4.1

Chapter 4

ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

4.1   INTRODUCTION

There is a compelling need for innovative approaches to the solution of many problems involving human relationships in today's work environment. Although the technical competence of employees is essential, it is not a sufficient condition for success. Human resource managers must also attend to the personal needs and concerns of the people they are managing. Managers are increasingly recognising the importance of human social interaction as a basic requirement for the effective functioning of organisations. People are social beings and organisations therefore have to create settings in which employees are able to interact socially. One concept which is fundamental to human social interaction is justice. Whether it is a promotion decision, the assignment of tasks, the allocations of rewards or just about any other type of social exchange, matters of fairness are bound to arise.   Employees' perceptions of fairness in organisational settings, also known as organisational justice, influence their attitudes and behaviour and consequently their performance and the organisation's success. That is why research on organisational justice is so vital.

In view of the widespread recognition of the importance of fairness as an issue in organisations, it is now necessary to apply theories of social and interpersonal justice to understanding behaviour in organisations. The earliest theories of social justice were mainly derived to test principles of justice in general social interaction, not organisations in particular. In recent years many human resource interventions have been re-examined in light of organisational justice such as performance evaluation (Greenberg, 1987; Folger, 1984; Cropanzano, 1993), drug testing (Cropanzano, 1993) and pay satisfaction (Folger & Konovsky, 1989). Researching the fairness of human resource interventions does not, however, indicate how the organisation is influenced — hence the need to consider how these varieties of justice relate to various organisational variables such as trust in management, job satisfaction, supervisor/subordinate relationships and employee commitment. In South Africa, which is renowned for its low productivity, it will be worthwhile to determine how the perceived fairness of AA influences employees' commitment and ultimately productivity. The relationship between employees' perceptions of AA fairness and their commitment will therefore be discussed in chapter 5.

This chapter provides an overview of the meaning, scope and nature of organisational justice. The components of organisational justice are discussed in order to explain how employees judge the fairness of AA decisions, policies and procedures.

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4.2   ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

Fairness is of central interest to modern managers concerned about providing equal employment opportunities, fair labour practices and paying a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. Just as referees should ensure that all participants have a fair chance to compete, managers are responsible for the fair treatment of employees. The differing perspectives, interests and goals of managers and subordinates, however, makes it difficult to determine what exactly employees regard as fair treatment. The multidimensionality of fairness is evident when one considers how people disagree about the definition of fairness. The different answers to questions about fairness depend on whether the focus is on outcomes, procedures or motives. A further complicating element is the possible interaction of a concern for justice with other motives in social situations (eg self-esteem, interpersonal attraction) (Folger, 1984). An attempt to describe and explain the role of fairness in the workplace is known as organisational justice. Organisational justice refers to the *decisions* organisations make, the *procedures* they use in making decisions and the *interpersonal treatment* employees receive.

The research on organisational justice, dating back to the 1960s, was originally conducted to test propositions about the distribution of payment and other work-related rewards. Since then concerns about fairness have been expressed in such organisational domains as conflict resolution, personnel selection, labour disputes and wage negotiation, to mentioned but a few. This resulted in the emergence of a variety of different approaches to justice. In order to clarify conceptual interrelationships, track trends in organisational research and identify needed areas of research and conceptual development, Greenberg (1996) categorised various conceptualisations of organisational justice around a taxonomy. This taxonomy was derived by combining two conceptually independent dimensions: a *reactive-proactive* dimension and a *process-content* dimension.

(1)   *Reactive-proactive dimension*. A *reactive* theory of justice focuses on people's attempts either to escape from or avoid perceived unfair states. By contrast, *proactive* theories focus on behaviours designed to promote justice.

(2)   *Process-content dimension.* A *process* approach to justice focuses on the way in which various outcomes are determined. Such orientations concentrate on the fairness of the methods and procedures used to make and implement organisational decisions. In contrast, *content* approaches are concerned with the fairness of the resulting decision or outcome.

By combining the two dimensions in various ways, Greenberg developed a taxonomy of four theories. Table 4.1 summarises the research questions related to each type of theory.

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TABLE 4.1

RESEARCH QUESTIONS RELATED TO ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE THEORIES

TYPE OF THEORY	RESEARCH QUESTION
Reactive content	How do workers react to inequitable payments?
Proactive content	How do workers attempt to create fair payments?
Reactive process	How do workers react to unfair policies or procedures?
Proactive process	How do workers attempt to create fair policies or procedures?

Source: Greenberg (1996)

4.2.1 Reactive content theories

Reactive content theories focus on how individuals respond to unfair decisions. These theories state explicitly that people will respond to unfair relationships by displaying certain negative emotions such as resentment, anger, dissatisfaction, disappointment and unhappiness (Folger, 1984). In an attempt to redress the experienced inequity, employees will seek restitution, engage in retaliatory behaviour or restore psychological equity by justifying the injustice or leaving the organisation.

4.2.2 Proactive content theories

In contrast to reactive content theories, which focus on how people respond to unfair decisions, proactive content theories focus on how people attempt to create fair decisions. According to Leventhal's *justice judgment model*, individuals attempt to make fair allocation decisions by applying several possible allocation rules to the situations they confront (Leventhal, 1980). For example, in situations where harmony between groups members is important, a supervisor will probably allocate rewards by following the equality norm, that is, dividing rewards equally. Lerner's (1982) *justice motive theory* recognises that justice is the pre-eminent concern of human beings, and concurs that people allocate rewards according to circumstances. According to him, people make use of four principles when making allocation decisions, namely (1) *competition* — allocations based on the outcome of performance; (2) *parity* — equal allocations; (3) *equity* - allocations based on contributions; and (4) *Marxian justice* — allocations based on needs.

