Social Justice Research (2023) 36:352–370
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-023-00422-w

On the Road to Justice: Some Selected Suggestions for the Future of Social Justice Research

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Accepted: 30 July 2023 / Published online: 11 August 2023

Abstract

In this paper, several aspects of social justice research are reviewed to analyze the current state of the field and to suggest refinements and new directions. The micro–macro-levels problem is discussed, including the policy of affirmative action. A canon of relevant philosophers is proposed. The strong influence of justice principles on social change research, search conferences and group interventions are demonstrated. The information value of social justice theories can be strengthened in several ways. Expanded information value implies increased effectiveness of advice and interventions. Possibilities to integrate justice criteria in total quality management are discussed. Contemporary quality management focuses on triple-P criteria: people, planet, profit, highly relevant for basic and applied justice research. The current state of the social justice discipline is rather good, but there is room for improvement. Finally, interdisciplinary research is the future, in particular for studies to solve complex societal and global problems.

Keywords Social justice · Micro–macro problem · Philosophy · Group interventions · Quality management · Interdisciplinarity

Introduction

People of the world are confronted with many problems at several levels: global, societal, regional, organizational, small group, and individual levels. Moreover, what is happening at higher levels may affect processes and problems at lower levels, and vice versa. Social justice research can offer insight into these problems, and into the possibility to solve them. To do so, we need to know more about contemporary social justice scholarship. Knowledge about its strengths and weaknesses enables us

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to build a strong structure and a body of valid knowledge. Valid knowledge may lead to evidence-based interventions to solve or mitigate problems.

What is the contemporary state of social justice research, and what needs to be done to strengthen our discipline? I could, of course, have done a formal SWOT-analysis to map out the strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and threats of the current social justice field. The SWOT-analysis is a fine method for the boardroom, to determine future strategies. However, I chose a method of free associations, to give fantasy and creativity a chance. What are interesting topics, and how can they be connected with other possibly relevant topics? The result was a list with a variety of topics, e.g., positive psychology, the interdisciplinary approach of social justice, dialectical inquiry systems, etc. From this list I selected some topics to focus on. The state-of-the-art is described from a social justice perspective, and it is proposed how the justice aspect can be strengthened. The following topics are discussed here:

- the micro–macro problem, including the problem of unintended consequences, and affirmative action;
- a canon of philosophers, relevant for social justice;
- social change processes in accordance with justice criteria;
- methods of strengthening social justice theories;
- integration of justice criteria in quality management;
- interdisciplinary research, with justice theories as a motor for attacking global problems.

The Micro–Macro Problem

The micro–macro problem focuses on the analysis of relationships between phenomena on the macro level and processes on a lower level of aggregation, the micro level. The relationship between the macro level and the micro level has two dimensions. First, the higher level (i.e., the macro level) may influence the micro level (e.g., the behavior of individual persons). But there is also the possibility of an influence from the micro to the macro level. The situation is complicated. In behavioral research we often see that a relationship exists between two variables at the macro-level. For example, as was hypothesized we find that the quality of social networks of nursing staff in hospitals correlates positively with the mean quality of the treatment of residents in hospitals, as measured by low mortality and/or high scores on satisfaction of residents. And at the micro level we find that organizational identification of individual members of the nursing staff correlates positively with work motivation. This example is based on a case discussed by Leyland and Groenewegen (2020). Often, the ‘ecological fallacy’ is made by researchers: the existing causal relationship observed at the macro level is erroneously applied to individuals, i.e., the micro level. However, the opposite risk is also a well-known phenomenon: the atomistic fallacy. In this fallacy, the analysis is carried out at the individual (micro) level, while the inference about causality is made at the macro level. But associations between two variables at the individual level may differ from associations between analogous variables measured at higher aggregation levels.

In situations in which we are interested in relationships between variables at the micro level, the macro level, *and* the relationships between variables from the one level to the variables at the other level (and vice versa) there is a well-known strategy to handle the interpretation problems and to prevent fallacies. James Coleman developed a heuristic scheme to analyze macro–micro relations (Coleman, 1986, 1990; see also Hedström & Ylikoski, 2010). His model is often called the '*Coleman bathtub*' (Oakes, 2009). The essentials of Coleman's scheme are presented in Fig. 1.

Arrow 1 represents the transition from macro-to-micro. Contextual, societal, situational mechanisms and constraints influence individuals. Often, 'bridge theories' or bridge assumptions are made about the constraints and resources created by the (social) structures, the macro context factor(s). For instance, assumptions are made about the effect on decision freedom and resources of the individual actor. Arrow 2 represents the effect of the characteristics of the individual on time 1 on the micro-level outcomes for the individual on time 2 (e.g., work motivation or individual behavior). Coleman assumes that individuals are rational actors, arrow 2 therefore often stands for a rational action-formation mechanism. Arrow 3, from the individual at time 2 to the macro outcome D, represents the impact of individuals on society, population, context factors. For example, via collective action or participation in social movements change is realized in the context. The theorist uses 'transformation rules' to enable the aggregation from individuals to the macro level (Lindenberg, 1977). In general, four different forms of transformation are used more or less frequently:

1. Aggregation. Individual behavior is transformed through application of a mathematical function.
2. Definition by convention. A collective outcome exists by definition. The existence of an epidemic is an example of this form.
3. Application of institutional rules. For example, institutions may use a majority rule to transform individual expert opinions into a formal consensus document.
4. Game theory and simulation. Games and simulations can be used to predict collective outcomes of joint actions of individuals.

