

# Organizational Justice Competency and Organizational Justice Behaviors for Building Leader-Follower Relationships: A Roadmap for Leader-Aspiring Managers

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## Abstract

Literature asserts that management is not leadership. Because leadership enhances employee performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, among other advantages, scholars have argued that it is beneficial for managers to become leaders or develop leadership skills. To become leaders, literature indicates that subordinates must first willingly transform into followers who subsequently make their manager their leader. However, followership results from various positive human relations practices by the manager, which convince subordinates of the manager's followership worthiness. This study recognizes organizational justice as an effective human relations competence that managers should practice in transforming subordinates into followers. This is based on the literature, which asserts that organizational justice enhances the work environment by stimulating employee performance, increasing motivation, engagement, trust in supervisors, and commitment to the organization. While literature recommends organizational justice as a leadership competence, the specific behaviors that produce justice remain sparse and sometimes controversial. This study contributes to the knowledge of organizational justice analysis and recommends specific social justice behaviors for managers to practice as a roadmap for achieving organizational justice and increasing their subordinates' likelihood of becoming followers.

**Keywords:** Organizational Justice, Leadership Development, Organizational Justice and Leadership, Leader-Follower Development, Organizational Justice Behaviors.

## 1. Introduction

This study aims to present and discuss managerial behaviors that can transform subordinates into followers, and consequently, turn managers into leaders. As extensively discussed by Oyinlade (2025), organizations determine who becomes managers, but followers determine who they follow (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). However, because organization members are hired as managers and subordinates, and engage in manager-subordinate relationships compelled by organizational structure, both must transform into leaders and followers to cultivate leader-follower relationships (Chen & Zhao, 2024; Oyinlade, 2025). And for this relationship to occur, managers must behave in a manner that transforms subordinates into followers who, in return, ordain them (managers) as their leaders (Oyinlade, 2025). This process implies that leadership and followership are informal relations, and unless followership has occurred, leadership and the leader will not exist (Ibrahim & Omar, 2024; Oyinlade, 2025).

While leadership has been extensively studied, it remains one of the most contested concepts in organizational science. It is frequently contrasted with management in organizational research, as both are central to coordinating people's labor and achieving goals, but differ fundamentally in methods and outcomes. The distinction between the two concepts has been a topic of debate for decades. One area of contrast lies in the demarcation between, and the common conflation of, the two concepts (Chen & Zhao, 2024; Harris & Williams, 2023; Oyinlade, 2025). The differentiation and untangling of these two concepts are outside the scope of this study; however, such knowledge can be found extensively in Oyinlade (2025). In this study, it suffices to note that management is traditionally defined as the activities of planning, organizing, and controlling (Kotter, 2013), as well as supervising and overseeing organizational activities, and prudently assigning human and material resources for goal attainment (Gardner, 2000). Management practices establish order, plan work, and ensure stability in organizational systems (Azad et al., 2017) by leveraging organizational authority (Robbins & Judge, 2019).

Unlike management, which relies heavily on hierarchical organizationally allotted authority (Robbins & Judge, 2019), leadership thrives on trust, shared purpose, and the development of followers' capacities (Northouse, 2021). It (leadership) is most typically defined as the *process of influencing and motivating* individuals to achieve collective goals through vision, relational influence, and empowerment (Northouse, 2021). In addition to vision and influence, Kotter (2013) also included inspiration as an essential quality of leadership, distinct from management. Consistent with Kotter's position, Azad et al. (2017) and Deng et al. (2023) noted that contemporary research views leadership as a distinct, relational, and influence-based process that transcends administrative or managerial control. Hence, Deng et al. (2023) characterized leadership as future-oriented, focused on change, innovation, and empowering followers. Therefore, leadership is best conceptualized as a process of social influence that mobilizes individuals and groups toward a shared vision or goal (Deng et al., 2023). Studies also indicate that while managerial skills ensure efficiency and compliance, leadership behaviors drive employee motivation, engagement, and well-being, outcomes that cannot be achieved through administrative management alone (Eva et al., 2019; Kim & Cruz, 2022). Unlike managerial roles that focus on organizational functions, leadership is

fundamentally relational, motivational, and developmental.

Other advantages of leadership make the case for preferring leadership over management, although, in practice, effective managers often double as leaders when motivating teams and shaping vision, thereby blurring the line between management and leadership. However, when the demarcation is made, the leadership advantage becomes prominent. For example, Deng et al. (2023) found that transformational leadership styles, unlike transactional management behaviors, significantly improved job satisfaction and reduced turnover intention. Other studies also confirm the positive net effects of leadership on employee performance, engagement, and resilience (Kim & Cruz, 2022; Deng et al., 2023). Similarly, leadership (the servant approach) emphasizes prioritizing followers' needs, fostering their growth, and creating a supportive climate. Empirically, (servant) leadership has been systematically linked to enhancing workplace relationships, higher job satisfaction, trust, and organizational citizenship behaviors (Eva et al., 2019; Canavesi & Minelli, 2022). Additional studies have also shown that when frontline supervisors display transformational and servant leadership qualities, employees experience higher well-being, lower burnout, and stronger organizational commitment (Kim & Cruz, 2022; Eva et al., 2019). Conversely, when unit heads act only as managers, employees report feelings of neglect, stress, and disengagement (Kim & Cruz, 2022; Eva et al., 2019). Therefore, unlike management that focuses mostly on control and transactional exchanges, the core advantage of leadership lies in shaping values, enabling growth, and generating collective achievements.

## **2. Present Study Objective**

As mentioned in the opening paragraph, this study examines the leadership behaviors managers can employ to encourage their subordinates to become followers. As followers, subordinates make the manager their leader (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014), and the resulting leader-follower relationship benefits both the workers and their organization, as indicated in the previous paragraphs. However, more specifically, the objective of this study is to discuss organizational justice behaviors that managers may practice to attract followers and become leaders. Specific recommended social justice behaviors that enhance subordinates' transformation into followers will be discussed based on relevant literature.

Perhaps more than ever, in contemporary organizational settings, the relationship between managers and their subordinates is fundamental in fostering an environment conducive to growth, trust, and mutual respect in pursuit of both individual and unit goals. Central to this relationship is organizational justice, which pertains to employees' perceptions of fairness in the workplace (Cropanzano & Molina, 2015). Organizational justice is not merely an ethical imperative, but also a strategic leadership practice that can enhance employee engagement, motivation, and loyalty. Therefore, when managerial practice is grounded in organizational justice, it facilitates the cultivation of followership among subordinates, thereby promoting employee development (Deschamps et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2023).

Followership is described in this study as an *endearing relationship* with a leader. It (followership) includes aligning one's interests with those of the leader, a willingness to perform above expectations without fear of punishment or expectation of rewards, but solely

based on the human relations influence of the leader (Oyinlade, 2025). Hence, followers' behaviors and attitudes actively support leaders and organizational goals as well as commitment to the organization or specific unit (Khan et al., 2023). Empirical research shows that perceptions of organizational justice are critical determinants of effective followership (Deschamps et al., 2016; Wolfe et al., 2018). When subordinates perceive fairness in outcomes and processes, they tend to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviors, increased ethical behaviors, and loyalty to leaders and the organization (Alhaidan, 2024). Employees who feel treated equitably are more likely to trust their supervisors, contribute ideas, and engage in team problem-solving, thereby enhancing collective organizational performance (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Suárez-Acosta, 2014). Inversely, unfair treatment, favoritism, or opaque decision-making erodes trust and reduces follower engagement, undermining both short- and long-term organizational effectiveness (Plachy & Smunt, 2022).

Given the benefits of organizational justice in improving the work environment by stimulating employee performance, increasing employee motivation, engagement, trust, loyalty to the supervisor, and gaining followers, this study discusses and recommends specific social justice behaviors for managers to enhance their subordinates' perceptions of experiencing organizational justice and increase their likelihood of becoming followers.