4.2.3 Reactive process theories

These theories focus on how people react to unfair procedures, policies and processes used in making a decision. According to Thibaut and Walker (1978), the amount of *control* people have over decisions and processes influences their perceptions of fairness. Two types of control exist. *Process control* refers to the degree of control people have over the procedures or information used to make a decision. *Decision control* refers to the degree of control people have over directly determining the outcomes. Research has found that procedures offering process control are perceived to be fairer and enhance the acceptance of even unfavourable decisions (Greenberg, 1987).

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4.2.4   Proactive process theories

The proactive theories focus on allocation procedures and seek to determine what procedures people will use to achieve justice. The allocation preference theory proposes that people hold expectancies that certain procedures will be differentially instrumental in meeting their goals. For procedures to be regarded as instrumental in attaining justice, they need to meet the following requirements:

- Allow opportunities to select the decision maker.
- Follow consistent rules.
- Make use of accurate information.
- Identify the structure of decision-making power.
- Employ safeguards against bias.
- Allow for appeals to be heard.
- Provide opportunities for correcting procedures.
- Meet moral and ethical standards.

Trends in organisational justice research indicate that interest in reactive and content theories has waned. This means that two shifts have occurred — a shift from reactive to proactive theories and a shift from content to process theories. In the next section the meaning of the concepts "content" and "process", and the way employees use them as a basis for judging fairness, will be discussed.

Judgments about fairness are made by means of a fairly simple, straightforward process. According to Sheppard, Lewicki and Minton (1992), judging the justice of a decision, action or procedure requires evaluating it against two principles, namely balance and correctness.

(1)   *Balance*. The first principle of justice requires a judgment of balance. Comparisons of balance are made when a person compares the reward he or she receives with that received by someone else, while comparing the value of their inputs. Greenberg (1987) refers to this form of justice as *distributive justice*.

(2)   *Correctness*. Correctness is the second principle of justice. Correctness refers to the "rightness" of the decision and encompasses elements of consistency, accuracy, clarity, and procedural thoroughness (Sheppard et al, 1992). As long as procedures are clear and consistently applied, employees will perceive them to be fair. Folger and Greenberg (1985) refer to this form of justice as *procedural justice*.

The perceived justice of some decision or action is thus made by deciding whether the decision or action appears to be distributively and procedurally fair.

Related to the concepts of balance and correctness, theorists have distinguished between conceptualisations of justice that focus on *content* — the fairness of the outcome or decision (*distributive*

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justice) and those that focus on *processes* — the fairness of the methods and procedures used to determine the decision or outcome (*procedural justice*). As research expanded, a third type of justice, which focused on the quality of the interpersonal treatment people receive, (*interactional justice*), was identified. Since distributive, procedural and interactional justice play a role in an individual's perception of the fairness of treatment, they all form part of organisational justice. Figure 4.1 illustrates the various types of justice and their interrelatedness. Each of these types of justice will be discussed in order to link fairness principles to employees' perceptions of AA.

FIGURE 4.1:   ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE
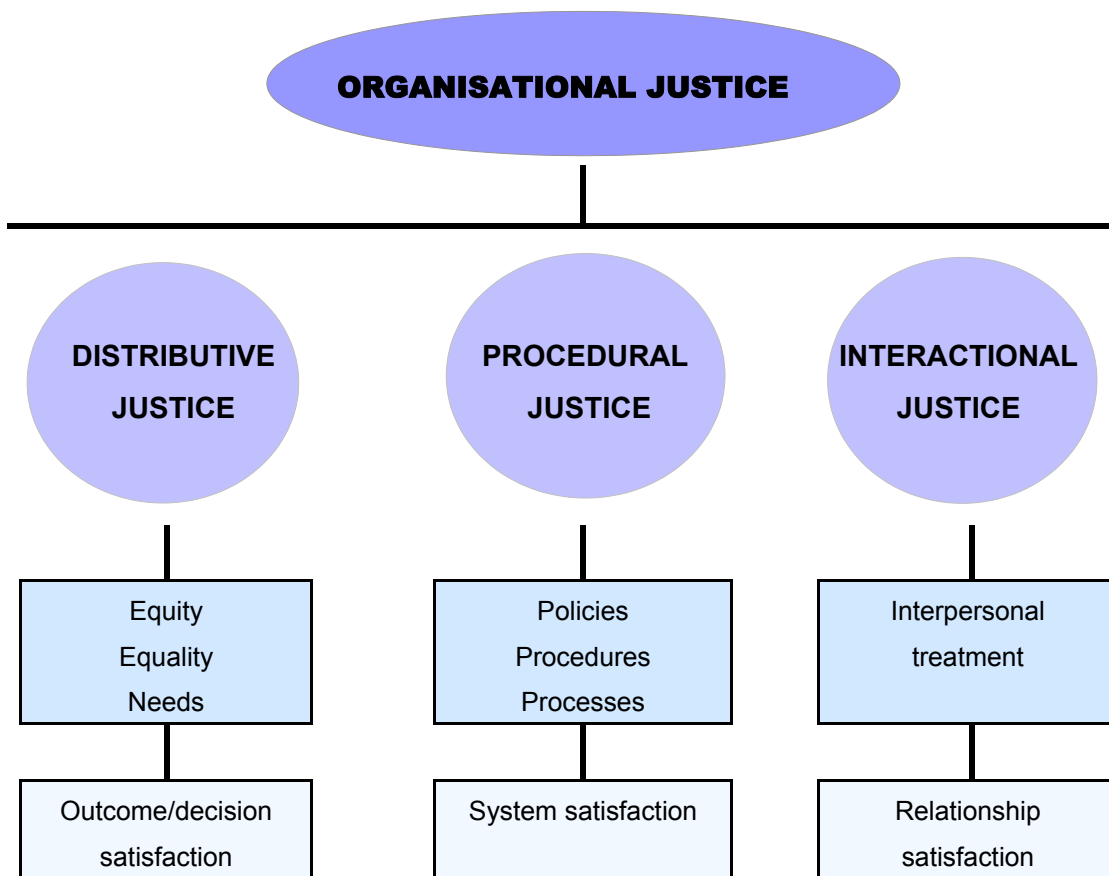
Source: Adapted from Greenberg (1990)

