OF EACH EMPLOYEE GROUP

	POPULATION		SAMPLE	RESPONS E	RESPONSE RATE
ETHNICITY					
Blacks	12 007 (40%)		688	128	18,6%
Whites	17 681 (60%)	100%	1032	221	21,4%
GENDER					
Men	10 088 (34%)		585	120	20,5%
Women	19 600 (66%)	100%	1135	229	20,2%
STAFF CATEGORY					
Top management	253				
Middle management	5 975	29%	498	168	33,7%
Supervisory level	2 502				
Clerical staff	20 958	71%	1222	181	14,8%
TOTAL	29 688	100%	1720	349	20,3%

9.4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, a principal factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed for each of the sections. The purpose was to identify the latent variables underlying AA fairness, treatment of AA employees in the workplace and the commitment of employees.

9.4.1 Major components of affirmative action fairness

Consistent with the findings of previous research on organisational justice, the factor analysis identified the following four factors:

Interactional justice. This factor refers to the manner in which employees are treated. As far as AA is concerned, this means that employees want to be recognised and regarded as capable and competent workers. Information on career prospects and employment equity policies should also be communicated to them. Employees value any efforts made to accommodate their cultural needs.

Procedural justice(input). This factor refers to the procedures, and in particular, the opportunity employees are afforded to influence any decisions made about AA. Issues such as allowing all employees to apply for positions or appeal against decisions, making use of joint decision making, providing mechanisms to protect employees against discrimination, applying rules and procedures consistently and adjusting systems to integrate AA employees successfully, largely determine how fair procedures seem to be.

Procedural justice(criteria). This factor refers to the criteria or standards used when implementing AA. Actions such as applying selection criteria consistently, using accurate performance data when evaluating an employee, applying the same performance standards to all employees, using job-related selection criteria and taking disciplinary action strictly and consistently, play a major role in influencing employees' perceptions of the procedural fairness of AA.

Distributive justice. This factor refers to the actual decision taken about AA. Decisions such as granting black employees token positions, training AA employees to replace current job incumbents, paying unrealistically high salaries, appointing less qualified employees for EE reasons, focusing on the development and advancement of AA employees and basing selection decisions on criteria such as ethnicity and gender, influence employees' perceptions of the distributive fairness of AA decisions.

9.4.2 Major components of the treatment of affirmative action employees

According to the results of the factor analysis, the treatment of AA employees can be grouped into the following four factors:

Task autonomy. This factor refers to the level of task autonomy employees from designated groups are granted in the workplace. The elements of this factor include the significance, importance and difficulty of the jobs assigned to AA employees, the opportunities they are afforded to use their initiative and judgment, the extent to which the job allows them to use a variety of skills and competencies, whether or not they receive feedback on their performance, the level of cooperation required to perform a task, the extent to which tasks are defined, and whether or not they are allowed to determine their own work pace and methods.

Respect. According to this factor, employees are treated with respect when they feel that they are treated with dignity, are listened to when they make suggestions, are free to discuss problems with co-workers, are recognised for work well done, are regarded as contributors to the department's success and their cultural differences are taken into consideration at social events.

Responsibility. This factor refers to the responsibility assigned to employees from designated groups. These employees should be allowed to accept responsibility for important tasks such as specific assignments and projects, working with equipment and facilities, initiating assignments and projects, and budgets and expenditures.

Realistic expectations. According to this factor, supervisors should have realistic expectations about AA employees' performance standards and workloads. In addition, AA employees should be held accountable for their decisions and performance.

9.4.3 Major components of employee commitment

The factor analysis identified the following four factors in terms of how committed employees behave at work:

Obedience. This factor refers to employees' adherence to rules and procedures and behaviour according to group norms. The elements of this factor include treating bank property with care, obeying bank rules and regulations, being concerned about the bank's image, keeping the workplace clean and tidy, being punctual and not taking unnecessarily long breaks, helping others with heavy work loads, staying informed about the bank, preventing problems with colleagues, and having valid reasons for staying away from work.

