

Chapter I.

Feelings of justice and injustice: Trends of the socio-psychological approach

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Imagine that you have been invited to take part in a performance evaluation task. You are to observe and evaluate the work carried out by two people. From an objective point of view those two people carry out exactly the same work in front of you and perform it to the same standard. At the end of the observation exercise, and before you have responded to the questionnaire evaluating the work, you are informally told that the Department where the study take part can only pay one of the two people involved. The criterion for selecting that one person was arbitrary. A coin tossed in the air decided that candidate X is the one who will be paid. You then receive a questionnaire for evaluating the performance of the two people whose work you observed. What does the analysis of the responses show? This situation is the scenario of an experiment carried out by Lerner (1965) and the results of the experiment clearly show that the work of X is considered to be better than that of Y. Remember that in objective terms both candidates car-

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ried out the same quantity of work. But the person who received the award, the one favoured by chance, is given a more positive evaluation than the person whom chance left out.

Two people carry out the same task, one of them is rewarded and the other is not. The one who is rewarded gets his reward by chance, and not by any objective criterion. Nevertheless, we reach the conclusion that that person who won is a better performer than the other person. Why? Because we believe that the world is just, that justice is an inherent characteristic of our world, that there is an order that rewards those who are good and punishes those who are evil. We learn this rule very early on when, as children, we learn to associate punishment with bad actions and rewards with good actions. This association becomes a cognitive expectation, and this expectation becomes a norm: it is not just probable that it will happen this way (a contingent relationship between rewards and investments), it should happen this way.

This belief in a just world makes the world more coherent, more predictable and more controllable. And a world over which one has control is a world of well-being and social and psychological balance (Lerner, 1980). When reality weakens this belief and we think that there is nothing we can do to re-establish justice, we reinterpret the events and make the victims of injustice responsible for their own fate. Even if we do not do this consciously, because social norms do not allow us to do so, we do it in an unconscious way, for the sake of defending our psychological well-being (for a review and experimental illustration, see Correia, 2000, 2001).

If feelings of justice and injustice are such significant elements in our individual and collective behaviour, what do we mean when we talk about justice? What meanings does this word have on day-to-day social thinking? What factors lead the common man to describe a given decision, a social situation, or certain behaviour as just or unjust? And is it relevant for us and for social and political decisions to know what common man thinks about justice?

In fact, for some social scientists social thinking doesn't matter. For instance, Kluegel and co-authors (1995), in a work on social justice and political change, quote the following opinion from a referee on their proposed work project:

Surveys of popular opinion on these topics seem to me of little academic value. The great debate about justice that has been in progress since the time of Plato has thrown up many difficulties. But we will not be helped in the least in the resolution of these difficul-

ties by a knowledge of the quirks of public opinion... It would seem therefore a waste of time to survey the views of people who are not in a position to judge the issues.

This position fails to take into account the fact that persons think and that what they think constitutes in large measure the functioning of social institutions. The objective of this paper is to summarise some of the dimensions of social thinking on social justice. This objective is based on the assumption that social representations of justice are social expectations and social norms that frequently shape individual and collective proactive and reactive behaviour in interpersonal and institutional contexts. It is the approach that validates the importance of studies as the study on “feelings of justice in the Chinese community of Macao”, carried out by Hespanha and his co-authors (see this volume).

Dimensions of the representation of justice

Based on the idea that social representations of justice are often one of the most significant organizational bases for individual and collective behaviour, we conducted a small research on the experience of justice and injustice in organizations (Theotónio, 1997; Theotónio and Vala, 1999). In that research we asked about 200 people from 18 different organizations to tell us about situations in which they felt that had suffered injustice. The episodes referred to by the participants in this research were grouped into three categories: distributive aspects – wages, non-promotion, results of performance evaluation, etc.; procedural aspects – lack of impartiality, lack of voice, etc.; relational aspects – honesty, personal respect, etc.