4.3   DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

Historically, Adams's (1965) equity theory has been the main focus of organisational scientists interested in issues of justice. This theory claims that people compare the ratios of their own perceived work outcomes (rewards) to their own perceived work inputs (contributions) with the corresponding ratios of a co-worker. If the ratios are unequal, the person whose ratio is higher is theorised to be inequitably overpaid, whereas the person whose ratio is lower is theorised to be inequitably underpaid. The equity theory predicted that comparatively low rewards would produce dissatisfaction. This discontent would then

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motivate individuals to take action that reduces the discrepancy between their ratio and that of their coworker. According to Adams (1965), an over-reward situation will result in a person experiencing guilt, shame or remorse. These emotions are also negative and should therefore motivate the individual to reduce the imbalance (Cropanzano, 1993). Various studies have been conducted to determine how employees behave when they perceive an injustice. With enabling legislation such as the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 and the Promotion of Equality and the Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, managers should pay close attention to justice violations in the workplace since these may give rise to employees' lawsuits which, if successful, could bring about various remedies. Injustices, however, can also generate negative consequences that are less direct. Various studies have examined the influence of fair treatment of employees on organisational variables such as job satisfaction (Bateman & Organ, 1983), trust in and loyalty to the leader (Deluga, 1994), organisational citizenship behaviour (Morrison, 1994) and employee theft (Greenberg, 1990). The fair and equal treatment of employees will increase job satisfaction, improve relationships between supervisors and employees, encourage organisational citizenship behaviour and reduce cases of employee theft, thus also benefiting the organisation.

According to Leventhal (1976), people use three major justice rules to determine outcome justice: the contributions rule (*equity rule*), the *needs rule*, and the *equality rule*. The purpose of outcomes or decisions based on the equity rule is to achieve productivity and a high level of performance. The equality rule is used when the goal is to preserve social harmony, while the needs rule is applied when the objective is to foster personal welfare. As far as AA is concerned, decisions are often made by applying the equality rule.

One source of frustration with the equity theory in explaining organisational justice was its lack of specificity regarding the reactions that would occur when inequity was experienced. Organisational scientists thus began to raise questions about justice in various organisational settings, something which was not adequately addressed by prevailing theories of justice. Specifically, questions on how pay plans were administered and what grievance resolution practices were followed in organisations, prompted concerns about fairness that were more process oriented. The focus thus shifted to *how* decisions were made as opposed to *what* those decisions were.

4.4   PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Outcomes or decisions (distributive justice) are not the only relevant issue to an individual — the way one is treated is equally important. According to Skarlicki and Latham (1996), as quoted by Ivancevich and Matteson (2002), procedural justice refers to the extent to which fair procedures and processes are in place and adhered to and to which individuals see their leaders as being fair and sincere and logical or rational in what they do. Folger and Cropanzano (1998:26) define procedural justice as the "fairness issues concerning the methods, mechanisms, and processes used to determine outcomes".

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In 1975, Thibaut and Walker conducted research into employees' reactions to the dispute resolution process. This led to the development of their theory of procedural justice. According to these authors, employees judge the fairness of procedures according to two types of control: the amount of control they have over the procedures used to make a decision (referred to as *process control*) and the amount of control they have over influencing the decision (referred to as *decision control*). People want procedures that allow them to feel that they have participated in developing a decision that will affect them. Being able to voice their opinions thus affords them the opportunity to influence others' decisions. Further research revealed that procedures that provided employees with opportunities to influence a decision were perceived as fairer than procedures that denied process control.

Related to the study on control over processes and decisions, Lind and Tyler (1988) developed the self-interest and the group-value models of procedural justice. The self-interest model suggests that people seek decision control because they are concerned with maximising their own outcomes. However, when individuals have to cooperate with others in groups to achieve outcomes, the group-value model comes into play, and the focus shifts from decision control to process control. Procedures are then regarded as more important in attaining fair or favourable outcomes. The group-value model explains the value-expressive effects of process control. Group identity and group procedures are two elements that govern the functioning of groups. People consider procedures that allow them to express their opinions (voice) to be fair, for they can participate in group processes as valuable group members. Even if "voice" does not produce a favourable outcome, it enhances perceived procedural justice because its value-expressive function confirms the values of group participation and group membership status.

In further research, Tyler and Lind (1992) developed a relational model of authority in groups. According to the authors three relational concerns with the authority affect procedural justice judgments: *trust*, *neutrality* and *standing*. Trustworthiness can be measured by rating the manager's fairness and ethicality. If the manager behaves fairly and considers the needs and views of the individual, then he can be trusted. Trust involves beliefs about the manager's intentions. Neutrality can be judged in terms of the person's unbiased decision making in the use of facts. Standing refers to status recognition that is indicated to people by a manager who treats them with dignity, politeness and respect for their rights. By looking at the procedures a manager uses, individuals can judge whether they will be treated fairly with regard to the manager's relational concerns of trust, neutrality and standing.

