

Lack of fairness and reward for efforts can lead to burnout and poor job satisfaction

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A research on the influence of justice on work-related outcomes confirms that employees who experience 'distributive injustice' are more likely to develop burnout over time, whereas 'procedural injustice' leads to lower job satisfaction. The study was carried out over three years comprising more than 1,500 employees. In addition, the study found that female employees experienced higher levels of distributive justice than their male counterparts.

Research shows that perceptions of 'procedural justice' and 'distributive justice' in organisations are related to the well-being of people at work (for an overview, see Greenberg and Colquitt, 2005). Procedural justice refers to fairness in the way employees are treated in the organisation while distributive justice relates to equity of one's own rewards or outcomes, such as salary and esteem, compared with that of colleagues. To date, it is largely unclear whether these considerations in relation to justice are the cause or the effect of psychological work outcomes.

The longitudinal study on the influence of justice on work-related outcomes, carried out by Jan Fekke Ybema (2007), aimed to unravel the direction of causation in the relationship between perceived organisational justice and work-related outcomes. Usually, it is assumed that justice influences work-related outcomes – such as job satisfaction and burnout; this is considered as the normal cause and effect relation. For instance, an imbalance between employees' investment in work and rewards – so-called distributive injustice – may lead to burnout and dissatisfaction in the long term (Siegrist, 1996). However, reversed causation may also occur: that is, burnout or other health complaints may be viewed as a consequence of investment in work or a negative result of work; this, in turn, upsets the balance in the employees' exchange with the organisation (Geurts, Buunk and Schaufeli, 1994). Consequently, it was predicted that perceived justice and work-related outcomes would mutually influence each other over time and that thus a reciprocal causation exists.

Effects of organisational justice

In line with the research hypotheses, the findings showed that organisational justice and work-related outcomes were reciprocally related: the fit of the model was best when it included both long-term effects from organisational justice to work-related outcomes (normal causation) and those of work-related outcomes on perceived organisational justice (reversed causation). Figures 1 to 3 present three parts of the final model, with standardised parameters indicating the strength of the relationship between the three variables examined, namely distributive justice and burnout, procedural justice and burnout, and procedural injustice and job satisfaction.

Distributive justice reduced burnout a year later, controlling for burnout in the previous year (Figure 1). No reversed effect emerged between these two variables. However, burnout reduced perceived procedural justice over time, controlling for earlier measures of procedural justice (Figure 2).