### **3. Relevant Literature**

#### *3.1 What Is Organizational Justice?*

Everyone who joins an organization, regardless of its type or size, expects to be treated fairly, and the wish for fairness is independent of employee status. Corporate executives, managers, and low-level workers alike seek and expect fair treatment from others in their organizations. In the same respect, students, teachers, professors, school administrators, priests, and congregation members all similarly want to be treated fairly by others in their respective organizations. The desire, expectation, and preference for fairness constitute the focus of organizational justice. In its most basic conception, organizational justice refers to the perception of fairness in the workplace and how this perception shapes employees' attitudes and behaviors, including feelings of job satisfaction, commitment, trust, and performance (Colquitt et al., 2013). This is consistent with definitions from various scholars. For example, Eigen and Litwin (2014) and Cropanzano & Molina (2015) defined organizational justice primarily as the extent to which employees perceive they are treated fairly in their organizations. It was also described consistently with other scholars' definitions as an individual's perceptions of fair treatment received in an organization by comparing the rewards received from a job to the effort, experience, and education invested in the job (Ohiorenoya & Eguavoen, 2019).

While organizational justice may appear simple on the surface, it can be complicated and controverted by subjective perceptions and the difficulty in establishing what constitutes fairness. For example, it is common to assess fairness through a self-serving bias in which workers perceive fairness in ways that benefit themselves (Diekmann et al., 2007). They often overestimate their own contributions and, therefore, believe they deserve a larger share of rewards, leading to perceptions of distributive injustice when this does not occur

(Diekmann et al., 2007). Similarly, workers tend to conflate what is favorable with what is fair. If they receive a positive outcome, they are more likely to judge the process as fair, even if it was flawed and potentially unfavorable to someone else (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1996). This makes it difficult to separate genuine perceptions of justice from simple satisfaction with an outcome, thereby blurring the line between fairness and satisfaction. Additionally, perceptions and realities of organizational justice can be complicated by the levels or areas in which organizational justice is expected to be manifested. These levels constitute the units of analysis for implementing, assessing, and evaluating workplace justice in a work group. The two broad levels are individual and collective, and each level comprises two types of perceptions of organizational justice: contributive and relative. Each level and its two types are briefly explained in the following paragraphs.

### *3.2 Levels of Organizational Justice*

#### *3.2.1 Individual Level: Individual Organizational Justice*

Individual organizational justice refers to the *feelings, perceptions, or beliefs of being treated fairly* as an individual organizational member (Adamovic, 2023; Robbins & Judge, 2019; Ohioirenoya & Eguavoen, 2019), regardless of employee status (supervisory or nonsupervisory). A member of a work group may hold personal beliefs about being treated fairly or unfairly by co-workers and managers (Ohioirenoya & Eguavoen, 2019). Organizational policies and their enforcement may also be perceived as fair or unfair by individual organizational members. When an individual feels fairly treated by coworkers, managers, or favored by organizational policies, the individual feels a sense of individual justice, and vice versa. Keeping in mind that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the perception of fair treatment is in the eye of individual organizational members.

Judging from the descriptions above, an individual's perceptions of organizational justice are essentially subjective evaluations of fairness experienced within an organization. These perceptions shape the individual's attitudes and behaviors, such as job satisfaction, trust, commitment, and performance (Adamovic, 2023; Zhao et al., 2024). They are rooted in individual values and comparative organizational experiences, which serve as the basis for assessing fairness and determining whether one is receiving justice in one's organization (Robbins & Judge, 2019; Colquitt et al., 2013). This implies that what one member may perceive as fair and evidence of justice, another may see as completely unfair and unjust. However, when employees perceive high levels of organizational justice, they exhibit positive attitudes and behaviors, such as increased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, task performance, and reduced counterproductive work behavior and turnover intent (Robbins & Judge, 2019; Colquitt et al., 2013). Individual justice can be further analyzed in two forms: Contributive and relative.

*3.2.1.2 Individual Contributive Justice (Person-Role Justice, Basic Justice).* The concept of *contributive justice* is uncommon in the literature, yet it is appropriate for what it represents, which appears to have been ignored or unrecognized in justice studies. I describe this form of organizational justice as *fairness to an individual solely based on the individual's performance* rather than in comparison to the performance of another worker. It includes



having the opportunity to participate meaningfully and contribute based on one's qualifications. This form of organizational justice is based on the person-role fit theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978) and a subjective judgment of fairness by individual employees about how organizational role compensation reflects their personal skills, dignity, autonomy, and competence (Colquitt et al., 2012), as well as opportunities to participate meaningfully. When participation and compensation reflect perceived personal contributions and dignity, employees perceive higher person-role justice. This phenomenon is captured in the description of organizational justice by Ohioorenaya and Eguavoen (2019), who define justice for the individual worker in terms of personal contributions to organizational accomplishments. Essentially, individual contributive justice is the extent to which an individual believes he/she has been fairly treated or compensated consistently with his/her credentials, job demands, and job performance. When a worker believes he/she is adequately compensated financially and in-kind consistently with his/her skills, job experience, union-negotiated contract, performance quality, and output volume, he/she has individual contributive organizational justice (see Ohioorenaya & Eguavoen, 2019). However, in their explanation of organizational justice, Greenberg and Colquitt (2015) noted that individual contributive justice extends beyond fair reward distribution. They explained that this form of justice includes the fair application of organizational procedures, policies, and interpersonal relations based on individual contributions to the organization. Such organizational justice can also be accurately described as *person-role justice* because it is justice accorded to an individual based solely on the individual's performance, skills, training, education, experience, labor, and other relevant job-role factors. In this regard, individual contributive justice can also be referred to as individual *basic justice*, as it is the most fundamental form of justice that workers expect and are most likely to receive.

Individual contributive justice is obtained by a worker who worked extra hours during the week and was fully compensated for the extra hours consistently with the worker's attributes, job characteristics, and organizational policies for labor compensation. Hence, contributive justice is based solely on fairness to an individual, regardless of the level of fairness accorded to another worker. Contributive justice is not based on a comparison of one worker to another. It is based only on fairness to a worker for what he/she brings to the job and how competently he/she has performed under his/her particular job conditions (Colquitt et al., 2012). For example, John and Mary are co-workers with similar years of job experience and other employment characteristics. They do the same job and earn the same hourly wage of \$20. Each of them works exactly 10 extra hours per week at \$30 per hour, because extra hours are compensated at 150 percent of the basic wage. At the end of a two-week pay period, John was paid \$600 for the extra 20 hours he worked, giving him individual contributive justice. He was fairly compensated for his extra labor regardless of how much Mary was compensated. If Mary were paid \$800 for her 20 extra hours of work, John's individual contributive justice remains intact. It has not been violated. According to Shao and colleagues, individual contributive justice (person-role justice), as illustrated in the John anecdote, benefits both the employee and the organization. When workers experience person-role justice, they feel motivated to take greater psychological ownership of their work, show greater commitment, and exhibit ethical behavior; conversely, when they feel their roles

devalue their individuality or self-worth, they experience identity strain and reduced engagement (Shao et al., 2013).

*3.2.1.3 Individual Relative Justice.* Unlike contributive (person-role or basic) justice, individual relative justice is determined solely by comparison with other workers. This concept is fundamental to Adams' (1965, 1963) Equity Theory, which remains highly influential in contemporary justice research. Individuals perceive (in)justice when they feel their output-to-reward ratio (e.g., achievement compared to pay/recognition) is unequal to the ratio of their comparison target. This individual perception of relative justice is rooted in social comparison theory, in which employees assess the fairness of their own situation not in absolute terms (as in contributive justice), but by comparing it with the situation of a chosen referent other. This comparison can be upward (comparing oneself to someone better off), downward (comparing oneself to someone worse off), or lateral (comparing oneself to someone at the same level of output, compensation, and otherwise recognition).