Related to Thibaut and Walker's research on the importance of process and decision control for fairness perceptions, Leventhal, Karuza and Fry (1980) identified seven components of procedures that lead to justice attainment:

(1)   the selection of decision makers
(2)   setting ground rules (criteria) for evaluating rewards
(3)   methods for collecting information
(4)   procedures for defining the decision process

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(5)   safeguards against abuse of power

(6)   procedures for appeals

(7)   the availability of change mechanisms (to change a unfair decision)

According to these authors, the fairness of procedures is evaluated by applying six justice rules. Procedures are regarded as fair to the extent that they

(1)   suppress bias

(2)   create consistent allocations

(3)   rely on accurate information

(4)   are correctable

(5)   represent the concerns of all recipients

(6)   are based on moral and ethical standards

Thus far, the discussion has focused on the attributes of a fair procedure. Very little has been said about the positive impact procedural justice has on employees' behaviour. According to Skarlicki and Foyger (1997) as quoted by Ivancevich and Matteson (2002), the positive consequences of procedural justice include

- organisational commitment
- intent to stay with the organisation
- organisational citizenship
- trust in supervisor
- satisfaction with decisions made
- work effort
- performance

As indicated by the above list, employee commitment is a direct consequence of fair treatment — hence the discussion of the impact of procedural justice and perceptions of the fairness of AA on employees' commitment in chapter 5.

As research has extended the original conceptualisations of procedural justice, it has become clear that perceptions of procedural justice are influenced by factors that go beyond the formal procedures used to resolve disputes or allocate rewards. In particular, it has been demonstrated that judgments of procedural justice are influenced by two important factors: the interpersonal treatment people receive from decision makers and the adequacy with which formal decision making procedures are explained (Bies & Moag, 1986). These justice appraisals based on the quality of interpersonal treatment are known as interactional justice.

4.5   INTERACTIONAL JUSTICE

Theorists on organisational behaviour have not yet reached consensus on whether interactional justice forms part of procedural justice or whether it should be regarded as a third type of justice. Bies and Moag (1986) state that interactional justice denotes individuals' concerns about the quality of the interpersonal treatment they receive during the enactment of organisational procedures. Folger and Cropanzano (1998) consider a decision-making process to consist of both the formal structural component represented by Leventhal's six justice rules, and the informal interactions between the decision makers and the recipients that represent interactional justice. They therefore believe that interactional justice should form part of procedural justice.   Bies and Moag (1986), however, maintain that interactional justice can be distinguished from procedural justice because procedures refer to the structural quality of the decision process, whereas interactional justice refers to a social exchange between two participants. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, interactional justice will be regarded as a third type of justice.

Bies and Moag (1986:44) identified the term "interactional justice" which refers to people's sensitivity to "the quality of interpersonal treatment they receive during the enactment of organisational procedures" and pinpointed the following four attributes of interpersonally fair procedures:

(1)   truthfulness
(2)   respect
(3)   propriety of questions
(4)   justification

The first three attributes deal with the nature of the communication while it is occurring. The last one (justification) has to do with removing any discontent following an unfair procedure. Each of these attributes will now be briefly discussed.

(1)   *Truthfulness.* Truthfulness consists of two components: deception and candidness. Employees do not like being deceived and expect to be treated in a forthright manner. Organisations should therefore provide them with realistic and accurate information.

(2)   *Respect*. Individuals expect to be treated politely and respectfully. This means that insults or discourteous behaviour should be avoided at all cost.

(3)   *Propriety of questions*. The propriety of questions refers to two components. Firstly, questions should not be considered *improper* by their very nature, and secondly, they should not involve *prejudicial* statements.

(4)   *Justification*. Justification comes into play following negative outcomes or unfair treatment. It may be possible to rectify an injustice with an adequate justification. According to Bies and Shapiro

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(1988), a sense of anger over injustice can be reduced or eliminated by providing the unfairly treated individual with a social account such as an explanation or apology. People expect events that affect them to be explained. If they do not receive an explanation, they doubt whether they have been treated in accordance with a socially rooted expectation for fair processes in human interaction (Weaver, 2001). Respect and concern constitute informal social goods, and failing to receive them is seen as a violation of justice expectations.

Although some researchers have stopped separating procedural and interactional justice, the general perspective is that organisations should see justice in a broader social context. Both formal procedures and the social side of organisational justice are important in predicting work outcomes and understanding organisational behaviour.

4.6   EMPLOYEES' BEHAVIOUR IN RESPONSE TO INJUSTICE

The experience of injustice is hurtful to individuals and harmful to organisations. Few benefit from unfairness, although many are harmed. In the face of this, organisations should reduce injustice by studying employees' responses to injustices and prepare written guidelines, procedures and policies to make decisions and engender fairness. This section discusses employees' behaviour when they experience injustice and provides guidelines on what organisations can do to improve the perceived fairness of practices.

Several years ago, Felstiner, Abel and Sarat, as quoted by Sheppard et al (1992) described the sequence of activities followed by people when they perceive an injustice as the "naming and blaming" process.

4.6.1   Naming

Naming refers to the initial identification of a fair or unfair outcome, procedure or system. Suffice to say that if something has not been identified as unfair, then no action will be taken, even if extreme injustice exists. Employees deem an action, procedure or system to be unfair only if their attention is drawn to it. One means of perpetrating an injustice with impunity therefore is either to hide it or direct employees' attention away from it. For example, organisations may maintain strict secrecy about certain matters in order to protect policies from public scrutiny that might stimulate accusations of perceived injustice regarding such things as pay systems, budget allocations or AA appointments.

The degree of perceived injustice is of vital importance in determining how someone will respond to the injustice. Perceived injustice is often determined by assessing the degree of perceived discrepancy from the rule being applied. According to Folger (1984), the degree of perceived injustice is at least partially determined by our ability to envision alternatives to the unjust condition. If no alternatives exist, employees will more readily accept the unjust condition. One way of limiting employees' sense of injustice would therefore include keeping them ignorant of alternatives. Many action groups in organisations have built their "businesses" around their ability to help others identify and label perceived injustices such as

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discrimination, abuse, exploitation or unfair treatment. Once identified, these groups also help to transform the perceived injustice into a grievance, by clearly attributing blame.