Distributive aspects cover the granting of rewards and the rules for distributing those rewards (equality, necessity, equity). Procedural aspects relate to how decisions are made and to rules of decision (for example, representativeness, consistency, neutrality, etc.). These rules are the formal aspects of procedures. Relational aspects of procedures relate to the quality of interaction as to how a decision is taken: honesty and personal consideration are typical factors in these relational aspects.

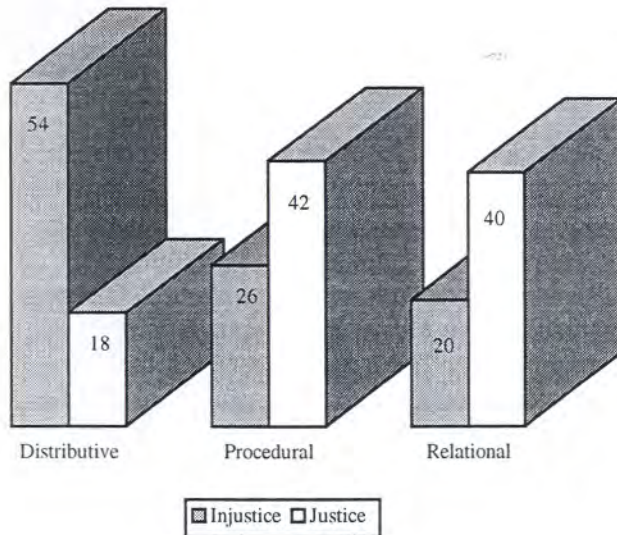
Contrary to conventional wisdom, the results obtained in this research show that much of the experience of injustice derives, in 46% of cases, from relational and procedural issues. Research in the social sciences and reflections in the area of political science have tended to

concentrate above all on distributive aspects of justice and on distributive justice norms. What these results show is that people view injustice in a wider perspective and that procedures are also important.

In that same study we also asked people to tell us about situations in which they felt justice had been done or restored. Once again people referred to situations related to the three dimensions mentioned above, but this time procedural and interactional aspects were clearly in the majority.

Experiences of injustice and justice: categories of episodes (%)
(Theotónio e Vala, 1999)

[FIGURE 1]



Taken together, these results show that the experience of justice and injustice does not only derive from distributive factors, but also from procedural and relational factors. The results also show that injustice derives above all from distributive aspects, while the experience of justice is associated primarily with procedural and relational aspects.

These results are similar, for example, to those of a series of studies carried out by Mikula and co-authors (1990) with university students

in different European countries, on the perception of injustice in interpersonal relations. Closer to the methodology of our study is the recently published research by a team of north American social psychologists (Lupfer, Weeks, Doan and Houston, 2000). In this case subjects did not recount experiences of injustice and justice in a particular sphere of their lives, such as work or interpersonal relations, but experiences in any area of their lives. The results show that accounts of experiences of injustice occur in equal measure in relation to the distributive, procedural and interactional aspects. However, as in our research, distributive aspects are found to a lesser extent in the experience of justice than are procedural and relational aspects. There is, therefore, sufficient empirical evidence to assert that, at least in Western societies, the experience of justice and injustice, at the different levels of individual and collective life, is not confined to distributive aspects. Procedures are perceived as an important dimension of justice. Leventhal (1980) systematised the following six justice rules in common sense: consistency (equal treatment across persons and time), accuracy (processes based on accurate information), bias suppression (avoiding self-interest and others personal biases), correctability (providing opportunities for a decision review), representativeness (participation of those involved), ethicality (compatibility with fundamental moral values)¹.

Despite the importance of procedural justice, it was research on distributive justice that brought out two fundamental aspects of the perception of justice in general – that the feeling of justice is a subjective experience and an experience based on social comparisons. We should recall, in this context, the results obtained during the Second World War by Stoufer *et al.* (1949) and later reanalysed by Merton (1957). These researchers verified that Air Force officers were unhappier than Army officers in relation to promotion. However, in objective terms, promotions were faster and more frequent in the Air Force than in the Army. Why, therefore, was there greater dissatisfaction among Air Force officers? Given that promotion was more likely to occur in the Air Force, it was the case that officers more frequently came across colleagues who had been promoted than in the Army. It is not the objective conditions that determine feelings of injustice, but subjective conditions which derive from social comparisons. Following this re-

¹ I don't refer here the model of justice proposed by Rawls (1971), because that model is a theoretical approach on normative rules and the paper is about social representations of justice.

search, the concept of relative deprivation has been developed and extensively used in social sciences as an important construct to explain the arousing of the feeling of injustice and why people engage in certain collective behaviour (for a review, Walker & Smith, 2002).