The correctness of the referent other is important for ensuring proper comparison; otherwise, one would make an illegitimate comparison by comparing apples to oranges. To this effect, Merton and Rossi (1968) indicated that referent others (individuals or groups) must be similar in characteristics to the entity making the comparison. Hence, for individual relative comparisons, referent persons could be workers with similar employment dates, job characteristics, education, training, or other job qualifications. In the earlier example of John and Mary, each qualifies as a referent for the other because of their shared characteristics. Junior workers who assess how fairly they have been treated compared to the corporate CEO would be making an incorrect or illegitimate comparison because of the many differences between their positions and those of the CEO. They would make an accurate comparison with workers at their level and, even better, with those at the same level in their department or unit. Those are the workers with whom they would most likely share many similarities.

Caution should be exercised when measuring relative justice against others. It is best to limit comparisons to those within one's own organization, as organizational conditions, dynamics, policies, and other realities vary significantly from one organization to another. Comparing oneself to workers in a different organization or in the same organization but in a different unit or location, particularly in an organization with geographic complexity, is tantamount to comparing apples to oranges—an inaccurate comparison. Given that relative justice describes how fairly one feels treated in one's organization or organizational unit compared to others with whom one can correctly compare oneself, it is a measure of one's perceived degree of equity, as explained by Stacey Adams' Equity Theory (Adams, 1965, 1963; Pfeffer, 1995). Recent studies have confirmed that these relative comparisons, especially in the current era of greater pay transparency and widespread social media, have become a powerful driver of perceptions of distributive justice and can significantly impact morale, cohesion, and performance (Buengeler et al., 2021).

Returning to the example of John and Mary in the preceding section, while John may have received individual contributive justice, he did not receive individual relative justice because Mary was paid at a higher rate for the extra hours she worked. Individual relative justice

occurs only when one feels compensated or treated like one's referent others, regardless of contributive justice. That is, relative justice is independent of contributive justice. Even if one holds the belief that one is being under-compensated or under-recognized based on one's education, skills, experience, and performance (that is, feeling an individual contributive injustice), one may claim relative justice if one believes that others like oneself are equally underpaid and under-appreciated. This may be likened to a situation in which a worker says she deserves better pay, but, since her coworkers are equally underpaid, she concludes that she has been fairly compensated *compared* to them.

### *3.2.2 Collective Level: Collective Organizational Justice*

The second broad category of justice is the collective type. Collective organizational justice, also called justice climate, refers to the shared beliefs within a team, department, or work unit about how fairly the organization treats collectives of people (Adamovic, 2023). It is a form of justice that describes the feeling, perception, or belief of how fairly collectives of workers are being treated in their organization. A collective may be a gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity, department, job area (line versus staff), or hierarchy level (senior versus junior workers) within the workplace. These social units describe the various organizational collectives with which organizational members may identify and the platform from which they may perceive organizational justice.

Collective Justice may be discerned in the protest for better pay and work conditions for Black Americans in the railroad industry by the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, led by Philip A. Randolph (Chateauvert, 1998). Other movements for collective justice include women's suffrage and the American Indian Movement, among others. Management-labor disputes and labor strikes also exemplify concerns about collective organizational justice. Similar to individual justice, collective fairness may be measured through the perceived treatment of a collective by supervisors, organizational executives, other organizational members, or organizational policies. When organizational justice is perceived through the lens of a collective, members judge how fairly they are being treated based on their collective membership rather than on individual attributes or contributions to their organizations. Therefore, collective justice reflects shared meaning and consensus that emerge from communication, leadership signals, and organizational practices (Adamovic, 2023; Herr et al., 2018). By this perceptual approach, organizational members measure how fairly they are affected by organizational policies and how well they are treated by organizational officers, not as individuals but as collectives. Therefore, as a collective, members will perceive organizational justice to mean their particular collective is being treated fairly by management, or that organizational policies favor them. For example, women may perceive organizational policies as fair to them as a collective, regardless of any individual injustice a particular woman might be experiencing. When the opposite is perceived, a collective may claim organizational injustice from a particular source, such as policies or other organizational members, regardless of the perceived organizational justice that any individual woman may experience.



Typically, when workers perceive themselves as victims of organizational injustice based on their collective identity, the injustice translates into collective discrimination against such workers. The collective that experiences discrimination defines itself as a collective victim. This is an accurate interpretation of collective injustice because discrimination is directed only at collectives like women, Whites, Blacks, non-supervisors, or managers rather than at individuals, despite the fact that the consequences of discrimination are felt as individuals (Marger, 2015; Oyinlade et al., 2020). A person experiences discrimination based on a shared collective identity against which discrimination is directed rather than due to individual failings or personal attributes (Marger, 2015; Oyinlade et al., 2020). Gender discrimination, as an example, is unfair treatment and injustice directed at people based on their gender. Discrimination may be directed at men or women as a category of people. So, when Jennifer, a woman, becomes a victim of discrimination in her workplace, it is not because of her individual failings, behaviors, or attributes but because of her shared status with other women. Below are the two forms of collective justice: contributive and relative.

*3.2.2.1 Collective Contributive Justice.* Collective contributive justice is described in this study as the perception that organizational members are fairly treated as collectives, based on their collective opportunities to contribute and their actual collective contributions to organizational activities. It is a measure of fairness based solely on a collective's combined qualifications to contribute and be fairly compensated based on its collective contribution without comparison with another collective. Hence, it describes the condition in which collectives of workers believe they have been favored to participate instrumentally and be compensated for their perceived collective contributions to organizational success. By engaging in instrumental participation, Roberson and Scott (2024) noted that workers have an instrumental voice (participation that influences decisions), indicating that they have both the opportunity to be involved and that their involvement is valued and incorporated into organizational processes. Additionally, collective contributive justice represents a collective's perception of the extent to which organizational policies have favored it.

Collective contributive justice may be illustrated for clarity with an example of a sales team as a collective. The team may claim to have organizational justice based on its involvement in sales decision-making, its compensation for its contributions to the sales department, and the fairness of the department's policies toward salespeople. If the team assesses its contribution or success to be very high but is minimally rewarded or recognized for its accomplishments, it may complain of collective organizational injustice (the entire sales team), even if a particular team member has been well compensated and recognized. Similarly, women, as a category of workers in an organization, may claim to have organizational justice if they believe they have instrumental voice and have been fairly compensated (and that organizational policies have been friendly to them) for their contributions to the organization, even when any particular woman may personally claim organizational injustice due to not being personally well compensated or favored by organizational policies. According to Banks (2023), it is imperative for organizations to practice collective contributive justice because units with low contributive-justice climate are associated with exclusionary practices resulting in lower cross-member trust, reduced knowledge sharing, and decreased team

creativity.

*3.2.2.2 Collective Relative Justice.* Collective relative justice is the perception that workers are fairly treated as work groups or any other collective identities in their organization. When collectives of workers (work groups, teams, departments, divisions, men, women, Black, White, Latinos) compare how well they are compensated or favored by organizational policies vis-à-vis their referent others (e.g. one department vs a similar one; men vs women; Blacks vs Whites, one team vs another in the same unit, etc.) they may feel fairly or unfairly treated as collectives. One sales team may claim to experience organizational justice or injustice compared to another team based on how fairly it feels it is treated by organizational managers. Similarly, women may feel fairly or unfairly treated as a category when they compare themselves to men. In collective relative justice, assessment of justice is based purely on relative comparison to another population rather than on fairness based on purely contributions. Therefore, a collective perception of relative justice (or injustice) is a shared judgment of how one's group is treated compared to another, and it typically centers on comparisons of outcomes, procedures, or respect (Pan & Yang, 2023; Wan et al., 2023). If two competing sales teams are equally undercompensated for their sales successes, collective relative justice prevails; but if one team is well compensated while another is not, the undercompensated team can appropriately claim collective injustice, even if any individual member of the team is well compensated.

