ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE AS A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING UNION-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS IN EDUCATION

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In this article, I have conceptualized union-management relations using an organizational justice framework. I consider organizational justice theory, including distributive, procedural, interactional, and what I call relational justice perspectives. Utilizing examples from my experience and research, I illustrate and discuss various forms of organizational justice operating in school systems and influencing teachers' perspectives and union actions. I urge researchers and practising educational leaders to use an organizational justice perspective to better understand teachers' perspectives and union-management relations in education.

Key words: teacher identity, educational leadership, teacher unions, school leadership, board-teacher relations, government-teacher relations, relational justice

Dans cet article, l'auteure analyse les relations patronales-syndicales à l'aide d'un cadre axé sur la justice organisationnelle. Elle fait appel à des théories sur la justice organisationnelle, notamment les théories sur la justice distributive, procédurale et interactionnelle, et à ce qu'elle appelle la justice relationnelle. À l'aide d'exemples tirés de son expérience et de ses recherches, elle illustre et analyse diverses formes de justice organisationnelle à l'œuvre dans des systèmes scolaires et ayant une influence sur les points de vue des enseignants et les actions des syndicats. Elle incite fortement les chercheurs et les leaders dans le monde de l'éducation à adopter le point de vue de la justice organisationnelle afin de mieux comprendre les points de vue des enseignants et les relations patronales-syndicales dans les milieux de l'enseignement.

Mots clés : identité des enseignants, leadership et éducation, syndicats d'enseignants, direction d'école, relations entre la commission scolaire et les enseignants, justice relationnelle

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Many educators view teacher unions as organizations that pursue a set of narrow self-interests on behalf of their members (Ballou & Podgursky, 1998; Lawton, Bedard, MacLellan, & Li, 1999). Other authors (for example, Bascia, 2004; Poole, 2000; Shedd & Bacharach, 1991) present an alternative picture, one that portrays a greater complexity of teacher and union interests. Within this alternative perspective, teachers pursue a broad range of interests through their unions, including traditional union issues like salaries, benefits, and working conditions; professional issues such as professional development; and social justice issues, such as anti-racism and anti-sexism (e.g., Poole, 2000). This alternative perspective has not, at least not yet, shaken the dominant view of teacher unions as vehicles of self-interest.

Suppose the critics are right and teacher unions pursue only issues that serve the self-interests of teachers. What does that mean? What self-interests do teachers pursue? Salaries and benefits are obvious self-interests. Working conditions for teachers, such as smaller class sizes and access to quality teaching resources, are advantageous to teachers while being closely connected to students' interests. It is often difficult to make clear distinctions between teachers' working conditions and students' learning conditions (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Professional develop-ment might also be perceived as self-interest because, in some cir-cumstances, such as higher education degrees and diplomas, it may lead to higher salaries. Is the pursuit of social justice self-interest? Not obviously so, yet many teachers, because they are women, belong to a traditionally marginalized gender group; many teachers belong to other marginalized groups, such as those related to culture and sexuality. Social justice goals, then, may serve the self-interests of teachers. In many cases, when teachers pursue these interests for themselves, they also pursue them for others, or others benefit from teachers' achievement of such goals. Self-interest, then, is not a particularly meaningful term.

Despite my disenchantment with the dominant view of teacher unions, I am not convinced that the alternative perspective has adequately captured the full range of teachers' interests. When I reflect on the research I have conducted on teacher unions, the theme of justice seems to figure prominently in teachers' interests. Teachers seem to seek justice for themselves and for others. Justice, however, may be one union

interest that has hidden below the radar and gone unacknowledged in the research related to union-management relations.

In this article, I address the gap in the research by conceptualizing teacher unions as justice-oriented organizations; I explore whether employing a framework of justice can lead to a deeper understanding of teachers' interests and their impact on relations between union and management in education. Because union-management relations occur between organized and organizational groups (e.g., teacher unions, school boards, Ministries of Education), research that directly relates to justice within and between organizations is particularly relevant. Also, because I'm interested in how the pursuit of teachers' interests has an impact on their relations with management, the way teachers make judgments about justice within the relationship is important. Although other conceptualizations of justice may be relevant, I limit my discussion in this article to an examination of *organizational justice* research and its potential to help educators and others better understand teacher unions.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE THEORY