4.6.2   Blaming

Although people try to resolve problems without knowing their cause, they usually attempt to determine what or who is to blame for the injustice, so that they can focus their effort on the agent of the problem. The process of allocating blame progresses from determining cause to determining responsibility to determining blame. Without knowing who or what caused injustice, people cannot decide blame.

Injustices can be attributed to any one of three distinct entities: the *person*, *procedure* or *system*. An outcome may be considered unfair because an unfair decision was made. Similarly, the procedure determining the outcome or the system may have been unfair. In real life, it is often not clear which component is truly responsible for the injustice. According to Crosby (1984), people initially tend not to blame systems, and are unlikely to blame systems for two reasons: individuals do not have sufficient information to question that system and most individuals do not wish to question the system.

A second complication of attributing blame concerns the data people use to form a judgment. The primary problem is to determine whether individuals or their environment are most to blame. In the context of judgments about injustices, established criteria exist for evaluating the fairness of a procedure and a system. First, information about the individual (intelligence, rationality and consistency) is used to make judgments about the probability that the individual's environment is to blame. Second, information about the environment is used to determine whether the individual is to blame. When an injustice occurs and the procedures and system seem to be fair, logic suggests that the actor who produced the injustice is to blame.

Another complicating factor in attributing blame is that people have extremely strong, prior beliefs about the likely sources of injustice. These prior beliefs vary as a function of social class, cultural background, socioeconomic status and individual personality. If, for example, black employees believe that the organisation is not committed to their development and progression, they might not continue with their studies because they do not expect good results to be equitably rewarded.

Finally, sometimes it is not possible to attribute blame, because no real injustice has occurred. In such instances, predicting the individual's allocation of blame is difficult, since there are no clear indicators of blame. The more difficult it is to attribute blame, the more hostile, alienated, and disaffected an individual may become. According to Sheppard et al (1992), the above-mentioned principles in attributing blame hold the following implications for the organisation:

- The causes of injustice at any level may be diagnostic of potential injustice at other levels.
- If a procedure is fair then a person is likely to receive the blame.
- People will continue to blame that element to which they usually attribute blame.

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- Although blame for injustice can be widely shared, it rarely is. We tend to concentrate blame on a single, favourite source.

- People tend not to blame systems, and if they do, this will happen only after explanations of "people" and "procedures" have been proven to be inadequate.

Having determined the target of blame, a person must make one more decision: how much responsibility and blame to attribute to the target. According to Sheppard et al (1992), people base their judgment on three criteria: (1) Was the perceived injustice intentional? (2) Could the injustice and its consequences have been controlled? and (3) Did the person provide any excuse or justification for his of her actions?

According to Bies (1987), excuses and mitigating circumstances can be used to pre-empt blame for unjust acts. People can provide explanations for potentially unfair behaviour or procedures before they occur, and thus mitigate others' responses to the injustice. According to Sheppard et al (1992), common explanations used by organisations to soften the impact of an injustice include the following:

- "We didn't really have any choice."
- "You would have made the same decision had you been in my shoes."
- "The policy on AA appointments is very prescriptive."
- "The system wasn't designed to handle problems like this."
- "If we look at this problem from (a different) perspective, the decision is completely reasonable."

In lieu of an excuse, organisations can also provide an apology to justify injustices. An apology plays a similar role to an excuse, but assumes a different form. An apology involves the acceptance of blame, the acknowledgement of wrongdoing, and the implication that the behavioural or procedural elements that caused the problem will not occur again. In other words, there is no need for a person to take action to fix the injustice since the agent recognises the wrongdoing, has learned from it, and will make sure that it will never occur again.

4.7 ACTING ON INJUSTICE

Having decided that someone or something is to blame for an injustice, a person must next decide what, if anything, to do about it. A number of factors influence the degree to which someone feels a need to act on an injustice.

4.7.1 Factors influencing a person's need to act on an injustice

The two most important factors include the impact of the injustice on the perceiver; and the level of concern for limiting future injustice.

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4.7.1.1 The impact of the injustice

The need to punish the cause of an injustice is a direct function of both the perceived *magnitude of the injustice* itself, and the degree to which one holds a particular *person responsible* for creating the injustice. The perceived magnitude of injustice is a function of the level of *discrepancy from the relevant standards* of fairness held for behaviour in that situation, and the level of discrepancy from the best envisioned alternative to the current situation. If, for example, a manager uses his or her influence to ensure that a family member receives a promotion while other employees are not informed about the vacancy or afforded the opportunity to apply, unfairly treated employees will act on the injustice because:

- a gross injustice has occurred (magnitude of injustice)
- the manager can be held responsible for the injustice (person responsible)
- there was a clear deviation from procedures (discrepancy from standards)

4.7.1.2 Limiting future injustice

The second factor driving the need to respond is a function of the perceived probability that the injustice will persist into the future if left unattended. However, the decision to respond also depends on the probability that a person will be able to bring about changes. There is no value in responding to injustices where there is no likelihood of perpetuation. People have different reasons for responding to injustices. Some are more retributive in their responses, while others are more focused on deterrence and adopt "an eye for an eye" approach.

Individuals can pursue a number of alternative courses of action to deal with injustice. According to Sheppard et al (1992), employees generally deal with injustices in one of four ways. Firstly, they live with the injustice and continue as if nothing has happened. Secondly, they can change their behaviour to remove the injustice — for example, they can work less hard if their efforts are not equitably rewarded. Thirdly, they can rationalise the injustice by renaming, removing or redefining it. Lastly, employees can decide to resign or request a transfer in order to avoid confronting continued injustice.