For managers, all forms of organizational injustice matter, since they indicate unfairness in various ways to workers. In particular, relative justice is the most common source of employee complaints, as workers regularly compare their organizational circumstances with those of their referent individuals or groups (Wan et al., 2023). When a collective injustice is perceived, it is a shared perception of being under-rewarded or unfairly treated relative to other units (Wan et al., 2023) causing anger, resentment and feeling of powerlessness (Smith & Pettigrew, 2015) which spur collective responses including reduced discretionary effort, increased intra-organizational conflict, and lobby for change (Pan & Yang, 2023; Wan et al., 2023). Addressing relative justice issues, therefore, requires attention to inter-unit equity signals such as transparent benchmarking, consistent procedures across units, communication about the rationale for differences, and the social meanings of comparisons that teams use when evaluating fairness (Pan & Yang, 2023; Wan et al., 2023).

#### **4. Organizational Justice Behavioral Recommendations for Gaining Followers**

##### *4.1 Practicing Organizational Justice as a Principle*

In the effort to become leaders, managers must first understand organizational justice in its various forms, as discussed in the previous section, and learn to practice it as a principle. Since every worker seeks fairness, it means organizational justice is inherently expected as a condition of organizational membership. Typically, organizational members expect their organization to regularly grant ample justice to every individual and any collective in all manifestations of organizational life. This is expected to be achieved through organizational policies, job design, supervisory actions, rewards and recognition, formal bureaucracy, and organizational culture. Since the most direct implementer of organizational justice is the

manager, managers have the opportunity to implement it effectively, thereby enhancing their chances of transforming their subordinates into followers. If workers seek organizational justice and managers, as the direct implementers of justice, regularly practice it as a principle, they will gain the social capital of trust, respect, and admiration that could turn their workers from subordinates into followers.

When managers practice organizational justice as a principle, they uphold fairness in all situations. They remain fair to all subordinates and promote the welfare and success of all workers evenly. To practice fairness as a principle is to avoid favoring one worker or a collective of workers, especially personal friends, over others. Non-partiality is an essential aspect of the principle of organizational justice that managers who wish to become leaders should always observe. Vendettas and retaliation also erode organizational justice, so managers are advised to avoid them at all costs. As an example, if a manager retaliates against a worker in a job performance assessment for a wrong done to him/her, he/she (the manager) will violate the practice of organizational justice as a principle. Doing so is counterproductive to transforming subordinates into followers.

Scientific research has studied and documented three main dimensions of organizational justice: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactive justice. Collectively, these dimensions shape employees' perceptions of fairness and influence their attitudes, satisfaction, and behavioral engagement (Deschamps et al., 2016). Research indicates that when employees perceive justice across these three broad dimensions, they are more likely to internalize organizational values, actively participate in their roles, and maintain positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors (Plachy & Smunt, 2022). Conversely, perceptions of injustice can result in disengagement, withdrawal, and counterproductive behaviors, underscoring the importance of managerial attention to fairness in all organizational practices (Young & Baker, 2025). To become a leader, a manager ought to know each of the three dimensions well and practice them regularly. Below is a brief discussion and behavior recommendations for implementing justice in each area.

#### *4.1.2 Distributive Justice*

Distributive justice refers to perceived fairness in the distribution of rewards, compensation, and recognition to organizational members based on outcomes relative to input (Greenberg, 1987). It is also described as the perceived fairness of compensation allocations, ensuring that rewards, promotions, and recognition align with employee contributions (Cropanzano & Molina, 2015). Organizational members want to earn a fair wage for a fair day's job. Whether as individuals or collectives, and whether in a contributive or relative comparison, workers want their organizations to adequately reward them for their labor and adequately recognize them in non-material ways for their contributions. According to Kumari et al., "managers need to ensure that people working under their supervision are happy and satisfied 2021, p. 415) and distributive justice plays an important role in this endeavor. A keen awareness and regular practice of distributive justice will help a manager ascertain that her subordinates are fairly rewarded and recognized for their labor. Kumari et al. (2021) empirically supported the claim that both motivation and a fair reward system, which distributes, among other things,

small favors, bonuses, praise, and appreciation, are instrumental in boosting employees' performance. By regularly practicing distributive justice, managers stand a good chance of earning the trust and respect that will help them gain followers.

If distributive justice is an important practice for managers seeking to transform subordinates into followers, the question is: *what specific actions could a manager take to ensure distributive justice?* To ensure distributive justice, a manager will benefit significantly from implementing the following literature-based actions.

**4.1.2.1 Enforce an Equitable Reward Distribution Method.** The keyword here is *equity*, consistent with the Equity Theory of Stacy Adams. To transform subordinates into followers, a manager should consistently practice equitable distribution of rewards, compensation, and recognition based on a well-calculated ratio of subordinates' input to output. The extent of specialized skills and the amount of labor expended in performing work should always be fairly considered and compensated in the input-output ratio computation. This implies that based on input, output should be fairly assessed and rewarded, and workers with similar outputs should be similarly rewarded. For example, Andy and Stephanie work on an assembly line. Andy works 25 hours each week, while Stephanie works 35 hours per week. If the job pays \$20 per hour, Andy will feel equitably compensated by earning \$500 per week, and he will not feel undercompensated or unfairly compensated compared to Stephanie, who earns \$700 per week. What each of these two workers has earned is fair, even though one earns much more than the other. If Andy wishes to earn what Stephanie earns, he simply needs to work the same number of hours as Stephanie, and the opportunity to do so should be available to him for individual contributive justice. This is the point of *equity* in reward distribution in Stacey Adam's (1965, 1963) equity theory.

It is important to keep in mind that the calculation of input-output (or performance-reward) ratios may be complicated by the characteristics of job structure, thereby making the ratios complex and challenging to calculate with unquestionable precision. A Job with a large task range, as a standard rule, implies more work than one with a narrow task range (Gibson et al., 2012). However, there is an exception to this standard. Sometimes, a complex job with a narrow task range may demand more complex skills, work, and labor than a non-complex job with a large range. When this happens, jobs with high complexity and a narrow range will have a lower input-output ratio than jobs with less complexity and a larger task range (Tolbert & Hall, 2016). This means that managers must be conversant with and considerate of job complexities in their reward systems to avoid undercompensating workers who perform highly complex tasks that yield lower output volumes. What is important to keep in mind and regularly practice is to compensate and recognize performance in a way that makes subordinates feel fairly compensated and recognized for their job performance relative to the demands of their tasks and their outputs compared to their referent workers in the same command group. When a worker can say, "for what I do and the time I put into it, I am well compensated," he/she has experienced distributive justice under the manager.

**4.1.2.2 Be transparent with reward criteria.** Workers are likely to feel happy when they know the criteria for determining compensation, recognition, and other rewards. Hence,

performance criteria for reward distribution should be transparent. When reward and recognition criteria are transparent and openly communicated, they contribute to building trust in an organization's reward system (Khan et al., 2023; Deschamps et al., 2016; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Suárez-Acosta, 2014). When the criteria are fair, well-publicized, and readily available for verification, workers who want particular rewards and recognition will engage in appropriate behaviors to attain the goals that would earn them the rewards and recognition they seek. This transparency will contribute to the development of employees' internal locus of control and self-efficacy. This means the likelihood that the employee will develop the right attitude and actions to achieve any desired outcomes will increase (Latham et al., 1979). Employees will take action as necessary to achieve the goals that will earn them the rewards they seek when they have a clear understanding of the reward criteria and the certainty that the manager will not change them. This is because transparent performance standards clarify expectations, allowing employees to plan and monitor their progress, leading to improved performance outcomes (Latham et al., 1979).