Organizational justice theory, developed from applied research in organizational settings, focuses on how individuals socially construct incidents of justice and injustice. Justice in organizational justice research is examined through the perceptions of employees in organizations who make judgments about the actions of organizational leaders (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001; Folger & Martin, 1986; Folger, Rosenfield, & Robinson, 1983; Greenberg, 1990). A leadership act is just in the eyes of employees when they perceive it as just and respond accordingly. Organizational justice, in this sense is subjective – what might be perceived as just by one person may be perceived as unjust by another. However, justice is also socially constructed; therefore coherent, long-standing groups (such as employee groups) often develop shared conceptions of what constitutes justice (Bies, 1987; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler & Smith, 1999). Such group constructions may take on normative qualities over time, in the sense that they develop into group norms, although the norms will be limited to group members, and may conflict with the justice-oriented

perceptions of other groups. These differences may result in conflict when two or more groups interact.

Perceptions of organizational justice are contextual. Although certain norms may influence perceptions of justice in particular situations, norms do not necessarily determine or predict how individuals or groups will interpret or respond to particular situations. Nevertheless, organizational justice research has identified certain patterns of justice-oriented behaviour. Although these patterns should not be treated as deterministic or prescriptive, they do offer some guidance (formal and informal) to leaders who are interested in developing and maintaining just work environments.

Organizational justice research has shed considerable light on how employees respond to perceived fairness or lack of fairness in the workplace. For example, when employees feel unfairly treated their commitment to the organization falls, their job performance drops, job satisfaction declines, they become much less likely to assist their co-workers (Ambrose, 2002; Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997), and they may engage in deviant behaviour in the workplace, including sabotage (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002). Perceptions of justice, then, are important to the effective operation of organizations and are also important to the well being of employees.

Scholars have identified in theory and research three different aspects of organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. These aspects have developed chronologically, with distributive justice being the earliest aspect identified and examined, followed by procedural justice and interactional justice. A new identity-oriented dimension is emerging within the interactional justice perspective, a dimension I call relational justice.

Distributive Justice

The seeds of organizational justice theory can be traced to Adams' (1965) equity theory. He couched his theory in the broader context of social exchange: two-way transactions in which each side provides something to the other and receives something in return. Employees, in this view, have a transactional relationship with their employers – at its simplest level, employees provide their knowledge, intelligence, skills, and labor

in return for wages or salaries and benefits. Adams wanted to understand when and why employees might perceive such exchanges as fair or unfair and how they might act in response to perceptions of unfairness. He argued that a belief that allocation of costs and benefits within a group should be equitable affects social behaviour; employees should give and receive equivalent value. For example, compensation should be based on the relative contributions of individuals to the organization: those who contribute more work or who contribute work of greater value should receive higher compensation.

From this research rose the first wave of organizational justice research, focused on distributive justice (e.g., Blau, 1968). Distributive justice refers to perceptions of equity related to resource distribution, or justice as fair outcomes. During the 1970s, distributive justice research showed that distributive fairness judgments are ubiquitous and influential determinants of satisfaction with conflict resolution and allocation (Lind & Tyler, 1988). The relative distribution of salaries and benefits, merit pay, office space, and budgetary funds are examples of matters that employees often view through a distributive justice lens.

The earliest research in this field suggested that employees perceived resource-allocation decisions as fair only when they were favourable to the individual making the judgment. Thus, only favourable decisions were just decisions. A distributive perspective of justice reinforces the view that self-interest drives perceptions of justice. Later research proved this assumption to be erroneous (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001). Outcomes may play only a minor role in perceptions of justice and, in some circumstances, they may be irrelevant. Oftentimes, employees perceived resource-allocation decisions to be just, although they were unfavourable to themselves. Other factors, besides outcomes, must be influencing employees' perceptions of fairness and justice, and among them were the procedures used to make decisions. Organizational justice research subsequently expanded to include perceptions of procedural justice.

