Beyond Organizational Justice: An Integrative Approach to Organizational Fairness

Several attempts have been made to view and examine the relationship between the components of fairness and advance a preliminary global perspective. As described in the previous chapter, some of them have dealt with organizational justice and its components. This chapter, however, goes beyond organizational justice alone and looks at the relationships among the components of fairness that do not include just the dimensions of organizational justice. Conceptualizing organizational fairness beyond organizational justice is one of the more important contributions of this book. Another important contribution of this chapter is that it allows us to understand the relationships between components of fairness and then the need for a more global perspective of organizational fairness as a possible higher-level concept composed of lower-level fairness constructs. The review begins with a consideration of cases that include two or three of the fairness components advanced in this book, and as well as in a few other studies. The review covers the relationship between a given component of fairness and the other component(s) advanced in this book. In some examples, the relationships that involve two or more components of fairness are examined, without an integrative approach being advanced directly. The last section of this chapter, and an important one, focuses on works that promoted an integrative and global approach to organizational fairness directly.

Organizational trust and the components of organizational fairness

Organizational trust and its relationship to the components of organizational justice are reviewed first. According to Croonen (2010), even though issues of trust, fairness, and justice have received increasing
attention in the mainstream management literature, most scholars have treated the issues of trust on the one hand, and fairness and justice on the other, as separate concepts. Researchers argued that an important element of trust is the expectation held by one party that the other will treat him/her justly or fairly. Greater agreement, however, surrounds the concepts of fairness and justice. Croonen mentioned that many authors consider them to be closely related, because these terms are often used interchangeably (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Husted & Folger, 2004; Luo, 2005).

Holtz (2013) was more specific and advanced a model that integrated trust and perceived justice. He called this model the trust primacy model. The main argument of the model is that trust forms rapidly and has a significant influence on employees’ perceptions of justice. According to Holtz, previous work has maintained that trust is grounded in direct experience with an entity. For instance, the fairness heuristic theory emphasizes that people often lack sufficient information to evaluate the trustworthiness of an entity. Therefore, the theory predicts that early fairness-related experiences occur prior to, and provide the basis for, evaluations of trustworthiness. Holtz argued that the trust primacy model extends prior theoretical models in several ways. First, according to the model, a level of trust is formed prior to direct justice experiences that involve an exchange partner. Second, a growing body of neuro-scientific evidence suggests that the human brain automatically categorizes the trustworthiness of others without conscious deliberation. In essence, by the time a person has consciously perceived a potential exchange partner, he or she has unconsciously judged that partner’s trustworthiness. Third, in a hypothetical vacuum devoid of any signals to guide inferences about trustworthiness, a person’s psychological willingness to be vulnerable (i.e., trust) is shaped by his or her propensity to trust. Holtz (2013) argued that if these three points are taken together, there is compelling evidence suggesting that a degree of trust is inevitably present prior to the direct experience of justice-laden events in employment relationships.

Holtz contended that the advanced model offers a richer, more complete integration of the trust and justice literatures. In particular, the fairness heuristic theory and the relational model of procedural justice have been criticized for suggesting unclear and “primitive” conceptualizations of trust constructs. For instance, research involving the relational model has operationalized trust as the degree of effort an authority figure has exerted to be fair or the level of consideration an authority figure has given to the views of others in decision-making