With a heightened internal locus of control and self-efficacy, employee performance will likely improve, which may be credited, at least in part, to the manager's transparency about reward criteria. A manager who is transparent about the criteria for distributing resources will be considered honest, thereby helping transform subordinates into followers.

*4.1.2.3 Give Valuable Rewards Equitably Relative to Others.* If a reward is intended to stimulate perceptions of distributive justice, the reward must be valuable to employees. This means the value of a reward is determined by the employees who receive it rather than by the manager who gives it. It is also important that employees perceive the reward as fairly distributed; that is, equitably, based on both contributive and relative criteria. For a reward to be valuable, it must be something employees actively seek and fulfill a need for them. Therefore, it must be something other than what employees have already obtained (satisfied needs) (Maslow, 2013). Motivation theories like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Maslow, 2013), Alderfer's ERG Theory (Alderfer, 1972), and Vroom's Expectancy Theory (Vroom, 1964) have asserted that a fulfilled need ceases to motivate. And, as Vroom explained in Expectancy Theory, the greater the value workers attach to a reward, the greater the chances that the reward will encourage greater performance. Therefore, a manager who takes the time to know which rewards are highly valuable to employees and gives them equitably will likely be perceived as fair. Knowing which rewards will satisfy an employee's needs can be difficult, since employees typically don't fully understand their motivations, so asking them will prove unproductive (McClelland, 1988). Therefore, managers must take the time to interact with their subordinates to learn the themes in their stories, discern their motivation, and, consequently, their perceptions of valuable rewards (my emphasis) from those themes (McClelland, 1988). The success in knowing and giving valuable rewards will improve managers' favorability for followership.

*4.1.2.4 Practice Instrumentality.* The concept of instrumentality is derived from the Expectancy Motivation Theory of Victor Vroom (1964). According to Vroom, instrumentality is the extent to which rewards are strictly associated with job performance. When a worker expends labor to achieve an expected outcome in exchange for a reward associated with the



outcome, the worker expects to receive the reward upon satisfactory performance. When the reward is obtained, the worker feels encouraged to expend more labor to attain higher outcomes, so long as the reward is given each time the desired outcomes are achieved. This condition will be true, however, only if two conditions accompany the distribution of rewards. First, rewards are given as a guarantee when employees achieve required outcomes or results, and second, the only way any employee can get a specified reward is after the required antecedent outcomes are achieved (Vroom, 1964). That is, these two conditions are instrumental to obtaining rewards. Managers must not fail to give rewards when required outcomes are achieved, nor must they bend the rules to extend rewards to any worker who has not achieved required outcomes. To distribute organizational rewards in this manner is to practice instrumentality (Vroom, 1964). When managers practice instrumentality as a principle and habit, their subordinates will be motivated to work hard to achieve results that earn them the rewards they seek, since it is clear that no one will obtain rewards unless the qualifying conditions are met. When workers believe that rewards are contingent solely on observable performance outcomes, they are more likely to sustain effort and persistence (Vroom, 1964). The clear link between effort, performance, and reward enhances subordinates' performance efficacy and confidence that their actions will yield valued outcomes (Bandura, 1997; Hsu et al., 2021). Therefore, instrumentality will make employees feel secure and confident about fairness in reward distribution. By practicing instrumentality as a principle, managers stand to gain a reputation for fairness, impartiality, reliability, and trust. These qualities will increase managers' endearment toward their subordinates, thereby enhancing the transformation of subordinates into followers and the endorsement of managers as leaders.

#### *4.1.3 Procedural Justice*

Procedural organizational justice refers to the fairness of the processes used to determine outcomes, including consistent policies, transparency, and opportunities for input in decision-making (Wolfe et al., 2018). It also describes subordinates' perceptions of fairness in such things as organizational policy enforcement, performance assessment methods, and the fairness of the tools used to assess performance (Akanbi & Ofoegbu, 2013). In simple terms, procedural justice is fairness to workers in the procedures of their unit or organization in general.

Organizational procedures are about how things get done in an organization. Matters of organizational procedure include decisions on what to do and how to get it done. Therefore, procedural justice concerns the perceived fairness of the processes and methods (that is, the procedure) used to reach an outcome rather than the outcome itself (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Organizational procedures may include both formal and informal methods, technologies, techniques, consultations, approvals, and documentation of organizational activities. When procedural justice is persistent and effective, it has been strongly linked to increased trust in management, organizational commitment, and good citizenship behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2013). When procedural justice is perceived to prevail in a work group, workers believe that how things are done is fair to them. They believe that their managers are considerate of them in how decisions are made and how work activities are determined within the unit and

organization, leading to greater trust in authority (Lind, 2001).

Managers who make procedural justice a regular part of their work are engaging in a leadership behavior that will likely transform their subordinates into followers. Based on the literature, four behavioral patterns, discussed below, are recommended for managers when relating to subordinates to deliver procedural justice. Fairness with employees in each of the four areas will enhance a manager's image as worthy of following.

*4.1.3.1 Involve Workers in Decision-Making.* An important leadership quality is trustworthiness (Oyinlade, 2006; Oyinlade & Ajuwon, 2017; Oyinlade et al., 2003; Oyinlade & Gellhaus, 2005), and this is expedited when workers are included in decision-making processes. Managers who involve subordinates in decision-making processes not only become trusted but also facilitate the subordinates' commitment to the organization (Benton, 1998). The more frequently subordinates are included in decisions about how and why things are done, the more transparent the decision-making process becomes to them (Benton 1998). When subordinates are actively involved in decision-making with instrumental voice (rather than courtesy voice, in which they are allowed to speak but without influencing decisions), they feel recognized and valued by their manager, consistent with Roberson and Scott's (2024) analysis of instrumental voice. While the involvement of subordinates in decision-making exemplifies organizational democracy, it costs time and slows the decision-making process (Halloran & Benton, 1987). However, the manager gains credibility for employee involvement, with additional benefits for employee motivation and higher job performance. When employees are involved in making organizational decisions, they are not kept in the dark, especially about decisions that will directly affect them (Benton, 1998; Gibson et al., 2012). They will be fully informed that their manager is not working against their interests, and they will have the opportunity to influence decisions in their own self-interest. With the ability to influence organizational decisions for self-interest, they gain the opportunity to protect their interests as well as enhance them. When they can protect and advance their self-interests through their manager's commitment to involve them in decision-making, subordinates are significantly more likely to recognize their manager as a trustworthy person worthy of followership.

*4.1.3.2 Involve Workers in Assessments.* As involvement in decision-making enhances the likelihood that subordinates will become followers, involvement in assessments has a similar effect. Because annual performance reviews are the cornerstone of organizational human resource practice, the performance of all organizational members is periodically assessed for adequacy, typically serving as the main basis for distributing organizational rewards (e.g., promotions, raises, bonuses) and punishments (e.g., probation, demotion, termination). Despite the importance of assessment, organizational units, especially those comprising mainly lower-level or non-professional workers, often adopt the fully top-down assessment method, which is imposed on the employees. Based on the iron law of oligarchy (see Drochon, 2020; Michels, 1962), the top-down assessment method is designed without input from the workers being assessed. The assessment instruments tend to be designed by human resources executives, high-level managers, or, worse still, by outside consultants who are far removed from the nuanced realities of everyday experiences of workers in their particular

units and work groups. Consequently, the assessment process becomes supervisor-centric, unfair, and potentially alien to the workers whose job realities are not fully captured or measured by the instrument designed to assess them.

Certain negative consequences commonly emerge from the top-down supervisor-centric assessment method. For example, Kuvaas et al. (2017) indicated that when performance management is perceived as primarily evaluative and controlling rather than developmental and supportive, it is associated with lower levels of need satisfaction, which, in turn, predicts reduced work engagement and performance. Additionally, Blackman et al. (2022) suggested that without a collaborative dialogue between workers and the assessment design managers, performance management systems often fail, leading to friction and a breakdown in the supervisory relationship, which is a key predictor of employee turnover.