Procedural Justice

During the 1970s, researchers began an empirical examination of procedural justice in organizations. Justice, from this perspective, is

defined in terms of fair procedures: just decisions are those that result from fair procedures. The most influential of early procedural justice researchers were Thibault and Walker (1975), who examined perceptions of justice in dispute resolution. The authors argued that different conflict resolution procedures were needed, depending upon whether disputes revolved around cognitive conflicts (beliefs about truth) or conflicts of interest. Since then, researchers have examined how people respond to different conflict resolution procedures. Procedural justice research has resulted in overwhelming evidence that decision control (authority to make a decision) is an important contributor to perceptions of justice. People are more likely to perceive that a decision is fair if they feel they have had a voice or a sense of process control (opportunity to influence the decision maker); and people are more likely to accept unfavourable outcomes when they perceive that the process of arriving at the decision was fair (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001; Folger & Martin, 1986; Folger, Rosenfield, & Robinson, 1983; Greenberg, 1990). The latter point means that people consider more than self-interest (outcomes) when making judgments about the justice of decisions. Indeed, procedural justice research indicates that process is a more potent factor in justice perceptions than outcomes (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; Folger & Cropanzano, 1998, 2001). These findings suggest that employees are not simply looking for favorable outcomes in decisions; they expect fair procedures in decision making.

Greenberg (2001), who examined contextual factors influencing perceptions of justice, found, first of all, that concerns about justice were triggered when people received negative outcomes. Second, the processing of judgments about fairness was most likely to occur when relationships (such as those between employer and employee) were in a state of flux. Third, when resources were scarce, self-serving perceptions of justice tended to prevail. Fourth, justice concerns were more likely to arise among interactions having different levels of power than among those for whom the balance of power is equal. Thus, hierarchical structures that create superordinate-subordinate relationships inevitably are problematic from a justice perspective.

Leventhal (1980, cited in Folger & Cropanzano, 1998) found several criteria for judgments of fair decision making by leaders: consistency

(applying standards uniformly over time and across persons), bias suppression (minimizing personal self-interest and narrow preconceptions), accuracy (relying on high-quality information and well-informed opinions), correctability (allowing decisions to be reviewed and revised or reversed), representativeness (taking into account various interests), and ethicality (taking into account prevalent standards of moral conduct).

Folger and Cropanzano (1998) extended procedural justice theory by examining how leaders' accounts of their decisions influenced subordinates' perceptions of justice. Although closely connected to procedural justice, the authors thought this new direction sufficiently distinct to warrant a different label and so the interactional justice perspective emerged.

Interactional Justice

Interactional justice, as defined by Folger and Cropanzano (1998), refers to the quality of the interpersonal treatment received by an individual, both before and after decisions. The authors make distinctions between two subparts: interpersonal sensitivity (the belief that fair treatment should be civil and respectful); and explanations or social accounts (excuses and justifications) that tell the recipient why something unfortunate or untoward occurred. Folger and Cropanzano emphasize the latter (social accounts) in their work, and give little attention to interpersonal sensitivity. This emphasis may explain why Folger and Cropanzano tended to link interactional justice to procedural justice. Others, such as Bies (1987), Lind and Tyler (1988), and Tyler and Lind (1992), who tended to emphasize relational issues, preferred to treat interactional justice as a distinct category of organizational justice. I will use the term interactional justice to refer to social accounts and will later discuss separately an emergent aspect of organizational justice that I call *relational justice*. Justice, from an interactional perspective, then, refers to justifiable accounts for decisions that affect organizational members. Justice is achieved when organizational members perceive that leaders have adequately justified their decisions.

Explanations or social accounts of decisions are important to perceptions of justice when others make decisions that affect one's work or

well being. Bies (1987) found communicated explanations or social accounts (excuses and justifications) could help to mitigate feelings of anger toward perceived unjust decision makers. Subsequent research findings concur, indicating that individuals are much more tolerant of unfavourable outcomes when an adequate justification is provided (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Folger & Martin, 1986; Folger, Rosenfield, & Robinson, 1983).

Bies (1987) and Sitkin and Bies (1993) identified four types of social accounts: causal accounts, in which the decision maker articulates mitigating circumstances and thereby denies personal responsibility; ideological or exonerating accounts, in which the decision maker appeals to higher values to legitimize unjust actions; referential or reframing accounts, where the decision maker attempts to change the harmed party's frame of reference and lower their standards (e.g., maintaining that despite the decision they are still better off than others); and penitential accounts, where the decision maker admits responsibility and apologizes.

