

MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.

PEOPLE

ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

Four kinds of fairness and how they were told apart, what 183 studies tie to the boss and to the organisation, Leventhal's six rules for a fair process, nurses who slept better when their supervisors were trained, twenty questions, and a card for one decision.



183

studies on fairness at work, published from 1975 on, combined in a meta-analysis that set four kinds of justice side by side.

COLQUITT ET AL., 2001

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NO. 70 · PEOPLE

In this issue

People judge more than what they get. They judge how it was decided, how they were treated and what they were told. This issue is about those four judgements, what research ties to them, and how a manager can check a decision against them before it is announced.

In 2001 Jason Colquitt showed that people tell apart four kinds of justice: of the outcome, of the process, of respect and of explanation. A meta-analysis of 183 studies found that the last two shape above all how people rate their boss. Gerald Leventhal named six rules for a fair process, and 45 samples show that process counts most when the outcome is bad. In four hospitals, nurses whose pay was cut slept better when their supervisors had been trained in fair treatment.

Stiven Janaqi EDITOR · STIVEN CATALYST

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HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Figure

Every figure has its source and year at the foot of its page.

Our reading

Where the editors interpret rather than the research, it says so.

Practice

The steps and the card are proposals to try, not research results.

COVER STORY

Four kinds of fair

In 2001 Jason Colquitt wrote questions for each kind of justice the research had described and tested them twice, with students at a university and with staff of a car parts maker. Four separate factors fitted the answers better than two or three broader ones.

01**Distributive: the outcome**

Does what I get match what I put in?
Adams, 1965

02**Procedural: the process**

Was it decided by fair rules, with a voice? Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Leventhal, 1980

03**Interpersonal: respect**

Was I treated with politeness, dignity and respect? Bies & Moag, 1986

04**Informational: explanation**

Was I told why, candidly and in time? Greenberg, 1993

In 1990 Jerald Greenberg described the field as a literature “grown around attempts to describe and explain the role of fairness as a consideration in the workplace”. Bies and Moag had called the last two together interactional justice; Greenberg proposed splitting them, and Colquitt's data agreed.

OUR READING

A decision can be fair in one way and unfair in three. People notice all four.

Sources: Jason A. Colquitt, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001 (via Abstract at PubMed; items as reproduced by Díaz-Gracia et al., 2014); Jerald Greenberg, *Journal of Management* 16(2), 1990 (via Abstract; quoted in Colquitt et al., 2001); Jason A. Colquitt, Donald E. Conlon, Michael J. Wesson, Christopher O.L.H. Porter & K. Yee Ng, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001

Justice here means perceived fairness, as the people affected judge it. The years name the works that introduced each idea, as cited by Colquitt et al. (2001); we have not read those works themselves.

THE NUMBERS

The boss or the organisation

Jason Colquitt and four colleagues combined 183 studies from 1975 on. Bies and Moag had expected respect and explanation to shape how people see their boss, and process how they see the organisation. Corrected correlations:

CORRELATION WITH COMMITMENT TO THE ORGANISATION AND WITH THE RATING OF THE BOSS, 2001



Respect and explanation went with the rating of the boss far more than with commitment. Among 6,442 British civil servants followed for 8.7 years, men reporting high justice at work had a lower risk of heart disease (hazard ratio 0.65).

OUR READING

The organisation writes the procedure. The team judges the person who delivers it.

Sources: Jason A. Colquitt, Donald E. Conlon, Michael J. Wesson, Christopher O.L.H. Porter & K. Yee Ng, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001; Mika Kivimäki, Jane E. Ferrie, Eric Brunner, Jenny Head, Martin J. Shipley, Jussi Vahtera & Michael G. Marmot, *Archives of Internal Medicine* 165(19), 2005 (via Abstract at PubMed)

Mostly self-reports, which can inflate the links. Respect and commitment: only two studies. The heart study shows a link, not a cause.

THE MODEL

Six rules for a fair process

Thibaut and Walker found in 1975 that people in disputes accept losing control over the decision as long as they keep control over the process: time to make their case. In 1980 Gerald Leventhal widened the idea into six rules a procedure should meet to be seen as fair.