Given the negative consequences of excluding workers from their assessments and the importance of performance assessments for career outcomes, the best way to create fair assessments and achieve procedural justice is to involve workers in developing the criteria and instruments for their own assessments (Benton 1998). And, because of its potential coaching benefits (whether manifest or latent), workers' involvement in assessment processes helps them internalize standards of excellence and proactively manage their careers (Mone & London, 2018). These are compelling reasons why managers should consult with their subordinates to decide what should be assessed and how the assessment should be conducted. Subordinates should also be involved in determining what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable performance and how they are determined. In addition, managers should involve subordinates in how acceptable performance could be rewarded, how unacceptable performance should be remedied, and, if necessary, penalized.

It is recognized that employees may be prone to leniency or harshness in self-ratings, and managers may lack the coaching skills required to facilitate effective negotiation rather than simply deliver judgment. Furthermore, employees may be uncomfortable with self-promotion or open disagreement that may result from being involved in designing their assessment criteria. However, Blackman and his colleagues indicated that these challenges can be mitigated through training, clear rating criteria, and fostering a culture of psychological safety that encourages honest dialogue (Blackman et al., 2022). Psychological safety is a condition in which employees feel secure enough to express themselves without fear of humiliation or retribution (Edmondson & Lei, 2019). Therefore, it is strongly encouraged (by this author) that managers should deeply involve their subordinates in the assessment process and conduct assessments consistently with jointly established standards to deliver procedural justice to their subordinates.

*4.1.3.3 Grant Necessary Accommodations While Being Fair to Others.* Human relations competency skills include recognizing that workers are “whole” human beings rather than cogs in the production wheel (Halloran & Benton, 1987). Because workers are human beings with various life issues and concerns, situations often arise when they request special consideration and accommodations from their managers regarding their job responsibilities. Special accommodations in this regard are outside the legal mandate for reasonable

accommodations for people with disabilities or healthcare conditions. They are non-legally compelled accommodations that may violate the principle of equity and equal treatment of all employees under organizational policies, thereby putting managers in difficult predicaments. They are caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. They want to grant special accommodation requests but do not want to be unfair to other workers who are not making such requests, especially those who might have experienced similar circumstances that necessitated a special request by another subordinate.

A manager who recognizes that the employee is a “whole” human being with needs may grant the request by making some concessions. A viable concession may be that both the manager and the employee work out alternative work arrangements that allow the worker to work on different assignments without being unfair to other workers. Today’s technology, coupled with the desire of managers to accommodate their employees, could be leveraged to create innovative solutions to employees’ work-life conflicting demands. Hence, a manager who recognizes that employees must balance work demands with family responsibilities may accommodate employees’ special concerns such that the personal life needs of employees are not neglected for organizational needs. In fact, when managers recognize and accommodate work-life balance requests, employees have reported lower stress, less emotional exhaustion, higher job satisfaction, and greater organizational commitment; when such balance is unattained, it has led to burnout, reduced performance, and higher turnover intentions (Gragnano et al., 2020). Studies have also shown that when work schedule accommodations were granted by offering two days per week of work from home, attrition was reduced by about one-third, job satisfaction increased, and there was no measurable decline in performance (Bloom et al., 2024). Other benefits of job flexibility accommodations include improved health and reduced psychological distress (Barrero et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). These findings demonstrate that reasonable accommodations, such as adjustments to tasks, job schedules, or environments that enable employees to perform, are essential for inclusion and retention.

While granting accommodations is laudable, managers must be fair to other workers by granting similar concessions when similar requests are made in the interest of procedural justice. Granting concessions to one employee and denying them to another with a similar request will be unfair, partial, and unjust. Procedural unfairness and partiality will only hinder the likelihood of being respected and followed. If a concession is denied to one worker, all similar requests from other workers should be equally denied. This will establish consistency in managerial behavior regardless of the status of any particular subordinate. Fairness and consistency when granting and denying employees’ accommodation requests are important for sustaining procedural justice. However, granting accommodation or making a good-faith effort to grant it, even when it is difficult to do so without violating the principle of fairness to all, demonstrates managerial commitment to supporting workers and promotes the manager’s worthiness for followership.

*4.1.3.4 Demonstrate Respect for Seniority and the Scalar Chain.* Given that distributive and procedural forms of organizational justice center on fairness in the distribution of organizational resources and the procedures of organizational decision-making (Greenberg,

1987; Wolfe et al., 2018), a manager's consideration for seniority and the scalar chain in each of these areas is evidence of organizational justice. For example, if a manager must select a supervisor within a command group and he offers the position to the most senior member of the group, hardly would anyone in the group be upset about not getting the job because such an appointment demonstrates distributive justice. Ignoring seniority norms without transparent reasoning undermines trust and motivation and can increase turnover intentions (Chen et al., 2015) because seniority matters in the workplace, and the recognition of seniority signals respect for the value of the scalar chain and delivers distributive justice to the most senior command group members. Respecting established channels of authority, transparent promotion, seniority norms, and procedural rules contributes to perceptions of organizational justice, which in turn reduces turnover intentions and strengthens commitment (Chen et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2024). However, if the manager bypasses the senior members of the group and meets with a few junior workers, and together they decide to select a supervisor from among the junior workers, both procedural and distributive forms of justice for the senior workers would be violated. Situations like this are likely to lead to negative outcomes, such as alienation, hostility, differential loyalties, and even a lack of concern for the group among the alienated senior workers. These consequences will also likely contribute to weakening group cohesiveness.

Managers who overlook senior members of their command group dismiss the importance of their tenure and experience. To overlook seniority is to ignore and disrespect the contributions of the senior members to building and sustaining a unit. Not only will this sort of managerial behavior produce ill feelings towards the manager, but it will also alienate and discourage senior members from becoming followers. Managers should recognize that when subordinates with seniority become followers, junior subordinates will be encouraged to do the same. In the end, by respecting seniority, the prospect of managers gaining followership from all their subordinates will significantly improve.

In the scenario mentioned above, one fair approach to selecting a supervisor could be to establish a structured procedure for filling a position within the unit that gives senior members proper consideration. Such consideration may include a bureaucratically structured right of first refusal for taking a position based on seniority. This will eliminate the possibility of anyone in the group being side-stepped. The structural design can allow considerations to automatically flow downwards in the scalar chain by seniority (for right of first refusal), regardless of how the manager or anyone else may feel about the next person in line. This system will have the additional benefit of yielding both distributive and procedural forms of justice to those who may not be in the inner circle of power within a unit and could be easily pushed aside from occupational growth opportunities.

When considerations strictly follow a structured seniority line, each employee's right to fair recognition will be preserved. Transparent seniority rules and consistent application reduce uncertainty and foster internalization of norms so that when employees believe the process is fair, they are more likely to accept even unfavorable outcomes and remain committed (Chen et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2024). This is a potential outcome of recognizing senior members of a group with the courtesy of first consultation in group decisions, demonstrating recognition



for their experience and commitment. Eventually, the junior workers, too, will become senior members who will be accorded the respect and full benefits of seniority.

#### *4.1.4 Interactional Justice*

This is the third area of organizational justice for transforming subordinates into followers. Greenberg (2005) described it as fairness in how workers are treated in interpersonal interactions and under organizational policies. It focuses on the quality of interpersonal treatment employees receive from their supervisors, emphasizing respect, dignity, and ethical communication during organizational interactions (Colquitt et al., 2013; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Suárez-Acosta, 2014). Essentially, it is fairness in how managers relate to their subordinates and how subordinates treat one another, especially in the implementation of organizational policies. Interactional justice is present when a manager treats subordinates fairly as they engage in cooperation, exchange, competition, and even conflict. Organizational justice is not a one-directional, manager-to-subordinate behavior. While the manager-to-subordinate interactional direction is most emphasized, interactional justice is fully present in a command group when fair treatment occurs among subordinates and by subordinates towards the manager (see Greenberg, 2005).