Simply accounting for one's decision is not enough to influence the harmed party's perception of injustice. One must show genuine compassion for those who are hurt. Injured parties must view the account as sincere for it to be considered adequate for influencing their reactions (Baron, 1985, 1988, 1990; Bies, 1987). Social accounts should also be detailed, thorough, and logical (Daly & Geyer, 1994, 1995; J. Greenberg, 1990; Shapiro, Buttner, & Barry, 1994). A further qualifier is the severity of the harm. The more severe the harm, the less effective social accounts tend to be (Shapiro, 1991).

Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001) argued that parties who perceive injustices employ contrastive reasoning called counterfactual thinking. Counterfactual literally means "contrary to the facts," and counterfactual reasoning means the comparison of actual occurrences and their implications with alternatives that come to mind. The disadvantaged party examines three different counterfactuals: what actors *could* have done (e.g., what alternative actions were feasible? what degree of discretional control did the actor have?); what they *should* have done (e.g., were other options morally superior to those taken?), and what the outcomes *would* have felt like if alternative action(s) had been

taken (e.g., "He would be eligible for retirement in two months, if he hadn't been laid off yesterday.") Some or all these counterfactuals may be considered when individuals are making judgments about the justice of decisions.

The procedural and interactional justice perspectives focus on individual perceptions within organizational settings, but individuals in organizations do not operate in a social vacuum. These perspectives do not consider how group membership and social identity influence perceptions of justice. Viewing this as problematic, researchers during the late 1980s (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Lind, 1992; Tyler & Smith, 1999) began to fill this gap by making connections between organizational justice and social identity theory. The result is an emerging perspective that has yet to be given a label, and which I refer to as relational justice.

Relational Justice

The relational perspective is distinguishable from other perspectives of organizational justice because it focuses on the behavior of groups. Justice, from this perspective, is respect for social identities as constructed by individuals who identify with certain groups. Beginning with their group-value model (Lind & Tyler, 1988) and progressing to their relational model (Tyler & Lind, 1992), Tyler and Lind argue that groups are crucial to their members' efforts at self-definition. The use of the term self, here, is very different from that used in other models. The self is a social self, not simply the self acting within a social setting. To explain this, I turn to social identity theory.

Social identity theory. Tajfel's (1978, 1982) work serves as the foundation of social identity theory. Tajfel argued that individual and group behavior are not psychologically equivalent because group relationships change people's behaviors and psychology qualitatively (Turner & Onorato, 1999). To understand group and intergroup behavior, one must necessarily focus on collective psychological (or social) processes and group members' shared perceptions of intergroup relationships. The sense of self, used here, diverges from traditional personality theory and owes much to work related to self-categorization.

Self-categorization theory began with the distinction between social identity (self-definitions in terms of social category memberships) and

personal identity (self-definitions in terms of personal or idiosyncratic attributes). Under certain circumstances, especially where individuals identify strongly with a group, "social identity is sometimes able to function to the relative exclusion of personal identity" (Turner, cited in Turner & Onorato, 1999, p. 29). People self-categorize into groups, leading to self-stereotyping and the depersonalization of self-perception and the development of social identity. According to Turner and Onorato (1999):

Where social identity becomes relatively more salient than is personal identity, people see themselves less as differing individuals and more as similar, prototypical representations of their ingroup category. There is a depersonalization of the self . . . This process transforms individual into collective behavior as people perceive and act in terms of a shared, collective conception of self. (pp. 20-21)

Other researchers have supported this phenomenon of depersonalization of self (see Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Spears, Oakes, Ellemers, & Haslam, 1997; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994).

Turner and Onorato (1999) claimed that personal and the depersonalized identities are not opposite poles along a continuum; instead they represent different levels of inclusiveness of self-categorization. Depersonalization does not mean loss of the self, but a change in the level and context of the self (p. 24). Personal identity is downplayed, while social identity becomes more salient. This shift occurs as a matter of choice. Social identities emerge because individuals identify with the group and choose to see themselves as part of the group and to see the group within themselves.

Self-categorization relies on comparison of the ingroup to outgroups. One of the basic tenets of social identity theory is the notion that social comparisons between groups relevant to an evaluation of social identity produce pressures for intergroup differentiation to achieve a positive self-evaluation in terms of that identity (Turner & Onorato, 1999). Comparisons lead to distinctions between ingroup and outgroup – us and not us. Tajfel and associates (Tajfel, Flament, Billig, & Bundy, 1971) found that the mere social categorization of people into distinctive

groups could produce behavior favoring ingroup others over outgroup others.

