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## Effectively Communicating Ethics Using Procedural and Distributive Justice: An Exploratory Study

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Yolonda L. Holmes - Echols

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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Effectively Communicating Ethics Using Procedural and Distributive Justice:

An Exploratory Study

by

Yolonda L. Holmes-Echols

MA, Webster University, 2011

BS, Morris College, 2009

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

May, 2022

## Abstract

Organizational justice influences employees' citizenship behaviors and performance. Work environments characterized by unfair or unjust treatment are associated with low job commitment, dissatisfaction, demotivation, nonperformance, and high turnover. There was a need to explore the perception of variable justice in healthcare organizations grappling with a perennial shortage of skilled health professionals and high levels of turnover. In addition, reports of injustices in nonprofits in the health care sector made it challenging for the organizations to attract and retain volunteers. This qualitative exploratory study investigated how employees of the Mercy Clinic perceived fairness and how variable justice exists as part of the institution's organizational behavior. The study was conducted among a sample of six employees from the clinic. Secondary data were collected from peer-reviewed articles, whereas primary data were collected from the participants using an open-ended interview prompt. The data were analyzed through content analysis to identify emerging themes. The findings showed that the participants associated the clinic with a justice and fairness and effective leadership. However, incidences of preferential treatment were reported especially in relation to hiring choices. As per the findings, the clinic's leaders should hire competent workers who can perform their roles as expected and punish social loafers. Leaders of non-profit organizations should embrace fair decision making procedures to promote justice and inspire employees to continue providing services to the target underserved communities; thereby, promoting positive social change.

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## Dedication

This project is dedicated to my husband, children, and parents, who supported me from day one. Thank you for your prayers, patience, understanding, and your willingness to take this doctoral journey with me. Special thanks to my committee for your dedication in ensuring that I wrote an exemplary project that will one day be a part of future empirical evidence that will offer a strong foundation on organizational justice.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my family members, committee, friends, and Mercy Clinic employees, who willingly helped me reach this point in my academic journey. Thank you for believing in me and seeing the potential of my research project and its potential to create social change. May God bless every one of you.

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## Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

### **Introduction to the Client and the Problem**

Organizational justice is a multidimensional construct that denotes the fairness of distribution of outcomes, processes in allocation of outcomes, and interpersonal relationships at the workplace (Mengstie, 2020). Organizational justice manifests in four dimensions: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice. Distributive justice focuses on the fairness of outcomes such as pay and promotions based on workers' expertise and contributions. In contrast, procedural justice concentrates on the fairness of the procedures followed in allocating outcomes (Mengstie, 2020). Interpersonal justice focuses on whether leaders respectfully treat subordinates.

Mercy Clinic (pseudonym) is a nonprofit and a Christian primary care charity clinic. Volunteer physicians run the operations at the clinic by treating patients who cannot afford medical insurance free of charge. As per the clinic's website, the facility has served Florence and Williamsburg counties in South Carolina for 25 years. Nonprofit organizations, such as Mercy Clinic, rely on volunteers to achieve the organizational purpose. For instance, approximately 44,000 employees and volunteers provide services in the clinic's 45 acute care and specialty hospitals. Improving organizational justice and fairness would help healthcare organizations, such as Mercy Clinic, struggling with human capital-related challenges to understand how Mercy Clinic employees perceive fairness and gain insights into variable justice that exists as part of their organizational behavior. Nonprofits that rely on volunteers are negatively impacted by perceptions of injustice or unfairness since such views could damage their image and make it

challenging to access human resources (Pan et al., 2018). Failure to attract qualified volunteers and employees would hamper service delivery to underserved populations that rely on the clinic.

Organizational justice has a significant impact on employees' citizenship attitudes and efficiency. Previous researchers indicated that work environments with unfair or unjust treatment are characterized by low job commitment, dissatisfaction, demotivation, nonperformance, high turnover intentions, and actual turnover among employees (Ismail, 2020). The concept of fairness dictates that equal individuals should receive the same treatment, and the same rules should be applied to everyone.

Organizational justice is exemplified through distributive and procedural justice, which are distinct but highly related constructs (Folger, 1987). Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes or resource allocation, whereas procedural justice is the fairness of rules and decision processes that determine outcomes (Lucas et al., 2015).