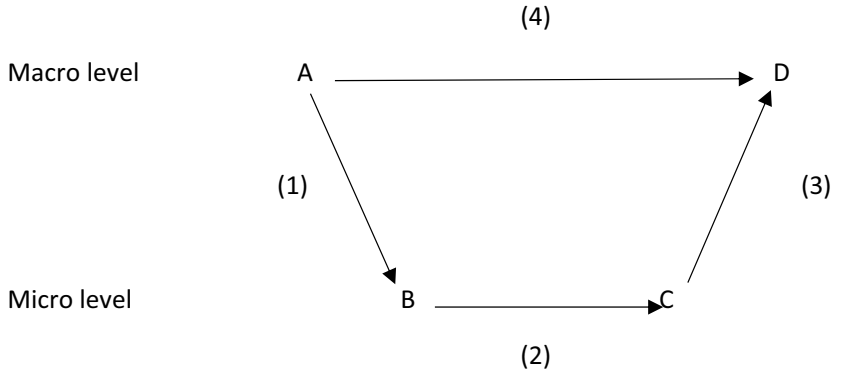

Fig. 1 The bathtub model of macro–micro relations

See Leyland and Groenewegen (2020), who also presented an application of Coleman's bathtub to explain the relationship between social networks of nursing staff and treatment of residents. In their application, arrow 4 from A to D represents the effects of the social networks on the treatment of residents. In the general scheme, arrow 4 represents the relationship between A and D at the macro level.

The Problem of Unintended Consequences

Transformation of individual behavior to macro-level outcomes has special problems. Often, outcomes are unintended consequences of individual behaviors. Boudon (1977) uses the concept '*effets pervers*' (perverse effects) to refer to these unforeseen effects. Leyland and Groenewegen (2020) discuss two important sources of unintended consequences. Individual behaviors are often very interdependent, and moreover, reactions of other persons are frequently not correctly anticipated. They present fee inflation in the field of health policy as an example of interdependencies leading to unintended consequences. When individual specialists are paid on a fee-for-service basis and there is a macro budget, the budget may be exceeded, and fees will be adapted downwards. To maintain their income, individual specialists then have to increase their number of services. The unintended consequence is that all specialists have to work harder.

Social policy may have unintended but very negative effects. Actions intended to guarantee fair treatment and fair, just allocations of money to people who really needed it have resulted in very unfair treatment of individual persons and members of minority groups in the Netherlands. This is the Dutch '*childcare benefits scandal*'. Between 2005 and 2019 Dutch authorities wrongly accused many parents of making fraudulent benefit claims, and required them to pay back all allowances they had received. This drove many families into severe financial hardships. And many people, not only the victims of the scandal, lost trust in authorities.

It is clear that micro–macro problems can be analyzed with special heuristic tools. Macro-level characteristics define the action space for individual persons and thus influence the behavior of the individual. Outcomes of individual behavior aggregate to collective outcomes. At the micro level you should use a theory of human behavior that takes the context into account.

Liebig and Sauer (2016) present two sociological multilevel macro–micro models of justice. First, a model with justice as a socially determined collective phenomenon. Secondly, a model with justice as a social force affecting other collective phenomena. They note that empirical research on the mechanisms and conditions underlying the influence of individual justice behavior on macro-level outcomes in a society is scarce. More insight into the way how social conditions affect justice preferences is necessary. Future studies can use the micro–macro model approach, to determine how structural conditions affect an individual's justice attitudes, and vice versa.

Justice research can profit from the development of long-term research programs focused on analyzing micro–macro justice problems. I recommend development of more research programs of this kind.

Microjustice, Macrojustice, and Affirmative Action

Brickman et al. (1981) wrote a classic chapter in which they made a distinction between microjustice and macrojustice. Treating individuals fairly may sometimes lead to an unfair distribution of rewards among groups in society. If you select only individuals with the highest test scores for access to higher education or employment the result may be a dramatically low participation of members of minorities who suffered from discrimination and had less opportunities from the start. This will finally result in institutions that are hardly representative of the population.

Principles of microjustice are individualizing. Microjustice focuses on the qualifying attributes of individuals. Principles of macrojustice specify the preferred overall shape of an outcome distribution (e.g., based on a minimum principle, that all people are entitled to some minimum). Most people have preferences for the shape of an overall distribution of outcomes. When doing research on distributive or procedural justice we should also be aware of macrojustice aspects.