Social consequences of the perception of procedural justice

Together with the feeling of justice and injustice derived from distributive issues, we should consider the perceptual salience of procedural and relational factors in the experience of justice and injustice. Moreover, we need to know the consequences of the judgements of justice anchored in those procedural and relational factors. In the area of distributive justice, these consequences have been extensively studied at the personal and collective levels. We know that under certain conditions, the perception that one has been the victim of an injustice in terms of resource distribution has implications in the personal well-being, in the perception of the control over one's life and on the personal involvement with social protest movements. But the impact of procedural/relational injustice on the lives of individuals and groups remains less studied. However some studies already show that in certain situations the social impact of the experience of justice shaped by procedural concerns is as important as or more important than the impact of injustice derived from distributive concerns.

For instance, a comparative study conducted with students from the University of Berkeley in the US, the University of Osnabruck in Germany, the Chinese University in Hong Kong and the University of Tohoku in Japan shows that status recognition, trust and neutrality, which are relational/procedural aspects of the experience of injustice, are critical in evaluating the justice of a decision in any one of the samples studied (Lind, Tyler and Hu, 1997). A study carried out in Hong Kong using a probabilistic sample of employed people shows that judgements on both distributive justice and procedural justice are predictors of job satisfaction, of the intention to remain in the organization, and in the evaluation by supervisors (Fields, Pang and Chiu, 2000).

In a study conducted in Portugal on 200 employees of 3 Portuguese banks it was shown that the legitimacy of a decision taken by a hierar-

chical superior was clearly associated with judgements on procedural and interactional justice relating to other decisions made by that same hierarchical superior (Theotónio, 1997). In another study, carried out in a Portuguese insurance company, it was shown that the greater the perception of procedural justice, the greater the perception of the legitimacy of the organizational authority and the greater the support for organizational change (Sousa & Vala, 2002). Following the findings of the international research, other studies carried out in Portugal (Rego, 2000; Caetano and Vala, 1999) also show the importance of the procedural and interactional dimensions of justice in organizational contexts and that the legitimacy of corporate decisions is more dependent on procedural aspects than on distributive justice aspects. Besides, some other researches show that the procedural aspects of justice also shape the evaluation of political authorities. For instance a study by Lind and Tyler (1988) carried out in the USA analysed the impact of the perception of justice on the evaluation of political decisions. That research shows that the agreement with economic policies and with social policies is more explained by justice judgements than by perceptions of personal benefit or by classical socio-demographic variables. That research also shows that procedural aspects are as influent as distributive aspects upon evaluation of social policies.

Judgements of social justice and evaluation of democratic institutions

(adapted from Vala and Marinho, in press)

[TABLE 1]

	Satisfaction with democracy	Satisfaction with Portuguese political institutions
	R^2	
Positional Socio-demographic V's	0.44%	0.38%
Socio-demographic V's + Distributive justice V's	10.0%	14.0%
Socio-demographic V's + Distributive justice V's + Procedural justice V's	18.0%	30,0%

Values are adjusted R squared.

In the same vein, in a study on satisfaction with democratic institutions, carried out on a representative sample of the Portuguese population, it was found that the evaluation of democratic institutions is better explained by the perception of distributive justice than by traditional socio-demographical variables. For its part, procedural justice better explains people's degree of satisfaction with those institutions than distributive justice. In this research authors contrasted the relative predictive power of a coherent set of variables. As shown in Table 1, authors proceeded in the following way: in the first regression equation they just entered positional variables; in the second variables concerning distributive judgements were added; the variables concerning the procedural judgements were introduced in the final regression equation. Once the procedural variables are finally entered in the regression models the increment of the explained variance in the final equation is a robust test of their predictive power.