Rusbult, Zembrodt and Gunn (1982) proposed a two-dimensional model of behavioural responses to dissatisfaction. According to them, behaviours can be located along a dimension of positive (constructive) to negative (destructive), and active to passive. Based on these two dimensions, four quadrants of behaviour, as illustrated in figure 4.2, are identified.

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FIGURE 4.2:   BEHAVIOURAL RESPONSES TO DISSATISFACTION
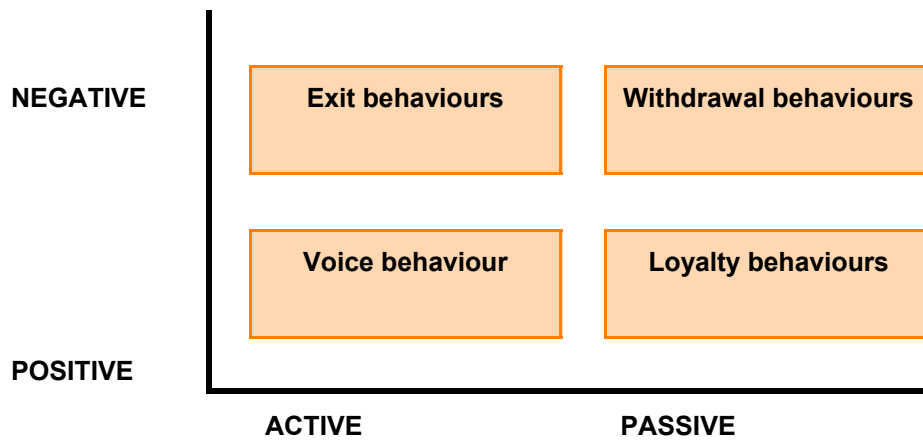
Source: Rusbult et al (1982)

Hirschman (1970) suggests an alternative response to injustice, namely: *voice*. He argues that a primary factor determining whether exit or voice is chosen is the individual's degree of loyalty to the organisation. Highly loyal employees will be more likely either to rationalise and cope with the injustice or attempt to change the organisation and remove the injustice.

Knowledge of the determinants of responses to injustice is necessary if managers are to develop functioning organisations. Successful organisations are ones that not only minimise the number of incidents of perceived injustice, but also create the mechanisms to direct the perceived injustices into channels that will effectively manage and deal with the responses injustice engenders.

With reference to figure 4.2, organisations will benefit the most from employees who deal with injustices *actively* and *positively*. Such employees will do something about the injustice in a constructive way such as bringing it to management's attention. This will enable the organisation to review its practices and prevent future problems. In addition, by affording employees the opportunity to raise their concerns, by responding to their inputs and by providing them with explanations and feedback, the value of employees is recognised. This, in turn, will lead to committed and loyal employees.

However, employees who respond to perceived injustices *passively* and *negatively* are harmful to the organisation. They are dissatisfied with their circumstances but do nothing to change it. Instead, they engage in withdrawal behaviour and make no attempt to contribute to the success of the organisation.

4.7.2   Factors influencing choice of action

When employees experience an injustice and have to choose what to do, they base their decision on two factors, namely the cost and the benefits of a response. The cost of a response could, for example,

include the creation of conflict, victimisation, resentment, retaliation, loss of reputation, emotional costs of action, lost opportunities, a sense of failure, strained interpersonal relationships, and so forth. The benefits of a response could include the system, procedures and practices being reviewed or a decision being reversed. Obviously an employee will choose the alternative that maximises the value of the action.

Part of determining the benefits of a response involves calculating the impact of a response and the probability that it can be successfully completed. According to Sheppard et al (1992), several aspects of the individual and the situation have an influence on the probable success of each course of action. These include the following:

- the degree to which an employee feels that he or she has control over the factors necessary to take effective action
- the degree to which an employee believes his or her personality and values are consistent with a particular course of action
- the degree to which a clear route for action is available and visible
- the degree to which others agree with and support the employee's opinion about the existence of an injustice and how to proceed

4.7.2.1 Level of perceived control

The degree to which one will actively respond is related to the level to which one feels one has any control over the cause of the injustice. Perceived lack of control comes from three main sources. First, it is related to one's general sense of *perceived efficacy*. Some people feel that they can effect change, or get things done, more than others. Second, perceived control is related to *real and perceived power*. If a person thinks he or she does not have the resources, information, status or support necessary to influence the cause of an injustice, he or she will not act to rectify the injustice. Third, perceived control is related to the degree to which a person feels he or she *understands* the cause of the injustice.

4.7.2.2 The predisposition of the unfairly treated individual

The likelihood of actively responding to an injustice is also affected by the qualities of the unfairly treated person. People who feel they are generally competent are more likely to act than those who feel they are incompetent. Individual differences in the tendency to *approach* or *avoid* a situation also influence a person's degree of active coping behaviour. People who have an approach orientation actively strive to cope with their problem, while those with an avoidance orientation tend to rationalise the problem away and deny it, and denigrate themselves. Furthermore, past feelings of injustice can accumulate to influence current action. People who have experienced persistent injustice from a particular source will be more likely to act on that injustice.

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4.7.2.3 Clear route for action

One reason for a person not acting on an injustice is that there is no obvious way to respond. Take, for example, the increasing number of complaints and grievances lodged during the past few years. Grievance procedures provide employees with information and the means to address any injustices, and they are therefore more likely to act on an injustice.