Job satisfaction. This factor refers to employees' satisfaction with their jobs. According to this factor, employees are satisfied when they enjoy doing their job, have a pleasant work environment and have a sense of personal satisfaction when they perform well.

Participation. An important aspect of employees' commitment is the extent to which they participate and are involved in work-related issues. This factor includes the opportunity employees have to share ideas or make suggestions on new projects or changes, and whether or not they attend and participate in bank meetings.

Loyalty. Loyalty is a vital part of employees' commitment, and is often measured by employees' attitudes towards remaining with the organisation. According to this factor, there are various reasons why employees do not resign. The first is that they feel they have an obligation not to resign; secondly they like their jobs; and lastly they cannot afford to resign because the costs are too high.

9.5 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE VARIOUS EMPLOYEE GROUPS REGARDING PERCEPTIONS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FAIRNESS

In order to determine what biographical factors influence employees' perceptions of the fairness of AA, the means of the various employee groups were compared. The biographical factors which played a key role are discussed below.

(1) Gender

Men and women differ significantly with regard to obedience and loyalty. Women are more willing to adhere to rules and regulations and display greater loyalty towards the bank.

(2) Ethnicity

There are statistically significant differences between blacks and whites with regard to perceptions of distributive justice, the treatment of AA employees regarding respect and task autonomy and how participative employees are. Distributive justice issues play a vital role in whites' formation of perceptions of the fairness of AA. Contrary

to what blacks feel, whites believe that AA employees are treated with respect and are accorded autonomy. Whites appear to be more participative than blacks.

(3) *Marital status*

Married and single employees differ significantly when it comes to distributive justice, work satisfaction and participation. Married employees regard distributive justice issues as critical to the fairness of AA. Married employees also seem to be more satisfied and participative than their single counterparts.

(4) *Number of years' service at the bank*

There are significant differences between employees with seven or more years of service and employees with less than seven years of service. Employees with seven or more years of service seem to be extremely concerned about distributive justice issues when forming perceptions of the fairness of AA and appear to be more participative and loyal than employees with less than seven years of service. Furthermore, they believe that AA employees do have autonomy and are treated with respect.

(5) *Staff category*

There are significant differences between management and clerical staff in respect of *distributive justice, autonomy, respect and participation*.

As far as the practical significance of differences between management and clerical staff are concerned, it is only with regard to *distributive justice* that the difference is of any practical importance. AA decisions such as giving AA employees token positions, paying unrealistically high salaries to AA managers, appointing less qualified employees, focusing on the development and advancement of AA employees, and making selection decisions based on criteria such as ethnicity and gender play a big role when forming perceptions about the fairness of AA. Management views distributive justice as integral to forming perceptions of the fairness of AA. In contrast to the opinion of clerical staff, management believe that employees from designated groups are granted autonomy and are treated with respect. Management appears to be more satisfied and participative than clerical staff.

(6) *Salary*

Respondents were categorised according to three categories of salary level, namely R5000 or less, R5001 to R15 000, and more than R15000. There is a significant difference relating to *distributive justice* between employees earning R5000 or less per month and those earning R15001 and more per month. Distributive justice is crucial to employees earning low salaries because it has a direct bearing on their financial position. Decisions about appointments, promotions, career advancement and training thus play a major role when employees form perceptions of the fairness of AA.

The MANOVAs and associated ANOVAs indicated that only ethnicity, age and job category had a significant effect on the differences between the groups' perceptions of the fairness of AA.

9.6 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FAIRNESS AND THE BEHAVIOURAL DOMAINS

9.6.1 How the treatment of affirmative action employees influence perceptions of fairness

Multiple regression statistics were used to predict how the treatment of AA employees influences employees' perceptions of the fairness of AA. There is a significant positive relationship between perceptions of AA fairness and the treatment of AA employees. The results indicated that the more task autonomy and respect accorded to employees, the more likely they will be to perceive decisions about AA to be fair.