01**Consistent**

the same for everyone
and over time

02**Free of bias**

no one deciding has a
stake in the result

03**Accurate**

based on correct
information

04**Correctable**

a way to fix a wrong
decision

05**Ethical**

in line with standards of
ethics

06**Representative**

the views of those
affected are heard

Joel Brockner and Batia Wiesenfeld reviewed 45 samples in 1996: the process mattered most to people's reactions when the outcome was poor or felt unfair, and the outcome mattered most when the process was poor.

OUR READING

When you cannot give people the outcome they want, the process is what you still control.

Sources: Jason A. Colquitt, Donald E. Conlon, Michael J. Wesson, Christopher O.L.H. Porter & K. Yee Ng, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001; Joel Brockner & Batia M. Wiesenfeld, *Psychological Bulletin* 120(2), 1996 (via Abstract at PubMed)

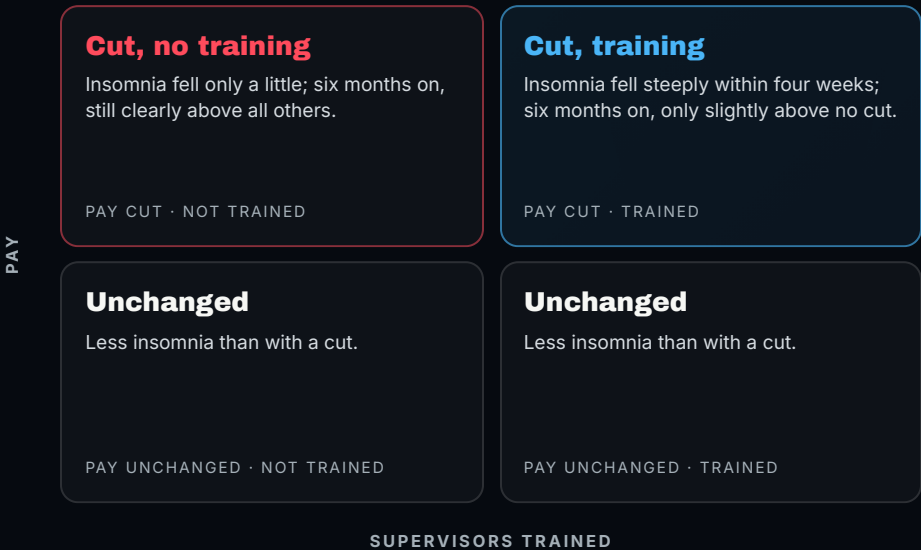
Thibaut and Walker studied legal disputes; Leventhal carried the idea into organisations. Both are summarised from Colquitt et al. (2001); the short labels of the rules are ours.

[More in the essay](#)[Leading people without losing the person](#)

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

The pay cut and the night

Jerald Greenberg followed 467 nurses in four US hospitals of one group. At two, a new pay system cut pay by about 10%. At one hospital in each pair, supervisors had two four-hour sessions on fair treatment: dignity and respect, and full, accurate explanations.



After the cut, insomnia rose to about 6 on a 7-point scale, roughly double. The training was “nothing magical”, Greenberg said. A 2013 meta-analysis of 493 samples links justice to performance and helping, through trust and commitment.

OUR READING

Fair treatment did not undo the cut. It changed how hard it hit. (Source: [Soulé, Fair Treatment Did Not Undo the Cut, It Changed How Hard It Hit](#) at PubMed; Ohio State University news release, 2006); Jason A. Colquitt, Brent A. Scott, Jessica B. Rodell, David M. Long, Cindy P. Zapata, Donald E. Conlon & Michael J. Wesson, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 98(2), 2013 (via Abstract at PubMed)

Self-reported insomnia, and one hospital for each condition. The figures for the scale come from the university's 2006 news release; the abstract confirms the design and the direction.

HOW IT IS MEASURED

Twenty questions

Colquitt's measure asks about one outcome, the procedure behind it and the person who carried it out. Each of the 20 questions is answered from 1, “to a small extent”, to 5, “to a large extent”. It has since been tested in other languages, Spanish among them.

01

Outcome · 4 questions

Does it reflect the effort you put in? Is it justified, given your performance?