Impact of the school experience and of the perception of the justice of teacher behaviour on legitimisation of school authority and on the evaluation of legal and judicial authorities
(*Gouveia-Pereira and Vala, 2001*)

[TABLE 1]

	Legitimacy of school authority	Courts	Police
	Beta values		
Evaluation of school rules.....	n. s.	0.21***	0.23***
Evaluation of relationship with peers.....	n. s.	n. s.	n. s.
Evaluation of school results.....	n. s.	n. s.	n. s.
Relational justice.....	0.50***	0.13*	0.29***
Distributive justice.....	n. s.	0.21***	n. s.
Comparative dimension of the perception of justice.....	0.15*	0.28***	0.14
R ²	0.30	0.22	0.21

n. s. = statistically not significant.
* $p < 0.50$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The feeling that processes count seems to be a feeling that is acquired at a very early stage in the process of socialisation. In a study

carried out with secondary school students in the Lisbon region by Gouveia-Pereira, Vala, Palmonari and Rubini (2002) it was shown (Table 1) that the legitimacy of teachers' authority and their decisions is determined more by procedural/relational justice than by the evaluation of other aspects of school life, in particular the marks awarded by the teachers, which one would expect to be the most important aspect. Moreover, results show that the experience of justice in school is also positively correlated with the evaluation of courts and police, two examples of institutional authorities

Psychological and sociological explanations for the relevance of the perception of procedural justice

Thibaut and Walker (1975), two American social psychologists interested in group processes, studied the motivations underlying the salience of procedural justice judgements. These authors studied the decision-making process in the courts and compared the (European) inquisitorial system with the (American) adversarial system. Their first studies showed that North-American students preferred the adversarial system to the inquisitorial system. The hypothesis they formulated was that the adversarial system gives the litigants greater control than the decision-maker and is therefore preferred. New studies carried out not just in the US but also in the UK, France and Germany, confirmed that hypothesis. Studies conducted on decision-making in other areas also show that participants' intervention, or how much voice they have in a decision process, is a fundamental element in evaluating the justice of the results: adverse results were more likely to be considered just when those affected by them had been granted a voice in the process of decision-making. Thibaut and Walker distinguish between process control or voice (disputant's perception of control over presentation of evidence) and decision control (disputant's control over the decision). Based on experimental work, these authors show that voice or process control is the key factor in the perception of justice.

Thibaut and Walker justify the importance attributed to voice as deriving from instrumental motives. Control over the process is seen as a factor that makes it easier to obtain better results. Thus, in the Thibaut and Walker hypothesis, concern with the process derives not from the value attributed to the process itself, but from the value attributed to its results. According to these authors, judgements of justice, like judge-

ments on other aspects of social life, are governed by a concern with favourable rewards. This explanation is not only plausible it is also supported by a great deal of empirical research. But it still does not explain everything. For example, how can we explain the importance attributed to expressive and symbolic aspects underlying judgements of justice in the light of the principles of self-interest? Why do people make their judgements on the justice of a decision dependent on factors like the recognition of personal status and the trust they have in the decision-maker? Probably because it is not only self-interest which underlies judgements of justice.

Let us set out a strictly psychological hypothesis for the salience of the procedural aspects of justice, and then complement it with a more sociological hypothesis. Lind and Tyler (1988) are the authors of the psychological hypothesis (the group value model) that we put forward in order to clarify the salience and the consequences of the perception of procedural justice.