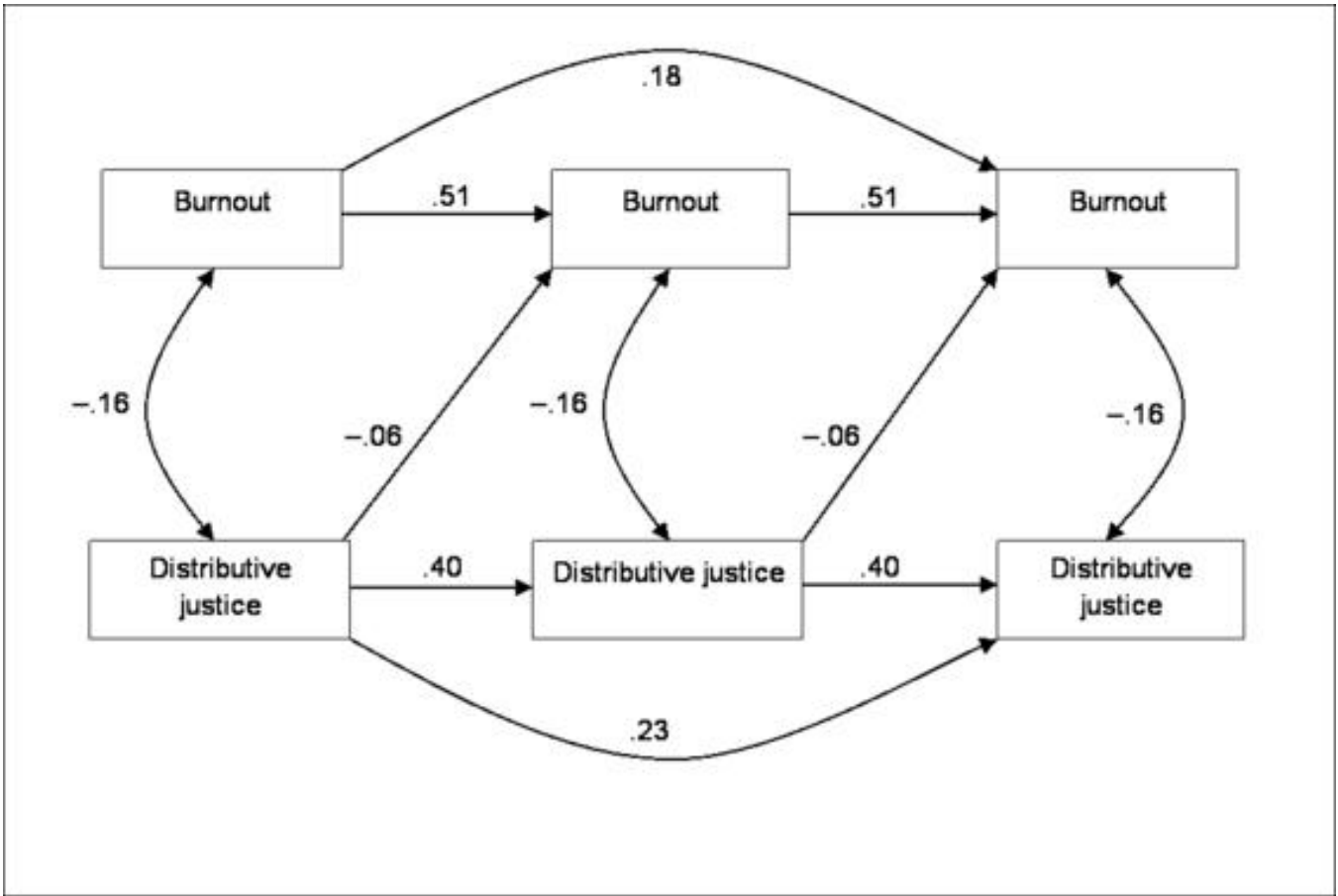
Relationship between distributive justice and burnout