Self-categorization of a group as ingroup leads to perceptions of attraction, agreement of group members, and cooperation, while perceptions of dislike, disagreement, and conflict are more likely to be attributed to outgroups (Turner & Onorato, 1999). David and Turner (1996) observed that people who received feedback from a relevant and salient outgroup with which they disagreed shifted away from the outgroup in the direction of the normative ingroup position.

What does this mean? How is social identity linked to organizational justice? The answer leads to an examination of how leaders' decisions and organizational members' perceptions of justice influence social identity.

Social identity, authorities, and organizational justice. The importance of organizational justice is a function of the importance of the group to the self. The more importance attributed to the group, the more importance attributed to organizational justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler & Smith, 1999). Because people use groups to help define their social selves and to evaluate themselves, how they are treated within the group conveys identity-relevant information (Tyler & Smith, 1999).

Because authorities (or leaders) represent and communicate a group's agenda to group members, they represent group values and norms to group members (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Tyler and Lind found the more group members perceive a leader to be prototypical of group values and norms, the more power the leader has to represent those values and norms to a group. Therefore, people draw identity-relevant information from groups, particularly from their interactions with key group representatives or authorities. They make judgments about procedural justice based on the behaviours of authorities and they generalize their experience with authorities to the attitudes and behaviour of the larger group the authority represents. For example, unjust treatment by a union representative may lead to perceptions that the union itself is unjust; or unfair treatment by a school principal may lead teachers to conclude that administrators, as a group, are unfair. Tyler and Smith (1999) claim

The way that group authorities treat people influences not only satisfaction and decision acceptance, but also shapes commitment to the organization, views about the legitimacy of authorities, and voluntary work behavior that contributes to organizational effectiveness but that is not part of traditional job reviews or descriptions. (p. 27)

The authors' findings point to linkages between how authorities treat people, people's perceptions of justice or injustice, and behaviour that stems from those perceptions.

An identity-based relational explanation of organizational justice purports that people care about their treatment by others because of what that treatment communicates about identity. "Treating people fairly communicates favorable status and social importance. Treating them unfairly communicates marginality and exclusion" (Tyler & Smith, 1999, p. 229). The quality of treatment the group receives communicates information about self-worth and social status. Because of the way social identity is constructed, authorities need to pay attention to how they treat the identity group, as well as to how they treat individual members of the group.

Relational justice contributes to a more complex and comprehensive understanding of justice in organizational settings, especially those that serve as workplaces. Although distributive, procedural, and interactional justice perspectives help to explain interpersonal interactions and personal responses to perceived injustices, relational justice is better suited to explain the social implications of perceived injustices. When all four perspectives are considered, organizational justice has the potential to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of organizational justice.

ORGANIZATIONAL JUSTICE THEORY AND UNION-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS

There may be many applications of organizational justice theory. One application may be intergroup relations, including union-management relations. Organizational justice theory may offer researchers and educators greater insights into the relationship between union and management in education. In the sections that follow, I have drawn from some

of the research I have conducted previously to discuss some of these possible connections.

Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is perhaps one of the most obvious applications in education of organizational justice theory to labour-management relations. Frequently, collective bargaining is conceptualized in distributive justice terms; that is, in terms of how to distribute scarce resources. Many stalemates in collective bargaining relate to the distribution of resources. However, perceptions of procedural injustice may also lead to conflict and stalemate at the bargaining table. For example, perceptions that one party or the other is using unfair practices (procedural justice) contribute to conflict and stalemate. Failure to 'bargain in good faith' is a fairly common complaint, as is 'bargaining through the media,' or releasing information about the asking packages under negotiation to bring public pressure to bear on the other party.

Rarely, in my experience, is collective bargaining perceived from the perspective of identity-based relations. What insights would such a perspective lend to an understanding of collective bargaining? In a study completed in a central New York school district during the early 1990s (Poole, 1993), a school board's unwillingness to raise local school taxes as a means to provide teacher salary parity with neighboring districts resulted in teachers feeling undervalued and underappreciated by the district. Such feelings led some teachers to experience a sense of diminished commitment to the organization and to question their usual practice of volunteering; that is, their practice of contributing more to the organization than their contracts required. Because teacher bargaining was restricted to terms and conditions of work, the relational justice issue was expressed during bargaining as a distributive justice matter. For example, participants frequently commented that if school board members wanted them to do extra (work beyond contractual obligations), they would have to pay them for it. Because senior administrators and school board members failed to acknowledge or address the relational issues, their failure led to diminished trust between teachers and management. Examples such as this suggest that the collective bargaining process is closely linked to procedural, interactional, and rela-

tional justice, in addition to its linkages to distributive justice. This territory is largely unexplored in collective bargaining research in education.