4.7.2.4 Shared perceptions with others

As indicated earlier, because perceptions of justice are not an objective reality but a social judgment, people are likely to seek confirmation of their opinions before deciding on a course of action. When a person discovers that others disagree with his or her opinion, he or she will become less certain about the judgment and less likely to act on it.

4.8 HANDLING EMPLOYEES' REACTIONS TO INJUSTICES

Employees who experience an injustice tend to act irrationally and emotionally when no avenue exists for reducing the injustice, when the chosen action has not fully solved the injustice, when the feelings from the existing injustice are managed without taking the future into consideration and when the unfairly treated employee is too angry to react rationally. These situations suggest that an organisation can do a number of things to channel reactions to injustice into forms that are less emotion driven, and thus easier for the organisation to handle. Organisations should consider the following options to manage employees' feelings about perceived injustices:

4.8.1 Eliminate gross injustices

First, organisations should avoid engaging in gross injustices. Although it is impossible to eliminate all forms of injustice and there are too many criteria for determining justice, injustices that do exist should be reasonable in scale.

4.8.2 Provide accessible and effective mechanisms for responses to injustices

Providing a controlled, accessible, responsive, nonretributive means of allowing employees to vent their ill-will and receive some reasonable response from the organisation can serve to avoid more harmful, emotional responses and reduce the perceived need for further action. One of the mechanisms that organisations can use to assure procedural fairness is to afford employees the opportunity to be heard in the organisation. This opportunity to express feelings and opinions is known as *voice*.

4.8.3 Allow employee voice

According to Sheppard et al (1992), voice serves two critical roles in assuring procedural fairness: a *preventive* and a *remedial* role. Preventive voice is the process whereby organisations create mechanisms

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that permit employees to express their views about policies, procedures or key decisions in organisational governance and management. By providing opportunities for input by those influenced by a decision, organisations will likely be seen as more fair in the first instance. Remedial voice mechanisms afford individuals the opportunity to express concerns about a decision that has already been made. This form of voice consists of efforts by employees to question organisational practices, for the purposes of gaining more information about them, challenging them or attempting to change them.

Remedial voice serves a number of key functions. Its primary function is to reduce the level of dissatisfaction and distress in the employee experiencing an injustice. It also provides diagnostic feedback to the organisation by indicating that some policy or practice is not working. It thus serves to alert the organisation to the fact that some employees find a policy or practice unfair. By identifying and notifying management of injustices, it enables the organisation to correct or make changes as necessary. Voice does not, however, assure that such changes or corrections will be made. Lastly, voice creates the opportunity for a new level of knowledge and understanding about the areas in which problems may be encountered in the future. This information enables the manager to design and implement future policies and practices so that justice concerns will not be raised.

The fair treatment of employees is important for three reasons: (1) to improve performance effectiveness, (2) to enhance the sense of organisational commitment, and (3) to sustain individual dignity and humaneness. Closely related to these reasons are the functions of voice systems which include:

- assuring employees' fair treatment
- providing a context in which unfair treatment can be appealed
- improving the organisation's effectiveness
- sustaining employee loyalty and commitment

The first two functions meet the dignity and humaneness goal, the third meets the performance effectiveness goal, and the last meets the commitment goal. One can thus conclude that a voice system has a direct influence on the perceived fairness of an organisation. However, for a voice system to function effectively it has to meet certain criteria. Without going into too much detail, the attributes of an effective voice system, as identified by Sheppard et al (1992), are listed in table 4.2.

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TABLE 4.2:   ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE VOICE SYSTEMS

DESIGN
    Simple procedures
    Broad application
    Vested authority
    Good diagnostic system
	CORRECTNESS
	    Administered well
	    Provides follow-up
	    Solve problems in an unbiased, thorough
	    and effective manner

RESPONSIVENESS
    Timely
    Tangible results
    Management commitment
    Considered inputs
	ACCESSIBILITY
	    Easy to use
	    Well advertised
	
	NON-PUNITIVENESS
	    Anonymity, Nonretributive
	    Confidentiality

Source: Sheppard et al (1992)

The purpose of organisational voice systems is to channel organisational dissatisfaction into acceptable forms and to respond to that dissatisfaction. Viewed from the individual perspective, they provide mechanisms for hearing employee concerns and complaints. Viewed from the organisational perspective, they serve as vehicles for stimulating feedback and commentary while maintaining control over the challenges and threats to management or even to the organisation's existence.

In understanding what organisational justice entails, an attempt should be made to apply fairness principles to the AA domain. In the next section the fairness of AA will be evaluated against organisational justice criteria.

4.9   MANAGING AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FAIRLY

In order to determine the fairness of AA, one needs to understand the meaning of the concepts of *fairness* and *affirmative action*. As defined in chapter 2, AA refers to the creation of a workforce that is representative of the population. In order to achieve this, organisations need to make use of fair discriminatory interventions to appoint, promote or develop employees from previously disadvantaged groups. Justice refers to the fairness of a *decision*, the *procedure* used in making that decision and the *interpersonal treatment* an employee receives during the enactment of these procedures.

If a decision to appoint or promote an AA candidate is made in accordance with the provisions of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, there is not much an organisation can do about the perceived fairness of it. There are, however, various ways in which such a decision can be made — hence the need for organisations to ensure that the procedures, policies and processes they use in making appointment or promotion decisions are procedurally fair and viewed as such by employees.

Several principles of procedural justice are cited in the literature. The following list summarises the principles of fairness referred to in seven recent articles on procedural justice (De Witt, 1998; Gopinatha

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& Becker, 2000; Harris, 2000; Konovsky, 2000; Saxby, Tat, Johansen, 2000; Simerson, L'Heureux, Beckstein, ZiaMian, Dembowski & Freshman, 2000; Tang & Sarfield-Baldwin, 1996; Tata, 2000):

- Provide advance notice of intent or decisions.
- Provide accurate information and adequate feedback.
- Support two-way communication.
- Explain and justify decisions.
- Allow employees to influence the decision.
- Consider the interests, views and concerns of all recipients.
- Permit appeal, review, reconsideration and correction.
- Treat employees with dignity, respect and sensitivity.
- Apply administrative procedures consistently.