About

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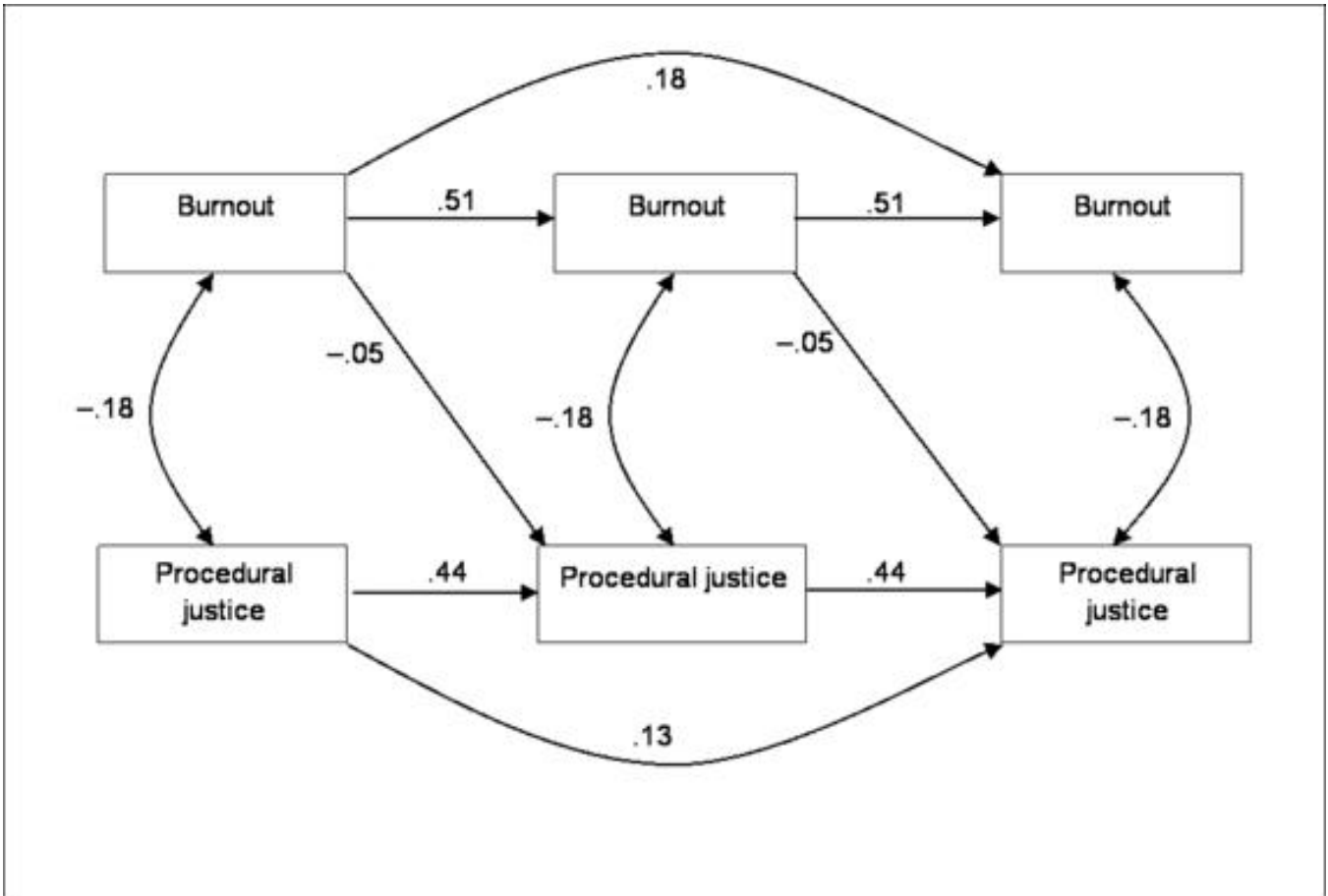
Institution: TNO Work and Employment



Notes: Values represent standardised parameters indicating the strength of the relationship between two variables.