Affirmative action consists of programs granting special consideration to historically excluded groups, often racial minorities or women. Most programs in many countries focus on access to education and employment. Affirmative action in the USA often included the use of racial quota. Some states had banned affirmative action. In 2023 the United States Supreme Court ended legally race-based affirmative action for college admissions.

Affirmative action is controversial in the politics in many countries. Supporters of affirmative action often use arguments of macrojustice, opponents appeal more to microjustice.

Principles of macrojustice also play a role in environmental justice. Differences in focus of justice arguments contribute to environmental conflicts (Clayton et al., 2016). There is a strong need to examine justice perceptions in specific situations. Environmental justice research should also study preferences for new forms of distribution (e.g., ceiling on consumption; equal access to environmental benefits and costs; etc.). So, much needs to be done. Clayton et al. (2016) recognize that justice and environmental sustainability is a topic that best can be studied by integrating perspectives of several disciplines, e.g., psychology, economics, public policy. This is important for research as well as for practical applications. I fully agree.

A Canon of Philosophers

Adam Smith could have benefitted from our present-day knowledge of tools to analyze the micro–macro problems. This famous economist and philosopher from the eighteenth century is often seen as the father of modern capitalism. Many people believe that he is the philosopher and advocate of extreme, ruthless individualism, who sees no role for governments in economic life. The reality is very different from this image. Smith is a key figure in the tradition of Scottish moral philosophy. His first classic work is '*The theory of moral sentiments*' (1759). In this book he presents a theory of the development of (mutual) sympathy of sentiments and the development of conscience. The second classic work is '*An inquiry into the nature and the causes of the Wealth of Nations*' (1776). The title of this book (actually,

a series of five volumes) is almost always abbreviated as '*The Wealth of Nations*'. It is a comprehensive treatment of economics and political economy. But in fact it also continues philosophical themes already discussed in *The theory of moral sentiments*. In *The Wealth of Nations* Smith describes the historical evolution of society. He outlines four stages: the original stage of hunters; a second stage of nomadic agriculture; a third, feudal, 'farming' stage; and the final stage: commercial interdependence. In each of these stages institutions are developed to regulate the needs of society. And the famous '*Invisible hand*' is regulating the economy. In *The Wealth of Nations* Smith developed the theory of division of labor, and explained how the combination of rational self-interest and competition could produce prosperity and wealth. The struggle for self-betterment results in the unintended outcome that economy is regulated well. The invisible hand was already introduced in Smith's *Theory of Moral sentiments*.

Smith also intended to expound upon justice. He was opposed to inequality, slavery and colonialism, and supported higher wages for the poor. Progressive taxes should mainly be used for the protection of justice and public institutions that were necessary for the benefit of society.

Actually, Smith created a micro–macro theoretical model in which a micro-level theory of moral sentiments is used to explain developments at the macro level of society and nations. The quality of his analysis is lower than the standards of analysis models in modern social science. But in principle it is possible to reconstruct his model (or large parts of it) with modern heuristic tools.

It is worthwhile to study what philosophers have contributed to justice theory and research.

Most distributive justice researchers know that the equity formula of Adams (1965) corresponds with the proportionality principle of Aristotle (335 BC). Knowledge of the works of great philosophers contributes to '*Bildung*', may sharpen our minds, and stimulates development of insight and actions to improve justice both at the macro and the micro level.

The wonderful '*Handbook of social justice theory and research*' (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016) contains 26 chapters. At the end of each chapter a list of references is included. In most chapters, one or more references are made to a philosopher. John Rawls is the absolute champion. In eleven chapters references are made to his work (most often, of course, to his magnum opus '*A theory of justice*', 1971). We could start making a list of philosophers that matter for justice, based on the references in the *Handbook*. However, that's not enough. Some important thinkers are not mentioned in the *Handbook*. Ask the man in the street what justice is, and frequently you will hear that justice has to do with criminal law and punishment. Cesare Beccaria, an Italian philosopher, economist, politician and lawyer in the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century is considered to be one of the greatest thinkers of all times on criminal justice. His book '*Dei delitti e delle pene*' (*On crimes and punishment*, 1764) had enormous influence on thinking about criminal justice and on treatment of criminals. In almost all Western and democratic constitutional states central tenets of his theory are still present and integrated in the criminal justice system and the way criminals and detainees are treated. Even now reforms in criminal justice systems are often more or less explicitly based on the leading ideas of Beccaria.

Beccaria applies two philosophical theories in his book: the social contract theory and utility theory. In his treatise several principles are deduced from these theories. Principles which led to far more civilized criminal law and justice than existed in his time. Here's a short summary:

The *principle of legality* (nulla poena sine lege, no punishment without a law); principle of equality for the law; principle of proportionality; subsidiarity; abolitionism of torture and death penalty; rationality; personal punishments, i.e., innocent third persons and innocent members of the family of a criminal should not be punished; publicity; and finally, the principle of secularizing (justice is a task for judges, not theologians and priests, and judgments of God are not acceptable).