Ultimately, like any form of justice, interactional justice can be correctly understood as subjective. It could be subjective, based on a presumed standard of fair treatment in particular circumstances. For example, a standard expectation of fair treatment in a meeting may be that the manager looks at the subordinate who is speaking rather than gazing elsewhere. Looking at the speaker signifies attention, which the subordinate typically accepts as fair treatment in this situation. This can be described as *absolute interactional justice*. It is absolute in the sense that the manager's behavior is fully consistent with the subordinate's fair interactional expectations in a particular circumstance. But it may also be considered fair treatment—and hence interactional justice—if the manager looks away from the speaker, provided this behavior is the same for all speakers. While subordinates may find the manager's behavior rude, unwelcome, or even bizarre, it can be interpreted as interactional justice because it is the same for all subordinates. No subordinate is treated better than another, although they are unsatisfied in the absolute sense with his behavior. Such a situation is classified in this study as *relative interactional justice*. Overall, it may be impossible to establish a universally accepted litmus test to determine interactional justice, as it is largely based on individual and collective interpretations of interactional behaviors between managers and their subordinates, as well as associational behaviors among subordinates. What a manager may perceive as a fair interactional gesture may be scuffed by subordinates as manipulative or an attempt to compensate for past injustices. Hence, the key to achieving interactional justice may lie in managers' ability to consistently make good-faith efforts to be fair in all interactions with subordinates, while also being mindful of the potential for differing interpretations. The extent to which managers are perceived as fair in their interactions with their subordinates is the extent to which they have achieved interactional justice. To improve the likelihood that managers' good-faith interactional efforts will be perceived as interactional justice by subordinates, the following literature-based paragraphs offer specific recommendations for managerial behaviors that may foster this perception.

*4.1.4.1 Readily Grant Audience Equally to All Workers.* Managers who wish to attain interactional justice should readily grant an audience and be equally available to all their subordinates. A manager's ability to grant equal audience to all subordinates by listening to each employee without favoritism is essential for fairness and for converting subordinates into followers. An equal audience promotes *interactional justice* (Colquitt et al., 2013). When subordinates feel equally heard, they perceive their manager as transparent and trustworthy, which enhances job satisfaction, motivation, and overall commitment to the organization (Zhang et al., 2014). Also, equitable access to a manager's attention fosters psychological safety, enabling employees to express ideas, share feedback, and report problems without fear of bias or reprisal (Edmondson & Lei, 2019). This open communication climate enhances creativity, collaborative learning, and problem-solving efficiency. Because equal opportunity for dialogue promotes the belief that unit decisions are inclusive and legitimate, Miao et al (2020) claim it also builds procedural fairness in addition to interactional justice.

As Kim and Beehr (2018) suggested, managers who engage all employees in discussions help reduce power distance and cultivate a participative culture that supports autonomy and shared responsibility. Therefore, when managers consistently devote time and attention to all subordinates, they strengthen relational trust, which, in turn, increases task engagement and performance quality. With greater relational trust and higher task engagement, subordinates become more likely to align with organizational goals because they perceive themselves as valued contributors rather than overlooked cogs in the production machine (Agarwal et al., 2021). In addition to readily granting audience to all subordinates, interactional justice may also require managers to demonstrate respect for all communication from their subordinates. This is especially important when viewed from the standpoint of upward communication, which centers mainly on employees' complaints, requests, verifications of job instructions, work orders, and other forms of important work-related information (see Gibson et al., 2012). This indicates that when workers seek an audience with their managers, they mostly do so to address stressful work-related concerns (Gibson et al., 2012; Tolbert & Hall, 2016) for which they may need relief. So, being denied a timely audience with their manager will be tantamount to dismissing their concern as unmeritorious of the manager's attention. Also, granting unequal access to subordinates indicates that certain members of a command group are more important or valuable to the unit or the manager than others. Both managerial actions are antithetical to procedural justice and counterproductive to fostering subordinates' followership.

*4.1.4.2 Avoid Participating in Inner Circle Cliques.* In addition to granting equal audience to all subordinates, to maintain interactional justice, managers should avoid participating in inner circle cliques with their subordinates. This is not to say that managers should not have friends in the workplace. The point is that managers should always maintain an atmosphere in which no worker is perceived to have a closer relationship with them than others. As Psychiatrist Jean Kim claimed, cliquish behavior causes resentment, dissent, and splits in groups (Kim, 2016). Essentially, being a part of a clique is not in the best interest of leader-aspiring managers who need to cultivate harmony and trust between themselves and their subordinates.

If a manager desires an intimate command group relationship for the purpose and privileges of high group solidarity, it is advised that such intimacy be developed and maintained with all members of the group. Managers should strive to be friends with all workers to a similar degree of closeness. Managers who form cliques or show preference toward select subordinates risk undermining fairness and cohesion within their teams. Cliquish behavior can foster perceptions of distributive injustice and interactional discrimination, which can erode morale and trust. So, if a manager is unable to have intimate relationships with some members of the group, it is best to refrain from having them with any member of the group. Each member of a command group should see the manager as a neutral party in all group affairs, so that no one feels excluded from inner-circle dealings. When employees feel excluded from inner circles, they often resort to lower organizational commitment, decreased motivation, and higher turnover intentions (Ferris et al., 2008; Howard et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Also, when managers align with a subset of employees, communication channels become restricted and biased, silencing diverse perspectives (Kane et al., 2019). This selective communication can cause decision-making blind spots and perpetuate groupthink, as potentially critical feedback from excluded employees is ignored. Over time, the organization loses valuable input that might have improved innovation or prevented operational errors (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2008). In the end, the divisions among employees also disrupt collaboration and weaken collective identity, thereby reducing overall team performance.

When managers do not have differential associations with their subordinates, it is easier for subordinates to see them as independent of the inner circle's influence when decisions are made, especially those that may be unpopular with some members of the command group. Managers must be trusted to be fair with all their subordinates, so having an inner circle of employees is antithetical to building and maintaining trust. Because perceptions become realities (Cooley, 1902), even the appearance of the manager as a member of an inner circle with some employees can cause other employees to lose trust in the manager's commitment to equal treatment. Beyond hindering trust, when a manager is cliquish with an inner circle of subordinates, the likelihood that inner-circle members will enjoy unearned privileges over other subordinates increases. For example, inner-circle members are likely to advise the manager on issues that are imposed on the rest of the group. Hence, the decisions and preferences of the inner circle become those of the entire command group. When this happens, the inner circle has become a dominant coalition within the command group (see Tolbert & Hall, 2016). Given their special and close relationship, the manager is also more likely to reward inner-circle members with more unit resources than accorded to others, consistent with distributive injustice (see Tolbert & Hall, 2016). These resources may include extra payments for normal job performance, preferential time schedules, early notification of managerial decisions, recognition and commendation for average job performance, unearned superior job evaluations, and non-meritorious recommendations for promotions.

A manager who aspires to become a leader should avoid the appearance of belonging to an inner-circle clique. The actual or perceived cliquishness of the manager with an inner circle will consequently erode the trust that is needed for the transformation of workers into

followers. Avoiding cliquishness safeguards impartiality, transparency, and role-model behavior (Brown et al., 2023). A manager who maintains professional distance from favoritism upholds moral standards and fosters an inclusive work environment where rewards and recognition are merit-based. The theme of the discussion on management to this point is that a core tenet of effective management is the consistent practice of fairness. Managers who resist involvement in cliques can resist the pressure to favor clique members while encouraging inclusivity and creating higher perceptions of fairness, which directly correlate with enhanced employee engagement, trust, and commitment (Colquitt et al., 2001; Walumbwa & Schaubroeck, 2009). This body of evidence confirms that maintaining neutrality and accessibility to all employees is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic leadership competency that drives tangible positive outcomes for the organization.