Distributive justice, which has a low correlation with interactional and procedural justice, is not significantly related to the treatment of employees. This means that employees might be willing to tolerate injustices such as the promotion of an AA candidate as long as the decision was taken in a procedurally and interactionally fair manner.

It was interesting to note that ethnicity does not feature when it comes to perceptions of the procedural and interactional fairness of AA. It does, however, play a role in distributive justice perceptions. This means that whites regard certain decisions such as the appointment and promotion, allocation of tasks, and opportunities provided for growth and development of AA employees as an integral part of forming perceptions of the fairness of AA.

9.6.2 How perceptions of the fairness of affirmative action influence employees' commitment

This study also aimed to determine whether or not perceptions of the fairness of affirmative action influence employees' commitment regarding *obedience, satisfaction, participation and loyalty*.

(1) Obedience

Employees' willingness to adhere to rules and conform to group norms (obedience) are a direct result of the way they are treated in terms of task autonomy (type and significance of jobs assigned), fairness of decisions taken (salary increases, promotions, etc and the way they are treated (being recognised, informed about developments, guided and accommodated in the workplace). Obedience, however, is not influenced by ethnicity or staff category.

(2) Satisfaction

The satisfaction level of employees is strongly influenced by the amount of task autonomy they have and how fairly they are treated.

(3) *Participation*

Employees' willingness to participate in work-related activities is directly related to the amount of task autonomy they have and their job level. Management tend to participate more than clerical staff. Ethnicity does not influence employees' participation levels - hence there is no difference between whites' and blacks' participation levels.

(4) *Loyalty*

Employees' loyalty is directly related to the way they are treated, their job level, the responsibilities assigned to them and the perceived fairness of decisions taken. The more employees are treated in a humane and respectful manner, the more likely they are to remain loyal to the organisation.

9.7 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Overall, the results suggest that the measures of distributive, procedural and interactional justice are sufficiently reliable and valid to capture the perceived fairness of AA programmes. However, elements that influence overall perceptions of fairness may depend on the type of organisation, leadership style, etc, and support Greenberg's (1987) concerns about the context sensitivity of justice perceptions. Researchers should thus endeavour to select measures that incorporate elements that are relevant to specific contexts, and support the need for caution in generalising the results of AA fairness research across organisational contexts. Not limiting the sample to a single organisation could solve some of the problems related to the context sensitivity of perceptions of AA fairness.

One limitation in this study arises from the use of such a comprehensive questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 116 questions and took approximately 30 minutes to complete. This could have influenced respondents' willingness to complete it.

Another limitation concerns the interpretation of section B of the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate how much certain actions influenced their perceptions of the fairness of AA. Some of the answers provided by respondents gave the impression that they had evaluated the statements according to how AA fairness was *dealt with* at the bank.

The commitment behaviours that were investigated represent a subset of the many types of behaviours found in organisations. Perceived injustices produce a range of responses including psychological distress, sabotage, withdrawal and theft (Greenberg, 1987) - hence the need for future research to explore contextual moderators in order to improve the prediction of employees' responses to perceived justice/injustice.

Although items from other questionnaires were used to compile this questionnaire, the researcher feels that better items could have been selected. This may explain why the distribution of scores of the factors for

commitment was not normal and did not yield significant results. This is also reflected in the low practical significance values (effect sizes) of the multiple regression models.