Collective Agreements

Administrators (and some scholars such as Johnson & Kardos, 1998; Kerchner, Koppich, King, & Weeres, 1990) frequently think about collective agreements in terms of the constraints they impose. Unions tend to stick steadfastly and, some would argue, irrationally, to traditional industrial union principles such as seniority and uniform treatment of teachers across schools within districts. Critics accuse teacher unions of protecting incompetent teachers (i.e., through cumbersome teacher evaluation and grievance procedures) and of valuing teachers' interests above those of students (i.e., through provisions related to posting and filling positions and class size limits) (Angell, 1981; Berube, 1988; Lieberman, 1997; Moe, 2006; Peck, 1988; Toch, 1991; Urban, 1982).

Criticisms of collective agreements are seen in a different light when they are viewed through the lens of organizational justice. Certain contract provisions may be more accurately perceived as means for achieving and maintaining distributive and procedural justice than as attempts by power-hungry unions to create roadblocks for administrators. For example, uniform treatment across a school district ensures that all teachers are treated equally under a contract. Contractual means for promoting interactional justice (accountability for administrator decisions) include due process procedures for posting and filling positions and for dealing with teachers whose instructional skills are deemed unsatisfactory. Because of these contractual provisions, administrators must demonstrate, when challenged by a union, that decisions related to negative teacher evaluations and the filling of positions are just, at least from the point of view of following agreed-upon procedures.

Many unions (and some administrators) claim that the comprehensiveness and detail of a contract is an indication of the history of labor-management relations within a school district – the more comprehensive and detailed the contract, the more it indicates a history of conflict and distrust (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991). Hence a collective agree-

ment may be, to one degree or another, a record of perceived organizational justice or injustice in a school district or province.

Relations Between Teachers (Unions) and Government

The turn toward a more conservative (or neo-liberal) political agenda in many jurisdictions across North America has sometimes resulted in conflictual relationships between teachers (represented by their unions) and provincial or state governments. Many conflicts stem from education funding cuts that, in turn, result from deficit reduction initiatives and the priority given to efficiency. Because of their connection to financing, such conflicts are related to distributive justice issues. Often, procedural justice plays a role in teacher-government conflict when teachers perceive that they do not have a voice in policy decisions that affect their work. Overlooked dimensions in teacher-government relations are interactional justice and relational justice. In Nova Scotia, during the early to mid 1990s, the Ministry of Education under two different governments bypassed traditional inclusion of the teacher union in the development of educational policy (Poole, 1999). At first glance, this action might be perceived as a procedural justice issue, but the union perceived it as an interactional and a relational justice issue. Representatives of the union confronted government officials with questions about the change in procedure. They wanted an account (interactional justice) for why the union had been bypassed. They received this response: "Why do we need to talk to you?" Union representatives and teachers not only viewed the government's account of its behavior as inadequate, but they also interpreted the remarks as disrespectful of teachers (a relational justice issue).

During the 2001-2002 school year in British Columbia, the Ministry of Education implemented a number of policies unpopular with teachers (Education Services Collective Agreement Act, 2002; Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act, 2002; School Amendment Act, 2002, 2002). The government legislated a teachers' contract and made changes to the School Act related to matters such as the school calendar, class size, and school choice. The changes narrowed the scope of collective bargaining and introduced opportunities for school choice by parents. The legislation diminished the ability of teachers to shape their working condi-

tions and upset the distribution of power between union and management, giving more power to management. These are, in part, distributive justice issues, but teachers also complained that the legislation violated teachers' collective bargaining rights, and thus they viewed the law as illegitimate because of procedural justice issues. In the fall of 2005, the British Columbia government again imposed a contract on teachers. The president of the teachers' federation spoke of the government's disrespect for teachers (a relational justice issue) and criticized the circumvention of the collective bargaining process (a procedural justice issue) (Fowlie, Hansen, & Steffenhagen, 2006).