*4.1.4.3 Readily Share Successes with the Group.* The main reason for creating an organization with multiple workers is to achieve goals that cannot be achieved acting alone (Gibson et al., 2012). Based on organizational factors such as personnel size, purpose, technology, and the demand for organizational output, organizational members are arranged into a cooperating structure comprising workgroups, departments, and divisions to accomplish organizational goals (Tolbert & Hall, 2016). In essence, to achieve organizational goals, workers cooperate and depend on one another in performing the various individual and collective tasks that fulfill the goals of particular units under particular managers, who are positioned to showcase the output of their units. They are the official representatives of their units at organizational meetings, where they make presentations to higher-level executives about the successes and challenges of their units. When their units succeed, they are praised and accorded good recognition. And when their units are unsuccessful, they are mostly blamed and even punished as warranted. Middle-level managers are especially prone to being sacked for the poor performance of their units (Tolbert & Hall, 2016).

The path to leadership requires managers to always remember that, while they are instrumental to the success of their units through their effective coordination of work, the output of the unit represents the collective labor of all members of the unit. Therefore, managers should share collective group success with the subordinates to communicate that every role is valuable and appreciated. As Ryan and Deci (2017) concluded, recognizing each member's contribution satisfies the basic psychological needs for competence and relatedness, thereby enhancing engagement and team cohesion. Research by Kim and Beehr (2018) also suggests that equitable recognition within groups correlates with higher levels of collective efficacy and job satisfaction, as team members perceive fairness in reward distribution. Also, managers who attribute success to group efforts cultivate a shared sense of purpose, which enhances collaboration and reduces counterproductive work behavior (Colquitt et al., 2013). And when subordinates perceive fairness in recognition, they are more likely to engage in helping behaviors, trust their manager, and exhibit commitment to group goals (Li & Cropanzano, 2009). So, it behooves managers to always share collective recognition with their command groups because a group-centered recognition is not just a moral practice but also a strategic managerial behavior that fosters sustainable performance and trust, which may accrue to the followership worthiness of managers. Even when personally singled out

and praised or given any special award for a job well done in their units, managers should avoid accepting praise and recognition for themselves.

While it is not leadership behavior to take credit for a group's good performance, it is also negative to blame group members for poor unit performance. A manager who wishes to gain followership in the face of poor unit performance should take full responsibility for the unit. This is a form of absorbing uncertainties (see Gibson et al., 2012). In this form, managers take full responsibility for the poor performance of their units and for failing to recognize structural performance hindrances early enough to mitigate them. If anyone is to be blamed and punished, it is leadership behavior to step up, take all the blame and punishment, to shield subordinates from any harm. Behavior like this will increase the likelihood that subordinates will feel psychologically safe with their managers, which, as mentioned earlier, enhances followership.

*4.1.4.4 Readily Intervene to Correct Interactional Injustice.* Managers should readily prevent and correct interactional injustice within their units. Interactional injustice involves disrespect, lack of transparency, or unfair interpersonal treatment among coworkers (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt et al., 2013). Because work is a social event that takes place through group interactions, various forms of injustice often occur among group members (Bies & Moag, 1986; Colquitt et al., 2013). Failure to intervene and stop an injustice on time may be a fast track to employee dissatisfaction with (and disapproval of) a manager, but early intervention requires impartiality from managers, especially when they are friends with subordinates who engage in oppressive incivility against others. Managers who correct injustices without fear or favor exemplify ethical leadership quality grounded in fairness, integrity, and moral courage (Brown & Treviño, 2016). By acting impartially, such managers model the ethical value of interactional justice, consistent with research findings that employees under ethical leaders exhibit higher moral awareness, organizational trust, and prosocial motivation (Kalshoven et al., 2022), thereby strengthening managerial credibility. According to DeConinck (2020), subordinates are more likely to become followers and to respect and follow leaders who enforce rules consistently for justice. When managers correct injustice regardless of the parties involved, they earn moral legitimacy, which enhances their authority and influence.

Managers who openly intervene to prevent or stop interactional injustice will also foster the psychological safety necessary for participation in unit activities (Edmondson & Lei, 2019). With psychological safety, employees gain the confidence that they will not be punished, humiliated, rejected, shunned, or embarrassed for speaking up in a meeting or making a contribution to a project (Edmondson, 1999). Managers who openly signal disapproval of interactional injustice communicate to their subordinates the unacceptability of this behavior and simultaneously make their subordinates feel psychologically safe from becoming its victims. When employees see a manager intervene fairly, they typically interpret this as support for dignity and inclusion, thereby reducing anxiety and fostering open communication, creativity, and trust (Li & Cropanzano, 2009). In contrast, when injustice persists uncorrected, subordinates may engage in silent behavior, passive resistance, or disengagement, all of which harm team productivity (Kim & Beehr, 2018).



Ultimately, managerial interventions that prevent interactional incivility and reinforce interactional justice will enhance employees' self-expression and participation in group activities without fear of retaliation, ridicule, or dismissal for voicing opinions, especially those that may be unpopular within a unit or differ from the manager's views. This will encourage full membership participation in organizational life. Managers who preserve interactional justice for all their subordinates and who intervene to restore and maintain it, when necessary, would gain their subordinates' trust, respect, and admiration and, consequently, earn their followership.

## **5. Conclusion**

While management is important for the performance of organizational functions, leadership has unique qualities that elevate employee satisfaction, commitment, and performance beyond ordinary performance expectations. This means that leadership benefits from the infusion of management practices, especially at the unit level (Azad et al., 2017; Deng et al., 2023). The tandem of management and leadership suggests that organizations benefit when managers become leaders by developing relational skills that enable them to balance efficiency with inspiration, structure with adaptability, and compliance with growth, thereby earning followership among their subordinates (McGarity et al., 2020; Hølge-Hazelton et al., 2021). To gain followership and become leaders, this study recommends treating organizational justice as a relational competency and discusses specific organizational justice behaviors for managers to help transform their subordinates into followers. It is only after subordinates have become followers that they confer leadership on managers.

Organizational justice is a highly valued quality employees seek from their organization, managers, and coworkers. The core characteristic of justice is fairness; hence, fairness is the central measure of justice. How employees perceive fairness from their managers will shape how they assess their managers for leadership through their followership. This means that to become a leader, a manager must practice fairness regularly. If workers expect to be treated fairly, it is wise for managers to meet that expectation. But fairness must not be understood as merely being nice to subordinates. It requires understanding the structural processes by which it can be done regularly, as discussed in this article.

It is important that managers who aspire to become leaders understand the various forms of organizational justice. Becoming a leader should be an intentional endeavor for all managers, given the additional benefits of leadership over managerial effectiveness. Hence, managers, as aspiring leaders, should understand what comprises individual and collective justice as well as the differences between contributive and relative justice. With a clear understanding of these forms of justice, it will behoove managers to learn and regularly practice the behavioral patterns that constitute distributive, procedural, and interactional forms of justice recommended and explained in this study.

Managers should remember that justice is about the fair treatment of everyone in an entire group, not just a select few. Justice implies that everyone will be treated fairly; hence, it is unjust when one person is treated better or worse than another within a command group. The defining characteristic of justice is fairness to individuals and collectives across all areas of

organizational life, anchored in the structures of resource distribution, decision-making processes, and social interactions. Managers enhance their likelihood of becoming leaders by establishing and maintaining a structurally based delivery of organizational justice. When managers become leaders, employees are more likely to experience job satisfaction, higher productivity, and stronger organizational commitment, creating a synergy that leads to high organizational success.

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