Previous researchers indicated a complex relationship between distributive and procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1998; Tyler, 1998). Individual difference perspective suggests that persons may be characterized according to their tendencies to perceive outcomes and allocations and rules and processes as fair and deserved (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Lucas et al., 2015; Pan et al., 2018). Individuals may use outcomes as an indicator of procedural fairness (Lind & Lissak, 1985). Perceptions of procedural justice may also enhance the perceived fairness of the outcomes they produce (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Not only does procedural justice have a stronger impact when an outcome is unfair, but distributive justice has a stronger impact when a procedure is unethical (Schminke et al.,

1997). People draw similar distinctions between processes and outcomes as they attempt to determine what is ethical (Schminke et al., 1997). Pan et al. (2018) emphasized that organizational justice significantly impacts workers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions toward their organizations. For instance, procedural justice affects employees' trust in the management, work engagement, knowledge sharing, and innovative work behavior.

The health care sector is dealing with many challenges, including an aging population, an increase in chronic diseases, novel funding models, and changes in worker expectations (Brandis et al., 2016). The health care sector is also grappling with a perennial shortage of skilled healthcare workers due to high levels of turnover by an aging workforce, poor image of healthcare professions, and inability to cope with work demands among some practitioners (Brandis et al., 2016). There is a need to rethink the strategies adopted by healthcare organizations to manage their employees (Brandis et al., 2016). Many healthcare organizations fail in this task due to failure to consider employee perceptions of the work environment, the management, job satisfaction (Songstsad et al., 2011). The perception of variable justice is a crucial determiner of employment outcomes in organizations.

Ethics determine whether the principles of equity, fairness, and objectivity are applied during decision-making (Brandis et al., 2016; Schweitzer & Gibson, 2008). Despite the importance of organizational justice, fairness, and ethics, there is a paucity of research regarding these elements, particularly from the perspective of nonprofit healthcare organizations. Previous researchers have only focused on aspects such as

diversity and inclusion (Walker, 2019), diversity and equality (Sharma & Nisar, 2016), and transparency and accountability (Ortega-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Few researchers have investigated ethics in nonprofits (Rhode & Packel, 2009; Tortia, 2006). In this project, I explored how Mercy Clinic employees, a nonprofit healthcare organization, perceive fairness, how variable justice manifests in the institution's decision-making, and how ethics are communicated across the organization. I also explored how leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors create fairness among employees at the nonprofit.

### **Problem Statement**

Negative employment outcomes, such as high turnover, are detrimental to nonprofit health organizations such as Mercy Clinic, which rely heavily on volunteers to deliver services to the needy. Reports of injustices in such organizations make it difficult for them to attract or retain volunteers, thereby negatively affecting service delivery (Brandis et al., 2016). However, despite the importance of organizational justice, no studies have investigated the perception of fairness, particularly from the perspective of the employees in nonprofit healthcare organizations. In this study, I explored how fairness is perceived in such institutions to close this research gap. By understanding employees' perception of fairness, the manifestation of variable justice in decision-making procedures, and the influence of leadership efficacy and ethics on fairness, nonprofit healthcare organizations could implement strategies for improving organizational justice and employment outcomes. According to Van Dijke et al. (2020), a basic tenet of organizational justice is that employees' beliefs and behaviors are influenced by the fairness of their treatment in the workplace. Workers rely on fairness



information as a simple (and imperfect) decision heuristic to determine whether they can trust authorities not to exploit them.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory project was to investigate how employees of Mercy Clinic perceive fairness, how variable justice exists as part of the institution's organizational behavior, and how ethics are communicated across the organization. I also explored how leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors create fairness among employees at the nonprofit. I based the project on the following questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do Mercy Clinic employees perceive fairness?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do the clinic's decision-making procedures create variable justice?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How are ethics communicated in the clinic?

Research Question 4 (RQ4): How do leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors promote fairness in the clinic?

Nonprofit organizations such as Mercy Clinic rely on volunteers to achieve their purpose. For instance, the clinic has many employees and volunteers who offer services in its acute care and specialty hospitals (Mercy Clinic, 2021). By improving organizational justice and fairness, healthcare organizations such as Mercy Clinic could develop measures for overcoming human capital-related challenges such as high turnover, low job commitment, and nonperformance. Nonprofits that rely on volunteers are negatively impacted by perceptions of injustice or unfairness because such views could damage their image and make it difficult to access human resources. In addition,

failure to attract qualified volunteers and employees would hamper service delivery to underserved populations that rely on the clinic.