Actually, Beccaria is, perhaps, the most important philosopher of criminal justice in history. But his name is not mentioned in the *Handbook of social justice theory and research*. I missed at least one other name of a philosopher, important for his contributions to social justice: The Russian prince Peter Kropotkin. Kropotkin was famous for his writings on anarchism. He also was active as a scientist. One of his best-known books is '*Mutual aid*' (Kropotkin, 1902). Mutual aid is seen as a factor of evolution, leading to survival of animals and to prosperity in groups of humans and societies. The book is one of the first important studies on solidarity.

I think it is very valuable to compose a canon of philosophers who made important contributions to the study of justice. The canon could play a role in curricula on justice, in summer schools and in post-academic courses. I have given some suggestions, but the final canon should be made via teamwork (and be flexible, i.e. new talented philosophers should be included easily).

Social Change: Interventions in Accordance with Justice Criteria

In this section intervention methods for changing groups, teams, organizations, even industrial sectors, cities and societies will be discussed. The interventions are often very successful. Moreover, the change methods presented here are designed in accordance with criteria of social justice, in particular procedural and interactional justice. These fair methods also contribute to advances in basic and applied science. Therefore, it is desirable that justice researchers have adequate knowledge of the methods.

Action Research

Action research is a form of research in which problems in a social system (a group, organization, sometimes a neighborhood, district, region, village, branch of industry or subsystems of society) are solved by cooperation between the *action researcher(s)* and persons belonging to the social system. Definitions of action research may differ. Most experts, however, agree that the following features are very important:

- *Participation*. Action research is characterized by a close collaboration between the action researchers and persons and groups in the field (the organization, society, town, etc).

- *Change approach.* Action researchers want to change a situation. At the end of the action research process the quality of the situation should be better.
- *Science.* Action research is a form of science, but it differs from the traditional, classical way of doing research. Action research cannot be separated from the situation in which it is intervening (Liu, 1997). It implies a process of mutual learning between researcher and users (members of the social system). Action researchers follow the epistemological '*indeterminism principle*', i.e., they aim to understand and direct the open processes in large, complex systems (Liu, 1997). Moreover, the relationship between the action researcher and the users is characterized by joint involvement, collaboration, and shared responsibility (Toulmin & Gustavsen, 1996).
- *Social construction of reality.* Action researchers take the social construction of reality seriously. They acknowledge the value of differing perspectives. They believe from a constructivist perspective that the action research process can bring a desired future state into existence.
- *Self-study*. Action researchers try to enhance the system's capacity for self-study (Elden & Chisholm, 1993). Action research is a cyclical research and change process, with several feedback loops. An implication of this cyclical process is that gradually a higher level of functioning of the social system will be reached.
- *Group dynamics*. Action researchers need to have a good understanding of group dynamics.

Action research gives a good basis for change processes. The diagnosis of problems will improve, since a lot of local knowledge will be available. And implementation of changes will be facilitated by the democratic, participative way in which these changes have been planned. The action research process is far more democratic than the traditional research process. This does not imply that action researchers should 'obey' the majority of subjects in the field. The researcher may have expert knowledge that simply should be used. A process of consultation and negotiation may in such situations lead to the best solution: the combination of excellent scientific knowledge of the expert with relevant local knowledge. A successful action research program to reduce high sickness absenteeism is described in Steensma and Van der Vlist (1998).

Search Conferences

Action researchers frequently make use of 'search conferences'. The search conference emerged from the Tavistock tradition of sociotechnical systems design (Emery, 1993; Emery & Purser, 1996). A search conference is a temporary social structure, based on principles of participative democracy. Members of the social system form this structure. Often, care is taken that a representative cross-section of members of the social system participates in the search conference. Frequently a selection of relevant 'stakeholders' from the environment of the system also participates.

A search conference is usually conducted over two days. Search conferences can be applied in many contexts. Change processes in schools, organizations, local communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations have included search

conferences. The search conference should enable all participants to learn from each other, in a process of mutual learning, how a desirable change can be ascertained, planned, and implemented. The mutual learning process usually has the following characteristics. Getting insight into the changes and trends in the environment of the system (e.g., the environment of an organization). Getting insight into the relationship between the environment and the open social system. Getting insight into the processes within the social system. Problem definition, development of paths to solving the problem. Drawing the outlines of a desirable future. Discuss what should be maintained and what should be changed. Planning implementation and diffusion of the changes.

The normal procedure is to organize a follow-up search conference to enable collective reflection and evaluation of results, and planning for future, new experimental activities. The action researcher is a facilitator of the whole conference and the search process.

