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## Does your firm measure up in terms of fairness?

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Supervisors must practice civility when dealing with workers and ensure equitability. PHOTO | FOTOSEARCH

We learn from a very early age to value fairness. Researchers Jing Li, Leann Birch, Jane Billman and numerous others note that by the end of the toddler period at three years old, a child can notice and react adversely to disadvantageous inequality in distributions. Any parent knows if you give one child two cookies and another child only one cookie that a torrent of yelling, objections and crying will ensue by the marginalised child.

As a socially-oriented species, humans never outgrow our deep desire for justice in our personal lives and society at large as we age. Nothing sits so uncomfortably deep in the recesses of our mind than the feeling of unfairness.

The human brain pays acute attention to issues surrounding equitable distribution and treatment. An adult example includes when a citizen works and follows all the rules but notices on his walk to work a Prado passing by that contains a contractor who illegally obtained construction tenders.

The observation twists his emotions into knots. Likewise, a strong student candidate in her university student government elections can feel utterly cheated if she perceives that other candidates do not abide by institutional campaigning policies.

### **Overall motivation**

Inasmuch, the general public often wonders why some universities undergo peaceful student government elections while others descend into chaos. The root lies in the students' perceptions of institutional fairness regarding the process and results.

This week the students of United States International University of Africa go to the polls to elect new student leaders.

The institution places strong emphasis on teams of student, faculty, and staff independent from the university's administration to oversee the student elections so as to not compromise real and perceived fairness.

How does your workplace stack up in terms of fairness? Social scientists deem such fairness concepts of organisational justice as a pertinent salient research trend over the past 40 years that shows no signs of abating. Gijs van Houwelingen, Marius van Dijke, and David De Cremer summarise decades of research into one simple phrase that "procedural fairness matters". Employees fervently care about fairness in procedures, policies, and processes within their organisations.

An organisation that promotes an employee, as an example, following a perceived fair process proves enormously helpful towards overall employee motivation. Additionally, a rewards system that employees believe justly distributes payments for equitable performance will surge work output forward.

In fact, employee perceptions about procedural fairness substantially improve virtually all important organisational outcomes desirable by shareholders. Social scientists Brian Collins and Kevin Mossholder showcase mountains of other research that detail how when an organisation treats employees fairly, it improves positive employee attitudes such as commitment to the organisation and job satisfaction.

High feelings of fairness also increase positive behaviours among staff including greater trust in management and more extra-role helping behaviour whereby employees assist each other and their supervisors.

Moving beyond the organisation and its policies, the representatives of the entity also impact employee perceptions.

When immediate representatives, such as supervisors, treat their employees fairly, then those employees put in greater work effort. If a supervisor promotes positive relational norms in their respective department including integrity, honesty, and civility, then employees reciprocate, on average, that same behaviour back to their supervisor and to the company at large. The improved positive relational interactions improve work-life quality and increase output.

So, quite literally, it pays to be nice to your staff.

Unfortunately, not all supervisors practice civility and not all organisations operate fairly. David de Cremer's research highlights the severely negative reactions of employees when they judge institutional actions as not fair.

Employees who perceive a lack of fairness will search for other jobs instead of working, fail to meet performance targets, and quit at much higher rates. Interestingly, workers who feel more attached and integrated to an organisation become the most disenfranchised if fairness perceptions change for the worse.

Now, take out a pen and paper.

Determine whether your workplace operates with procedural, distributive, interpersonal, and informational justice. In each of the following 14 statements below, assign a numeric value to your response in that "1" = not at all, "2" = to a small extent, "3" = to some extent, "4" = to a moderate extent, and "5" = to a large extent.

Have you been able to express your views and feelings as a result of workplace procedures?  
Have you had influence over your workplace outcomes because procedures guaranty your input?

Have organisational procedures been free of bias? Does your performance review and reward reflect the effort you have put into your job? Is the reward given you by your organisation appropriate for the work you have completed? Does your remuneration reflect what you have contributed to your organisation? Has your supervisor treated you in a polite manner? Has your supervisor treated you with dignity?

Has your supervisor refrained from improper remarks or comments that insult you as a person or as a professional in a non-joking way?

Has your supervisor been candid in his or her communication with you? Has your supervisor explained the procedures of your workplace thoroughly? Has your organisation adequately provided you with written policies and procedures to empower you to do your job properly?

Did your supervisor explain organisational policies and procedures reasonably? Has your supervisor communicated details and approvals in a timely manner?

### **Negative feelings**

Now, total up all your numbers that you assigned to each statement and divide by 14. If your average score exceeds four, then congratulations because you work in a fair and just organisation with competent managers.

If your average score totaled between three and four, then your entity struggles with organisational justice and needs to either improve fairness in policies and procedures or in supervisor interactions.

If you scored less than three on average, then you should consider securing alternative employment because the organisation itself and the supervisors within it do not reward fairly or interact with you appropriately which could stunt your career growth, harm your chances of promotion, and increase negative feelings of satisfaction about your job and life.

Discuss organisational justice and fairness with other *Business Daily* readers through #Fairness on Twitter.