The examples in this section illustrate important connections between union-management relations and organizational justice theory. Many of the issues and conflicts between teachers and management can be framed using an organizational justice lens, resulting in a more complex understanding of their relationship.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Through empirical research on organizational justice theory, scholars have demonstrated that employees in organizations make judgments about justice based on a wide range of factors. Employees demonstrate attention to the quality of leaders' accounts for decisions, the quality of treatment they receive from organizational leaders, and their long-term relationship with leaders and with the organization. Employees are more likely to accept unfavourable outcomes if they perceive that procedures are fair, decisions are adequately justified, they are treated with respect, and their identities are validated. Teachers, in my experience, do not behave much differently than other employees in these respects.

The examples I have discussed suggest the potential of organizational justice theory for promoting a deeper understanding of union-management relations. The longer-standing distributive justice perspective supports a dominant view of teacher unions as self-interested collectives bent on achieving favorable outcomes. More recent research, referenced throughout this article, related to procedural, interactional, and relational justice demonstrates that employees (and my own research suggests teachers are included) apply other standards as well in their perceptions of justice. Together, the four perspectives complement

each other and thus offer more complex and more compelling accounts of teacher cognition and behaviour.

Given the findings related to process control and voice in procedural justice, it seems reasonable to assume that meaningfully involving teachers and their unions in the decision-making process will provide a sense of voice and may lead to stronger perceptions of procedural justice. Administrators and policy makers often provide teachers with opportunities to voice concerns and make recommendations during the decision-making process, albeit from employees' perspectives it is often too little voice, and too late in the process to be meaningful (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991).

According to organizational justice research, employees expect to receive accounts for decisions that deviate from advice they provide – they may accept decisions that contradict their advice if decision makers can satisfactorily explain why the decision was necessary or appropriate. Administrators and other authorities often ignore or downplay the important step of adequately accounting for final decisions, which, like lack of voice, may leave employees feeling that their participation was meaningless and that shared decision making is a manipulative management technique, not a genuine means of engaging employees' perspectives (Shedd & Bacharach, 1991).

Organizational justice findings justify the inclusion of due process arrangements in contractual arrangements, such as clearly articulated grievance procedures or employee evaluation procedures. Such provisions have become fixtures in collective agreements in education. Although they may restrict administrators' authority, they can help to avoid conflict as well as to settle disputes that arise.

As Moe (2006) explains, critics of teacher unions often view the union as somehow distinct from teachers, as if teachers' identities are disconnected from the union. Social identity theory suggests that one should assume that, at least some of the time, the union *is* the teacher(s) – that union identity and teacher identity are interconnected. Union identity may be more salient for some teachers than for others, and it may become more or less salient for teachers, depending on the context. Acknowledging that identity is social as well as personal, authorities would do well to be cognizant that, although treatment of individuals is

important, treatment of groups is important also. If teachers identify with their union, then how administrators and other authorities talk about and behave with respect to the union conveys information about authorities' attitudes toward teachers. Threats or disrespect toward the union may be perceived as threats or disrespect toward the self.

Organizational justice research to date has not specifically examined perceptions of justice in K-12 educational settings. What patterns of justice perceptions and what responses to injustice may be unique to educational contexts? Systematic, empirical research related to organizational justice specific to educational contexts can address this question. In addition, if the extent to which teachers identify with (or disidentify with) their union influences how they respond to actions by outgroups (e.g., administrators, school board members, and government), then it behooves these educational leaders to learn more about the self-identities of teachers. Researchers can assist in the development of a deeper understanding of union-management relations by systematically examining the connections between union identity and teacher identity.

Although more targeted research is needed, the existing research has implications for educational leaders. Organizational justice theory has the potential to shed more light on how justice issues might be addressed in the union-management relationship. If organizational justice research is applicable to teachers (as I believe it is), teachers expect to have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their work (a procedural justice issue), they expect procedures used to arrive at decisions to be fair (a procedural justice issue), they expect to receive adequate accounts for decisions by decision makers (an interactional justice issue), and they expect their self-identities to be respected by leaders (a relational justice issue). Working toward just decision making and just treatment of teachers and their unions may possibly require additional resources and reduce efficiency in the short term, but may have both short-term and long-term payoffs for union-management relations.

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