

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Justice, Morality, and Social Responsibility

edited by Stephen W. Gilliland, Dirk Steiner, & Daniel P. Skarlicki
(Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008, 318 pages)

In exchange for a commitment to our employer's goals, we expect to work in an environment where there is a sense of trust and fairness. There is no shortage of books offering managers prescriptions for creating this environment; however, *Justice, Morality, and Social Responsibility* is not one of them. Those looking for a cookbook approach to creating trust and fairness may not get past its preface, which is a pity because what they would find in many of the 10 articles that follow is a kind of background knowledge that helps us to appreciate the complexities of creating a healthy workplace. If there is a common theme running through this text, it is that morality, justice, and trust matter—they matter so much that people find ways to reject policies, procedures, and treatment that are at odds with their sense of right and wrong. Unaware of the complexities of the issues they face, well-meaning managers and healthy workplace committees find their efforts fail to make a difference; indeed, they may make matters worse.

Stephen Gilliland, Dirk Steiner, and Daniel Skarlicki have brought together a group of researchers who challenge existing theory and explore new approaches to this field of study. The contributors come out of the field of management, frequently specializing in organizational behaviour and applied psychology. They seem to share the conviction that by advancing research on morality and justice in organizations, they might improve what managers do and how they do it.

At first I thought I would have to reach back to my studies of Kant, Kohlberg, and Rawls to read this text. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that was not necessary. Although this is not an introduction to its subject, the authors are careful to define their terms, and the writing is remarkably accessible. Undoubtedly, a critical reading of these essays would be enhanced by formal studies on morality and justice, but I think anyone who has been deeply troubled by witnessing (or being the victim of) injustice in an organization is well prepared for this text.

I suggest beginning with Linda Skitka and Christopher Bauman's article, "Is morality always an organizational good?" They introduce a range of perspectives on what determines our sense of justice and morality: Are we driven only by our self-interest? Does justice always matter to us or does it depend on our attitudes toward a given situation? When might moral behaviour have a negative effect on people and create a "hidden cost" for an organization? In addition to posing such questions, they discuss how differences in our sense of fairness influence how we deal with organizational policies and procedures that conflict with our convictions. If our sense

of fairness is being violated, the repercussions can be serious, leading to retaliation, resignations, and efforts to undermine leaders and supervisors' authority. Employees may refuse to work with those with whom they disagree. Skitka and Bauman argue that we are less tolerant of moral diversity than other forms of diversity. After reading this article, it is clear that "doing the right thing" requires careful consideration.

Typically, I scan books looking for intriguing articles relevant to my concerns. That technique did not work well here, as several articles with fascinating titles and abstracts turned out to be extensive literature reviews, followed by attempts to construct new typologies. One example is Jason Colquitt and Jessica Mueller's "Justice, trustworthiness, and trust: A narrative review," which is a very relevant topic but the authors are interested in the fine distinctions between trustworthiness and trust found in the literature and connecting this with the literature on justice. Although valuable for the specialist, for someone without the background, these articles were too dense and difficult to relate to practical concerns.

Some gems were more accessible to the non-specialist, however. The opening essay by Roger Folger and Daniel Skarlicki, "The evolutionary bases of deontic justice," is such a gem. Deontic justice means that people have moral concerns that precede any given situation: we are motivated by a sense of duty and strive to do the right thing regardless of personal gain. How do we acquire this sense? Folger and Skarlicki propose that moral behaviour has an evolutionary basis. We require social coordination for both individual and collective survival. Selfishness is counterproductive. Individualism may run counter to an "evolutionary intelligence" (p. 56) that brings us together for the sake of our personal and collective well-being.

I was also intrigued by Debra Shapiro and Associates' essay "'Rude,' 'uncivil,' or 'disrespectful' treatment in the workplace: What's in a name?" Their principal concern is the proliferation of labels used to describe negative behaviour. The explosion of terminology serves to cloud issues and makes it difficult for employers to act decisively when faced with inappropriate behaviour.

Do not set this volume aside without reading Thierry Nadisic's "The Robin Hood effect." It strikes at the heart of an issue that is all too familiar. Nadisic calls it "invisible remedies" or "corrective justice" (p. 127). The supervisor knows you have been treated unfairly but instead of confronting the actual problem, you get bought off with some perks: don't worry if a deadline is missed, turn a blind eye to coming in late, and take home some goodies from the office. Organizations often rely on these invisible remedies, especially in situations where people feel they will not get senior management support if they seek substantive remedies. The aim is to compensate not correct injustices; of course, the consequence of doing so is to create a greater sense of harm among other employees and send the message that the organization is not interested in correcting systemic injustice.

Another important read is the essay by Keith James and Associates, "Organizational environmental justice with a Navajo (Diné) Nation case example." If we are going to act on the notion of environmental justice, we need to take seriously indigenous world views that apply morality and justice to the non-human world: to "go beyond the 'justice to all (people)' conception of environmental justice to a 'justice for all of creation' conception" (p. 268). Given the environmental impact of all organizations, this study poses a challenge for the full scope of studies on workplace morality and justice.

Since I am unfamiliar with the contributors' extensive literature reviews, it is outside my competence to critique the research, which is something that would normally cause me to set such a book aside. It is to the editors' credit that I did not. In part this was accomplished by useful summaries in the preface and by Stephen Gilliland's final chapter, which identifies key

questions derived from what is discussed in the previous nine chapters. In part, this book works because it both advances research and considers matters we experience directly.

A justice organization is not merely one in which employees feel a sense of trust and are treated fairly; it is also a place where people believe in the work they do. Continuing education operates in a market economy, and we face increasing demands to go beyond cost recovery and generate revenue for our home institutions. In this context, how do questions of morality, justice, and social responsibility come to bear on the everyday work of designing and marketing programs and recruiting students? We all feel pressure to increase a program's target audience. Does this pressure lead us to make decisions that could be somehow fundamentally unethical? If so, can a workplace be a healthy place if people feel that financial considerations trump ethics? I think not, and the contributors to *Justice, Morality, and Social Responsibility* share this view. Their studies suggest to me that in order to achieve a just workplace, we must engage in ethical practice. Nothing less will do.

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