The internal structure of a search conference can be characterized as a form of participative democracy. The group of participants (and sometimes temporary subgroups) have autonomy and responsibility. This is quite a contrast with classic conferences, where a hierarchy exists (chair, speaker, more or less passive audience). The search conference builds on collective interaction, democratic dialogue, participative learning and concrete experimentation, and developing shared views and shared goals.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a form of action research in which collective inquiry focuses on the best aspects, the strengths of a social system (a group, organization, or community). AI developed in the 1980s primarily by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987). Initially, principles for inquiry were that AI should begin with appreciation. AI should also be collaborative, provocative, and applicable. Later, most AI experts adopted the 4-D model of Appreciative Inquiry. The 4-D model presents the cycle of four phases in AI projects: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny. In the Discovery stage participants discover and appreciate what is already going well, and reflect on the best what is. In the Dream stage participants attempt to imagine what should be possible, considering what already goes well. This results in a common 'dream'. In the Design stage concrete proposals for the new state of the system are developed. This is a matter of dialogue and co-construction. In the Destiny stage changes should be implemented, the design should become reality.

Many consultants noticed that before starting a 4D-cycle it would be desirable to identify the central theme of the AI. Therefore, nowadays many AI practitioners work with a 5D model, starting with the 'Define' stage, in which the central affirmative topic is defined. Moreover, a particular variant, the *AI Summit*, is frequently chosen. This is a workshop or large-scale group intervention of several days in which all members of the social system complete all phases of the 4-D cycle.

Five principles form the theoretical basis of AI (Bushe, 2013; Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001).

1. The *constructionist principle*. People co-construct organizations (social systems) through language and social interactions.
2. *Principle of simultaneity*. Inquiry into human systems implies already changing them. And, social systems move in the direction of the questions people discuss with most passion.
3. *Poetic principle*. What happens in and with organizations is reflected in the stories people tell each other.
4. *Anticipatory principle*. What people do today is guided by their image of the future. Therefore, positive imagery on a collective basis gives energy for a positive change.
5. *Positive principle*. Talking about strengths and good aspects energizes and inspires people. Social bonding and positive affects stimulate collective action.

Large Scale Interventions

Since the 1980s many new Large Scale Interventions (LSI) have been developed. It should be noted that often a pattern is chosen in which large group meetings are alternated with smaller group meetings. But all large scale interventions are based on four principles, theoretical assumptions. Principle 1: *Organizations are open systems*. Principle 2: *Perception of reality is strongly influenced by social construction*. To develop social systems a dialogue between persons and groups in the system is necessary. Principle 3. *Self-organization and self-regulation*. Many dialogues take place in small, mixed groups of members and representatives of stakeholders. After dialogues diagnoses are made, and proposals for system change and experiments are developed and presented in large group meetings. So, a lot of self-organization exists. However, there are many forms of intervention, and there are different degrees of participation. Some interventions allow consultation: members and stakeholders give information, but management decides. Other large scale interventions use co-creation: important decisions are taken collectively. Principle 4: *Learning by doing is the best way to strengthen the capacity to change* of both the members of the social system and the system itself. In organizations this implies that large scale interventions create learning people in learning organizations.

Designing large scale interventions has become a booming business. There are different forms of LSI. See, for a classic study, Bunker and Alban (1997). Holman et al. (2008) present information about 61 *whole systems* interventions.

Group Interventions and Social Justice

Action research with search conferences, Appreciative Inquiry, and Large Scale Interventions are used frequently in changing social systems, in particular companies and (governmental and non-governmental) organizations. Many significant cases have been described in journals, books, magazines and websites and frequently, impressive results were presented at scientific conferences. In spite of some differences, all group intervention methods discussed here share several important characteristics. It is clear that

all methods score, in general, high on aspects of procedural and interactional justice. A short list follows, to support this claim.

- Process control and voice. Participants have an opportunity to give opinion and to present evidence.
- Decision control. They have influence on outcomes.
- Standing. Persons are respected.
- Consistency rule. Procedures are the same for different persons, and procedures are consistent over time.
- Accuracy. The information gathered and presented by participants makes it possible to base decisions on rather accurate information.
- Correctability. In principle, decisions can be modified, e.g., when new information is presented.
- Representativeness rule. Concerns and viewpoints of persons and groups affected by the decision are taken into account.
- High quality of interaction. All persons are treated well.
- Information. Adequate information is supplied to all persons involved.
- Ethicality rule. All persons have intrinsic and unconditional worth and should be treated appropriately.

Apparently, it is extremely important to apply change methods that score high on the criteria of social justice. These interventions were developed by scientists and professional change agents and in the development no *explicit* attention was paid to these criteria. So, the high scores are more or less not explicitly intended, but positive consequences of the design. To advance both scientific and applied research in the field it is desirable to use instruments (e.g., questionnaires) that are explicitly based on social justice theory. In this way, the link between successful interventions and social justice theory is the leading principle in refining and systematizing methods and evaluations. I suggest to do so. Curricula of business schools and Public Administration Schools may profit from this way to 'translate' existing methods and to refine these interventions explicitly in accordance with new results of justice studies. And, of course, the results of such research also deserve a place in our own courses, journals and books.