Source: Ybema, 2007

Relationship between procedural justice and burnout

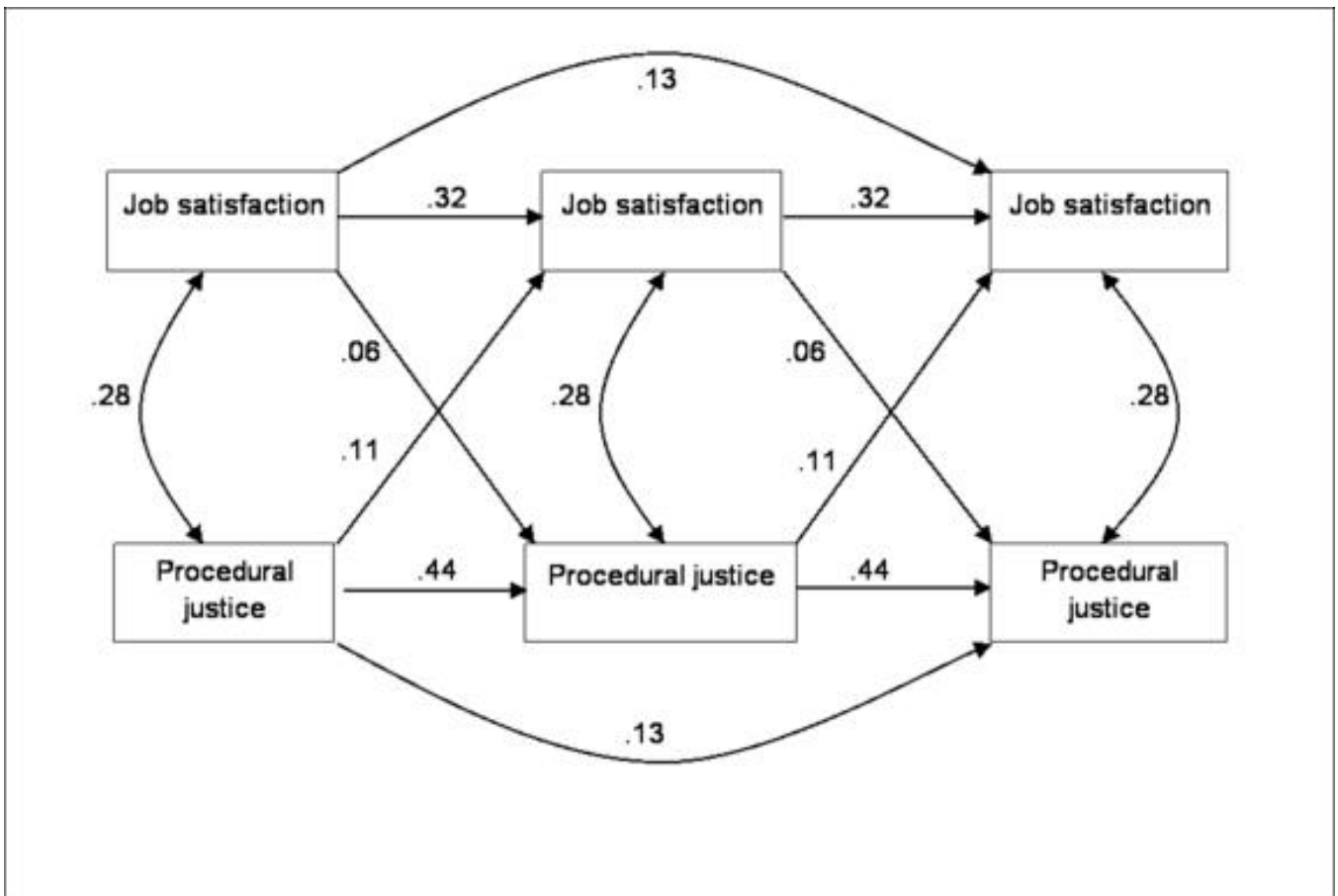


Notes: Values represent standardised parameters indicating the strength of the relationship between two variables.

Source: Ybema, 2007

Furthermore, procedural justice and job satisfaction mutually augmented each other: higher procedural justice enhanced job satisfaction a year later, and higher job satisfaction also increased future procedural justice within organisations (Figure 3). Distributive justice and job satisfaction were not related in the long term.

Relationship between procedural injustice and job satisfaction



Notes: Values represent standardised parameters indicating the strength of the relationship between two variables.

Source: Ybema, 2007

Effects of demographic variables

It was found that female employees experienced higher distributive justice than their male counterparts. This is a remarkable finding, given the fact that women are generally less well off in terms of salary and esteem than men. Older employees experienced lower procedural justice but higher job satisfaction than younger employees. Finally, higher educated employees experienced more procedural and distributive justice and were more satisfied with their jobs than lower educated employees.

Commentary

This research confirms the importance of justice in organisations. Employees who experience distributive injustice are more likely to develop burnout over time, whereas procedural injustice leads to lower job satisfaction. In addition, perceived procedural injustice is partly the result of burnout and low job satisfaction. Investment in organisational justice appears to be a viable means to enhance the well-being of people at work.

About the study

The research on the influence of justice on work-related outcomes is a longitudinal, three-wave study which was carried out among 1,597 employees and with a time lag of one year between each wave. The data were analysed using structural equation modeling (SEM) with the statistical software LISREL. Analyses focused on the long-term relationships between procedural and distributive justice in organisations, on the one hand, and job satisfaction and burnout of employees, on the other. In addition to the relationship between organisational justice and work-related outcomes, the study also examined the effects of demographic variables, such as sex, age and education.

References

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