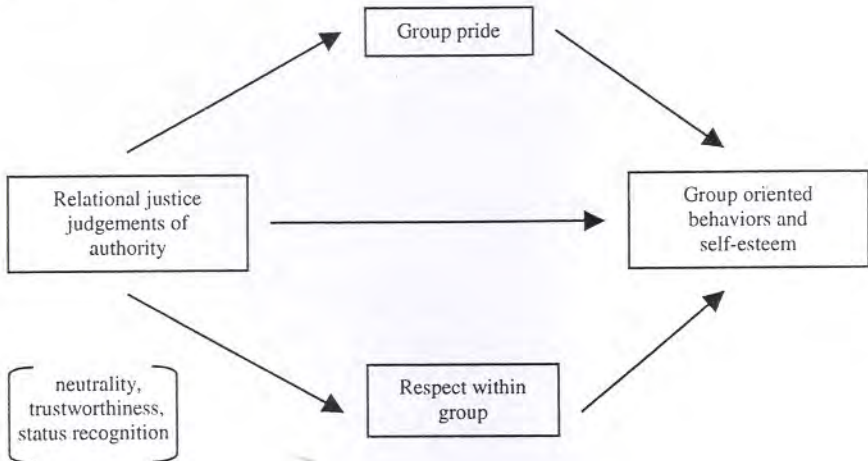
Decisions that affect us are generally taken in an organizational or group context. These group contexts are an essential source of information for the individual concerning his identity and value. It is in groups and organizations that people collect information in order to construct their self-image and self-esteem. In this context, decisions that concern us provide us with information on the value that the group attributes to us. A just decision regarding us means that the group is deserving of our identification with it, and also means that the group perceives us as being a person with value. Consequently the self-esteem increases and the group-oriented behaviours are more probable (figure 2).

Distributive aspects may, in a number of situations, communicate information to us concerning our value, but research has shown that it is above all the procedural and relational aspects of a decision concerning us which provide us with information on our perceived value within a group. This theoretical model (the group value model) assumes that the importance attributed to procedural factors does not just rest on motives of self-interest, it is also based on motives related to identity and self-esteem. The empirical evidence for this model is today robust (see Sousa, 2000). This approach is an extension of the theory of social identity proposed by Tajfel e Turner (1986). According with this theory an important part of people's identity derives from group membership, in which people are motivated to have a positive identity. Consequently people desire to pertain to groups with favourable evaluations, groups that can enhance the personal self-esteem.

However, the social identity theory emphasises the inter-group processes associated with personal and collective self-esteem, the group value model emphasises the intra-group processes associated with the search for personal identity relevant information.

The group value model of procedural justice
(Lind and Tyler, 1988)

[FIGURE 2]



Instrumental factors as well as identity motives are important factors that underlie justice perception. But factors related to social values may also account for the fact that the procedural aspects of justice judgements are seen as being increasingly important. The relevance attributed to processes is a feature of modern societies and, according to Weber, is a modern alternative to the “traditional legitimacy” of authority or to its “charismatic legitimacy”. In Inglehart’s (1990) model, which contrasts societies of “scarcity”, or “materialistic” societies, with “post-materialist societies”, the values of social participation and voice are characteristics of the latter. The “materialistic” societies are characterised by the importance attributed to economic values, by self-interested motives and by the importance given to social order. By contrast, in the post-materialist societies, participation is an important issue and the values of identity and voice are more important than in-

strumental and economic values. Consequently, we can formulate the hypothesis that in social contexts where post-materialistic values are more salient the identity and expressive motives are also more salient and then the procedural justice rules may shape the justice judgements. However, in the social contexts where materialistic values are emphasised, the instrumental and self-interest motives are also emphasised and then distributive concerns are more salient and may shape the justice judgements.

Conclusions

In this chapter we briefly presented the main issues of the socio-psychological research on social justice, giving special importance to the research carried out in Portugal. We emphasised the perception of justice that derives from procedural judgements. Indeed it is common to think that perception of justice just derives from evaluations of results and that people don't attribute importance to process through which the results are obtained. The empirical research shows, on the contrary, that people in everyday life either in macro-social or in micro-social contexts attribute importance to procedural rules.

The approach we developed doesn't reduce the importance of distributive justice. In fact, research nowadays tries to articulate these two dimensions of the perception of justice either at the level of their consequences or at the level of motivational factors underlying justice judgements. Instrumental and identity motivations are not opposed dimensions and deserve to be articulated. Besides, both the research on distributive justice and the research on procedural justice suggest that justice judgements are subjective and comparative judgements and are the result of social representations of justice. This perspective doesn't ignore the importance of the normative theories about justice, but suggests that social representations of justice should be an important input to these normative theories.

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