The primary principles of procedural justice, as identified by Leventhal et al. (1980) and which are similar to the principles listed above are briefly discussed below.

4.9.1   Selection of decision makers

Any decisions that need to be made about the AA policy, appointment of applicants, determination of appointment and promotional criteria, budget, grievances lodged, and so forth, should be made by a panel of members. Of even greater importance is the composition of the panel. Panel members should be representative of all interest groups and consist of men and women from all ethnic groups. This will prevent unfair discrimination and afford all employees equal opportunities.

4.9.2   Setting ground rules (criteria) for evaluating rewards

Clear guidelines and criteria should be referred to when making decisions. If the AA policy regulates the issue at hand, the policy should be adhered to and applied consistently to all candidates.

4.9.3   Methods for collecting information

The *methods* for collecting information as well as the *type of information* collected should be the same for all candidates. If a decision needs to be made about who to promote in a department, the performance appraisal report cannot be referred to for one candidate but a personal interview conducted with the supervisor for another. Using the same procedures for collecting information and obtaining the same type of information for all candidates will reduce the possibility of prejudice and bias influencing the final decision.

4.9.4   Procedures for defining the decision process

Procedures that outline the decision process and are followed consistently will protect employers against accusations of favouritism and nepotism. Affirmative action candidates, for example, will have to go through each step in the selection process and be evaluated according to the same selection criteria used

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for other applicants. Preferential treatment with regard to a procedure will be regarded as a gross injustice.

4.9.5   Safeguards against abuse of power

Although the Employment Equity Act prohibits any form of discrimination, subtle forms of discrimination still occur in organisations. This is usually the case when employees come up against the power of managers. In order to protect employees against the abuse of power, mechanisms should be in place to afford them the opportunity to voice their concerns. The most common known mechanisms available in organisations include the following:

- committees that allow employee input
- senior management visits, during which employees can meet with senior officials and openly ask questions about organisation strategy, policies or raise concerns about unfair treatment
- grievance procedures
- open-door policies
- suggestion boxes

4.9.6   Procedures for appeals

Unresolved disputes and dissatisfaction create tension and lead to behaviour such as withdrawal, resignations and other destructive actions such as sabotage and retaliation. The organisation should thus provide a mechanism through which employees can channel their dissatisfaction and receive feedback. The grievance procedure is an example of such a mechanism.

4.9.7   The availability of change mechanisms

This component refers to the reversibility of a decision. Employees will regard a procedure as fair if they have the assurance that the procedure makes provision for injustices to be rectified.

Perceptions of procedural fairness are, however, also influenced by factors that go beyond the formal procedures used to make decisions. The interpersonal treatment employees receive from decision makers also influences their perceptions about the fairness of AA.

Take, for example, the situation in which employees attend an interview in the hope of receiving a promotion. Management decide to promote an AA candidate despite the fact that some of the other employees have more work experience. The rejected employees discover afterwards that the decision to promote the AA candidate was made long before the interviews took place and they were conducted merely for formality purposes. From an interactional justice point of view, the interpersonal treatment the rejected employees received was, to say the least, pathetic. For procedures to be viewed as interpersonally fair, managers should be *truthful* to employees, treat them with *respect* and *justify* their decision. If the rejected employees were informed about the priority of an AA appointment, were shown

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respect by not giving them false expectations or inviting them to an interview under false intentions and were provided with an explanation for not being promoted, they would have perceived their treatment as fair and more easily have accepted the decision.

4.10   SUMMARY

There is clear evidence that people care about justice. Organisations thus have to pursue it, as measured by reality as well as by perceptions. Unfortunately, the conclusion that it is better to be behaviourally just is too simple. In pursuing principles of distributive justice, it is not possible to achieve all criteria simultaneously. The base criteria of equity, equality and need are incompatible. Thus, organisations are left with a superordinate problem: how to achieve balance between the three principles of distributive justice. One possibility is to determine which of the goals is most important to a given situation.

Regarding procedural justice, organisations have to ensure that the procedures, processes and policies they use in making decisions are fair. Employees judge the fairness of procedures according to two types of control they have, namely the amount of control they have over the procedures used to make a decision and the amount of control they have over influencing the decision. Procedures are regarded as fair to the extent that they suppress bias, create consistent allocations, rely on accurate information, are correctable, represent the concerns of all recipients, and are based on moral and ethical standards.

A third type of justice, namely interactional justice, refers to the interpersonal treatment employees receive during the enactment of organisational procedures. Procedures are seen as interpersonally fair when they make provision for truthfulness, allow for the respectful treatment of employees, eliminate the chances of improper questions being asked and provide reasons or explanations for perceived injustices.

Employees can respond in various ways to a perceived injustice. They can live with it, change their behaviour to remove the injustice, rationalise it or leave (resign from) the organisation. The experience of injustice is harmful to individuals and organisations — hence the need for organisations to eliminate injustices, provide accessible and effective mechanisms for responses to injustices and allow employees to voice their concerns.

In this chapter the meaning of organisational justice was discussed with a view to explaining how employees make fairness judgments. The discussion extended theories from the organisational justice literature to the AA domain in order to advance the understanding of AA fairness. Employees' reactions to injustices and the way organisations should deal with perceptions of injustices were also highlighted.

The next chapter deals with employee commitment and the possible influence perceptions of AA fairness have on employees' commitment.