Strengthening Justice Theories

According to equity theory, individuals who are in an inequitable relationship will attempt to restore equity. There are several ways of restoration: actually changing own inputs; actually changing own outcomes; cognitive distortion of inputs and/or outcomes; leaving the field; attempts to influence the comparison-other; changing of comparison-other (Adams, 1965). Apparently, many mechanisms for reducing inequity are available. But equity theory does not specify which mechanism will be chosen. The information value of the theory is rather low regarding this aspect. This is a well-known problem in social sciences. Fortunately, there are methods to strengthen the value of theories. For example, a connection can be made to another theory, a 'bridge theory'. By borrowing assumptions from

the bridge theory, the explanatory value of the theory one uses (in this example: equity theory) will be stronger.

Social-structural and institutional conditions, historical and statistical regularities also are often used to deduce meaningful assumptions for building more specific theories.

It's a good strategy to strengthen own theories and research programs with adoption of, or connections to, (parts of) relevant other theories and models. A fine example is Törnblom's use of the social resource model of Foa (see Foa & Foa, 1974). Foa classified social resources into six categories: love, services, goods, money, information and status. The resources are arranged in a circular order along two dimensions: concreteness and particularism. Particularism indicates the extent to which the value of a resource is influenced by the particular persons involved in the social exchange and by their relationship. Love is the most particularistic resource, money the least. Status and services are rather particularistic resources (though less particularistic than love), information and goods are less particularistic and more universal, but not as universal as money.

The concreteness dimension goes from less concrete (= symbolic, abstract) to more concrete. Services and goods are the most concrete resources, status and information are at the least concrete, symbolic pole; money and love score in-between on the concreteness dimension.

The differential properties of the social resources may affect exchange processes and satisfaction. For example, in the case of particularistic resources, people prefer exchanges with similar resources.

Foa's social resource model played an important role in several research programs and theories developed by Törnblom (see, for example, Törnblom & Kazemi, 2007).

Sometimes it is possible to combine two (or more) theories and to create in this way a new model or theory. Injustice is a form of stress. Vermunt and Steensma combined notions from stress theory and the general social justice model in their *Injustice Stress Theory* (Vermunt & Steensma, 2001). The *IST* is useful to explain the relations between injustice, dissatisfaction, stress, health problems and burnout in organizations. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed a dual appraisal model of stress and coping. In a primary appraisal process, the stress value of an event is assessed. If the event is assessed as threatening, a secondary appraisal process will evaluate the options for coping with the threat, and a coping method to reduce the stress will be selected. Vermunt and Steensma apply the Lazarus and Folkman model as follows. A distributive or procedural injustice will be evaluated as a threat only if additional information gives reasons to perceive it this way. Otherwise, it may be evaluated as a challenge or as irrelevant. If the injustice is evaluated as a threat, the second appraisal process will be triggered, and the available resources and options are evaluated. This second process leads to the selection of coping strategies. Failure to cope effectively may, in the long run, lead to negative consequences for health, to sickness absenteeism, and to burnout. In the IST special attention is paid to the role of the superior, the '*authority*' who is supervising the workers. These authorities allocate outcomes (rewards, but also tasks) to the workers, they apply procedures, and have social interactions which

may or may not meet the criteria of interactional justice. So, all three forms of (in)justice (distributive, procedural, interactional) are included in the *IST*. However, by compensating for possible injustices, superiors may reduce the stress of subordinates.

IST: Reduction of Injustice Stress

There are at least four tactics for overcoming initial injustices. These four ways to reduce injustice are the results of a combination of the (un)fairness of prior distributions/allocations and procedures, with 'new' procedures and allocation processes. A distribution as well as a procedure may be judged as fair or unfair. An unfair distribution may be followed by a fair distribution as well as by a fair procedure. An unfair prior procedure may be followed by a fair distribution or by a fair procedure. The four methods to manage stress by acting fairly via distribution or procedures are described by Vermunt and Steensma (2001). An unfair distribution may be judged as more fair (less unfair) if it is followed by a fair allocation. This method to restore justice is called *compensation*. By using *justifications* in allocating a resource, the negative effects of an unfair distribution may be lessened or overcome. Justification is a form of fair process effect. A fair end state of allocated outcomes may reduce the stress caused by prior unfair procedures. This fair end state demonstrates *appreciation* and is a fair outcome effect. The fourth method to restore justice is *mitigation*: negative effects of an unfair prior procedure are softened by another, but fair, procedure. It is, of course, possible to combine methods. For example, compensation may be combined with justification to reduce the negative effects of a prior unfair distribution.

Moreover, there are several ways to implement a method of reducing injustice stress. For instance, compensation can be given in the form of a permanent salary increase, or in the form of a bonus, or a sabbatical leave. So, managers have many alternative ways to reduce or prevent stress. Knowledge of the causes and consequences of distributive, procedural and interactional (un)fairness should become a central module in management training programs. It is even better to develop an integral model for improving the Quality of Working Life (QWL). This integral approach has five core elements (phases).