9.8 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to the differences between the various employee groups regarding perceptions of AA fairness, there are only two biographical factors that influence employees' perceptions: ethnicity and age. Whites and older people base their perceptions of the fairness of AA on *distributive justice* issues. If management thus wish to promote sound labour relations, the following human resource practices should be avoided:

- allocating token positions to black managers
- training AA employees to replace existing employees
- paying unrealistically high salaries to AA managers
- appointing or promoting less qualified people

Since management are compelled to meet employment equity targets, it is virtually impossible to avoid the above mentioned practices. Although management might be aware of the issues that create negative perceptions, they face conditions that constrain their ability to put the viewpoints of employees first. What management could do, however, is to implement these practices in a procedurally and interactionally fair manner. Any AA decision should thus be taken in the following ways:

- Acknowledge the value, capabilities and competencies of AA employees by assigning meaningful and significant jobs to them.
- Recognise the value of other employees by appointing and promoting AA employees who are capable of doing their share of the work.
- Inform employees about employment equity targets so that they understand why preference should be given to AA employees.
- Provide all employees with an equal chance of applying for positions and make no preliminary selection decision on the basis of the ethnicity of the applicant.
- Apply rules and procedures consistently so that all employees, irrespective of ethnicity, receive the same treatment.
- Use the same selection or performance standards for all employees irrespective of their ethnicity, age or gender.
- Use more than one performance appraiser so that employees feel that they are treated fairly and that prejudice does not influence the evaluation.
- Make use of a management style that facilitates joint decision making.

Since age and ethnicity are correlated (older employees are mainly white employees because of the employment practices followed in previous years), it is possible that it is not so much age but ethnicity that influences employees' perceptions of the fairness of AA.

It is interesting to note that gender does not play a significant role when it comes to forming perceptions of the fairness of AA. Men and women feel more or less the same when issues such as token positions, training AA employees to replace other employees, paying unrealistic salaries and appointing less qualified people are considered.

With reference to the treatment of AA employees in the workplace, there are significant differences between the ethnic groups in respect of task autonomy and respect. Whites believe that blacks do have autonomy and are treated with respect. Blacks, on the other hand, do not see it in the same way. According to the results of the study, the way employees are treated has a major impact on their commitment (work behaviour). Employees who have autonomy and are treated with respect are more obedient, satisfied and participative. Since whites and blacks have different views on how they believe AA employees are treated, management should determine, by means of a survey, what employees regard as autonomy and respect.

From a management point of view, supervisors should provide AA employees with significant, stimulating and challenging tasks, allow them to use their own judgment and initiative, enable them to apply a variety of skills and competencies, provide them with feedback on performance and outline expectations clearly. Participation and involvement should be encouraged by noting suggestions made by AA employees and giving recognition for work well done.

Because there are various factors that could influence an employee's decision to remain with an organisation (ie unemployment conditions), staff category is only partially responsible for employees' loyalty. Management should, however, keep the motivational value of promotions in mind when trying to retain the services of core personnel.

9.9 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The findings of this study support those of other researchers (Gopinatha & Becker, 2000; Harris, 2000; Konovsky, 2000; Saxby et al, 2000; Simerson et al, 2000; Tata, 2000) who suggest that the treatment of employees, rather than rewards or the perceived fairness of the organisational system, may be more important in the manifestation of organisationally desirable behaviours. If management apply procedures and treat employees fairly they will directly influence employees' commitment. If management wish to create an work atmosphere that elicits commitment, they must strive to improve the perceived fairness of their interactions with subordinates.

Many managers face conditions that may constrain their ability to reward employees equitably. Budgets and other monetary restrictions are often outside managerial control. Similarly, the formal procedures in an organisation may be beyond a manager's influence. However, the sensitivity with which a manager treats his or her subordinates and the ability to demonstrate fair intentions is relatively controllable by managers. Managers who wish to build a committed workforce need to realise that employees will be committed only if they believe that they themselves are being treated fairly. A key antecedent to performance and commitment appear to be employees' perceptions of fair treatment, an aspect of employee interaction completely under the control of most managers. Organisations should thus focus on improving the perceived fairness of managerial behaviours. Managers should receive training on the importance of being consistent, unbiased, truthful, and respectful in assigning jobs, conducting evaluations, and administering rewards and punishment.

This study represents a vital step towards a better understanding of the dimensionality of AA fairness. Examining the relationships between perceptions of fairness, the treatment of AA employees and employee commitment should ultimately contribute to more effective management of AA in the workplace.