02

Process · 7 questions

Could you express your views? Were the procedures consistent? Could you appeal?

03

Respect · 4 questions

Were you treated with dignity? Did they refrain from improper remarks?

04

Explanation · 5 questions

Were they candid? Did they explain the procedures thoroughly? Did details come in time?

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE, A TEAM AFTER A NEW HOLIDAY ROTA

Outcome 3.4 of 5

Process · respect 2.6 · 4.1

Explanation 2.2 of 5

The team felt respected, but no one heard why the rota changed or how to object. The numbers are invented.

Sources: Jason A. Colquitt, Journal of Applied Psychology 86(3), 2001 (via Abstract at PubMed; items as reproduced by Díaz-Gracia et al., 2014); Liliانا Díaz-Gracia, Claudio Barbaranelli & Bernardo Moreno-Jiménez, Psicothema 26(4), 2014

The questions are shortened from Colquitt (2001), as reproduced in the Spanish validation (2014); the translations are ours. Ask anonymously and read the four scores apart.

TOOL OF THE ISSUE

The fair decision card

One decision that affects people: a rota, a bonus, a promotion, a new rule. Fill in the card before you announce it, and once more a week later, with what you heard back.

01 The decision what changes, for whom, from when

02 Outcome which rule: contribution, equal shares or need; who gains, who loses

03 Process who was heard; same rule for all; facts checked; how to appeal

04 Respect who tells whom, where, in what words

05 Explanation the real reasons, candidly, before people hear it elsewhere

06 A week later what came back; what we corrected

Sources: Jason A. Colquitt, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001 (via Abstract at PubMed; items as reproduced by Díaz-Gracia et al., 2014); Jason A. Colquitt, Donald E. Conlon, Michael J. Wesson, Christopher O.L.H. Porter & K. Yee Ng, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001

A practice proposed by the editors, after Colquitt's four dimensions and Leventhal's rules. The KPI Diagnostic helps with a related question: whether a missed result comes from clarity, skill, capacity, process or ownership.

Open the tool: **KPI Diagnostic**

stivencatalyst.com/tools/kpi-diagnostic/

SOURCES AND METHOD

Every figure has a source.

The figures in this issue come from the sources below. The year shows how recent each one is.

On the dimensionality of organizational justice: A construct validation of a measure

Jason A. Colquitt, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001 · via Abstract at PubMed; items as reproduced by Díaz-Gracia et al., 2014

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386>

Organizational justice: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow

Jerald Greenberg, *Journal of Management* 16(2), 1990 · via Abstract; quoted in Colquitt et al., 2001

<https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639001600208>

Justice at the millennium: A meta-analytic review of 25 years of organizational justice research

Jason A. Colquitt, Donald E. Conlon, Michael J. Wesson, Christopher O.L.H. Porter & K. Yee Ng, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86(3), 2001

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.425>

Justice at work and reduced risk of coronary heart disease among employees: The Whitehall II Study

Mika Kivimäki, Jane E. Ferrie, Eric Brunner, Jenny Head, Martin J. Shipley, Jussi Vahtera & Michael G. Marmot, *Archives of Internal Medicine* 165(19), 2005 · via Abstract at PubMed

<https://doi.org/10.1001/archinte.165.19.2245>

An integrative framework for explaining reactions to decisions: Interactive effects of outcomes and procedures

Joel Brockner & Batia M. Wiesenfeld, *Psychological Bulletin* 120(2), 1996 · via Abstract at PubMed

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.120.2.189>

Losing sleep over organizational injustice: Attenuating insomniac reactions to underpayment inequity with supervisory training in interactional justice

Jerald Greenberg, *Journal of Applied Psychology* 91(1), 2006 · via Abstract at PubMed; Ohio State University news release, 2006

<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.1.58>

EDITORIAL METHOD

Each figure was checked for its year, its publisher and what exactly it measures. Where the publisher's page could not be opened, the figure was checked against independent summaries and is marked “via”. The editors' interpretation is marked “Our reading”. Figures that could not be confirmed are not in the issue.



MANAGEMENT REVIEW

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Every issue, one management question, checked against the best research.

ALL ISSUES

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