- Intention. All parties involved commit themselves to improve QWL.
- Diagnosis. Data gathering and developing knowledge of aspects of QWL. Aspects of procedural justice are important here.
- Prioritize. What to do first? Voice and representativeness are important.
- Implementation, preferably in close cooperation with workers and their representatives.
- Evaluation, both of results and processes. This may lead to continuous improvement.

Management should strive for a close cooperation with workers and their representatives. Actually, this approach is built on principles of procedural and interactional justice. Results demonstrate the value of this model. Cases may be used to

improve knowledge of the approach and the effectiveness of injustice stress reduction methods. This implies both advances in basic and applied science. The integral approach meets the requirements of the *Work Environment Act* of many countries. However, most managers and workers are not aware of the fact that the approach also is in accordance with criteria of social justice. Even politicians, responsible for making laws, often pay relatively little attention to the social justice aspect. Personally, I believe that justice researchers should explicitly speak the 'language of justice' when presenting results of studies into causes and effects of occupational health, burnout, bullying and absenteeism. Economists often have much influence on policy of governments and corporate boards. The gap with the influence of justice researchers from the social sciences should disappear, or become much smaller. The value of justice research should be more visible, and visibility can grow by using a language that enables people to see the link between justice and positive outcomes.

Justice and Quality Management

In general, five stages of quality assurance are distinguished.

- *Product quality*; (high) quality of products and services.
- *Process quality*; the quality of processes leading to the products and services.
- *System quality*; the organization as a whole is controlled well.
- *Chain quality*; there is a good control over the entire organizational process, including the relationship with suppliers, customers and other relevant partners in the chain.
- *Total quality management, total concern for quality*; continuous improvement and renewal in an excellent, high quality organization.

The *European Foundation for Quality Management* developed the EFQM-model of Total Quality Management. The model states that there are five *enablers* for achieving high quality, and four *results*. The enablers are leadership, personnel management; policy and strategy; partnerships and resources; and management of processes. The enablers should lead to high quality and four results. The results are people results (appreciation by personnel), customer results (appreciation by customers), society results (appreciation by society), and *key results* (the performance results of the organization). The EFQM-model is periodically adapted, but the core ideas are maintained. Nowadays, high quality organizations strive to reach high scores on *triple P*: *people, planet, profit*. Simply summarized: high profit for the organization (profit), high satisfaction and motivation of personnel (people), and positive effects for society and environment (planet). The striving for high scores on the triple P- dimensions is often called *Corporate Social Responsibility* (*CSR*). It seems better, though, to use the label *Organizational* Social Responsibility, since many not-for-profit organizations also want to take responsibility for the impact of their organization on people, the environment and society.

The 'Four Qualities Model' of Justice and Quality Management

The *Four Qualities Model* (*4Q-model*) shows how knowledge of social justice criteria can contribute to integral quality management in organizations (Steensma, 2014). Principles and norms of social justice are appreciated by persons, groups, and parties in organizations and society. The principles and norms can be integrated easily in systems for *Total Quality Management*. At least three forms of quality can be distinguished in each TQM system: the quality of organization; the quality of working life and work environment; and the quality of outcomes.

The *quality of organization* focuses mainly on effectiveness and efficiency of work processes and social structures in the organization. The perspective is highly important for managers, directors, governors and politicians. Aspects of informational justice are important for the design of communication systems. And for structures to be effective, qualities, skills and motives of persons should meet standards. Therefore, fair systems of selection, assessment, rewards and task allocation are necessary.

Aspects of *quality of working life* (*QWL*) are, e.g., job content, work environment, working conditions and labor relations. The QWL perspective is very important for workers and employees. On the basis of criteria of procedural and distributive justice workers want to have voice, process and decision control, adequate information, fair performance appraisals and fair rewards. Moreover, tasks, good equipment et cetera should be allocated in accordance with criteria of distributive justice.

Quality of outcomes concerns the quality of the 'output' of the organization. This should be understood broadly. Products and services, but also impact of the organization on the environment, pollution, depletion of raw materials and oil, etc belong to this category. So, intergenerational justice is important here, too. Contemporary organizational behavior has consequences for future generations. The quality of outcomes is strongly connected with the quality of organization. Criteria of procedural and distributive justice are relevant. The perspective of Quality of Outcomes is mainly important for consumers and customers of organizations (e.g., patients; students), but also for society as a whole.

The three forms of quality discussed so far are traditional topics of quality management studies. These forms are associated with each other. High quality of organization may lead to better quality of outcomes. High quality of working life correlates positively with satisfaction and motivation of workers, which may lead to higher performance, lower absenteeism, less employee turnover, and a more effective organization. Et cetera.

There is, however, a fourth form of quality: the quality of moral behavior of top leaders and top management. Top managers who are responsible for leading and managing the organization should be committed to high quality of moral behavior. This implies that their behavior is strongly based on principles of social justice. Such principles are supported broadly by employees. In the *Four Qualities Model* (*4Q model*) *of justice and quality management* the moral behavior of top leaders and managers, based on principles of social justice, is considered to be an overarching, 'umbrella' form of quality with direct positive effects on quality of organization, quality of outcomes, and quality of working life and work environment. Society as a

whole needs top leaders who have high standards of moral behavior. The 4Q model is an integral model, and perspectives of stakeholders and relevant parties are integrated in the model.

Top leaders can have a strong influence, not only on their 'own' organizations but also on the functioning of society. It's important that they commit themselves to high quality of moral behavior. Integration of social justice knowledge in total quality management may help this commitment to grow stronger. That's what I intend to promote.

Top leaders are responsible for real strategic decision making. Their decisions are immensely important for solving the large problems and challenges of contemporary society and the whole world system. Principles of fairness should guide them in their process of decision making, so it is important that they have a real and broad knowledge of these principles. Since top leaders frequently are committed to total quality assurance management, the strong link of quality management with principles of justice and fairness can be of help in reaching decisions resulting in a better world.

Interdisciplinary Research

In 1986, Riël Vermunt and I organized the first biennial conference on Social Justice Research in Leiden. We also founded the *Leiden International Centre for the Study of Social Justice* (1986), one of the predecessors of the *ISJR—International Society for Justice Research*, founded in 1997 by Leo Montada. Both in our conferences and in the Justice Centre we stressed the value of interdisciplinary and international cooperation to advance basic and applied justice research. This is perfectly in line with the mission of the ISJR. Cooperation between scientists often takes the form of multidisciplinarity. Researchers from different disciplines work independently on a common research problem. They stay within the disciplinary boundaries. Real interdisciplinarity implies that the boundaries between disciplines are crossed, and that integrated knowledge will be developed. In the contemporary world many global problems exist. These large problems are interconnected and interdependent. Moreover, (in)justice plays a role. For example, climate change has increased inequality between rich and poor countries. But the poor countries in the Global South bear hardly blame for causing the climate change. And people of low socioeconomic status or members of minority groups have more problems with environmental costs than other sectors in society (Clayton et al., 2016). Therefore, now we need more fully integrated interdisciplinary research. Joyeeta Gupta is a role model for the kind of interdisciplinary work that I propose. A short description of her approach will, I hope, convince the readers that interdisciplinary research has added value, in particular for the study of complex societal problems.

Joyeeta Gupta is *Professor of Environment and Development of the Global South* at the University of Amsterdam. She investigates effects of climate change, and the impact of these effects on the relationships between rich and poor. The distribution of resources (often privatized) and wealth is unfair. A small group of rich individuals, representing just a few percent of the total global population, have an impact on the environment that is as great as the impact of the poorest two-thirds of the

world population. Conflicts over the use of land, water and resources will increase, because these natural resources become scarce and are depleted gradually. Gupta focuses on the relationships between climate crisis, global water challenges, potential solutions, and justice. She brings together researchers from various disciplines (e.g., international law, economics, political science, development studies, and environmental studies). Gupta was the lead author of the report on climate change of the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (*IPCC*), which won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 (jointly with Al Gore). In recent research on safe and just *earth system boundaries* (ESBs) several justice criteria were used to analyze safe ESBs: Interspecies justice; Intergenerational justice (between past and present; between present and future); and intergenerational justice between countries, communities, and individuals (Rockström et al, 2023). In 2023, The Dutch Research Council NWO awarded the Spinoza Prize, the highest distinction in Dutch science, to Gupta. The NWO selection committee was impressed by the broad and interdisciplinary research.

Addressing complex societal problems often requires large research teams composed of scientists from various disciplines. The interdisciplinary approach with its focus on integration of knowledge can offer essential new insights.

Conclusion

The quality of current basic and applied social justice research is good. Social justice is alive and kicking. But the kicks can be more effective. There remain some things to be done. Micro–macro studies can be refined to determine more exactly how structural conditions affect individual's justice attitudes and vice versa. The study of micro-justice, macro-justice, and affirmative action is important, since this is a field with pitfalls and potential conflicts between groups in society. Affirmative action programs, based on arguments of macro-justice, are controversial in many countries. Society needs our knowledge.

Philosophy is the mother of many sciences, including social justice. Knowledge of the works of great thinkers can still inspire us, and broaden our views. A canon of philosophers is desirable.

It is remarkable that frequently applied group research methods and interventions are based on justice criteria. They therefore belong in the toolbox of social justice researchers. The information value of some social justice theories can be strengthened. Fortunately, there are valid ways to do so. I suggest to focus on these methods.

Social justice principles can easily be integrated with total quality management. This eases the acceptance of social justice principles in organizations and society. So, cooperation with managers and representatives of employees is a path to integration of justice in organizations, with mutual benefits for researchers and organizations.

Many complex problems have to be solved by interdisciplinary teams. Social justice researchers should be more active in taking initiatives for interdisciplinary projects. Good public relations strengthen the position of our discipline. It's nice to walk on the road to justice.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to declare.

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