### **Nature of the Administrative Study**

I used a qualitative exploratory methodology to conduct research on how fairness is perceived by the employees of Mercy Clinic and provide information on variable justice that exists as a part of their organizational behavior. The methodology is used to understand human experiences, perspectives, and attitudes towards a research phenomenon (Koleski, 2017). I used a qualitative methodology to develop an in-depth exploration of Mercy Clinic employees' perceptions of fairness in the organization. Further, an exploratory design was suitable for the project because I was able to conduct a broad-ranging and systematic investigation of the perception of fairness in the clinic by allowing the employees the opportunity to provide descriptions to understand the manifestation and significance of organizational justice in the facility. A qualitative exploratory design enables researchers to acquire a detailed description of the research phenomenon based on participants' perspectives (Hunter et al., 2019; Levitt et al., 2018).

In this project, I used secondary and primary qualitative data. I derived secondary data from recent, peer-reviewed journal articles on organizational justice. I collected primary data from a convenience sample of 15 employees from Mercy Clinic using an open-ended interview. Qualitative researchers use small sample sizes to support the in-depth analysis fundamental to studies of this nature (Vasileiou et al., 2018). I analyzed the data using content analysis to answer the practice-focused questions. I used the data to address the knowledge gap relating to the perception of fairness in the clinic.

### **Significance**

For Mercy Clinic to achieve its organizational goals, the employees' involvement at every level within the organization would be crucial. According to De Clereq and Pereira (2020), employees who rely on fair organizational procedures can better apply the insights gained from peer interactions to develop new ideas for organizational improvement. In addition, employees can use these procedures as guidelines to identify areas in which the insights are most needed.

This exploratory study may benefit the leaders at Mercy Clinic by ensuring they understand whether their leadership and decision-making procedures are perceived as fair by their subordinates. The study may also benefit employees at the facility because the employees will have the opportunity to make recommendations on how organizational justice and ethics can be improved. Consequently, the project findings may inform positive social change at the facility and other organizations by including information regarding measures that can be implemented to create a just work environment for workers.

### **Summary**

Organizational justice is important in firms due to its significant impact on employment outcomes among workers. Healthcare organizations are struggling with many human resource-related challenges, including an aging workforce and high turnover (Brandis et al., 2016). Such challenges also affect nonprofit healthcare organizations which rely on volunteers to achieve their service delivery goals. As a result, organizations have been forced to adopt novel approaches to managing their workforces

(Brandis et al., 2016). Organizational justice is one of the critical areas of consideration in nonprofits because reports of unfairness would be detrimental to their image and ability to attract volunteers (Pan et al., 2018). Unfortunately, there is a lack of research evidence on how employees in nonprofit healthcare organizations perceive organizational justice and fairness. In this qualitative exploratory project, I investigated how employees of Mercy Clinic perceive fairness, how variable justice manifests in the institution's decision-making procedures, and how ethics are communicated across the organization. I also explored how leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors create fairness among employees at the nonprofit. I used secondary and primary qualitative data that I analyzed through content analysis. Chapter 2 includes a discussion of concepts, models, and theories relating to organizational justice.

## Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

### **Introduction**

Organizational justice is a crucial concept for nonprofit and for-profit organizations (Pan et al., 2018). Healthcare organizations such as Mercy Clinic are experiencing different human capital-related challenges such as high turnover among workers. As a result, organizations have been forced to re-evaluate their workforce management strategies. Research indicated that perceptions of justice significantly influence employee outcomes such as turnover (Brandis et al., 2016; Ismail, 2020; Pan et al., 2018; Schweitzer & Gibson, 2008). However, there is a paucity of research focusing on the perception of fairness, especially from nonprofit healthcare organizations. In this qualitative exploratory project, I investigated how fairness was perceived in Mercy Clinic. I was guided by the following research questions:

**RQ1.** How do Mercy Clinic employees perceive fairness?

**RQ2.** How do the clinic's decision-making procedures create variable justice?

**RQ3.** How are ethics communicated in the clinic?

**RQ4.** How do leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors promote fairness in the clinic?

In Chapter 2, I cover the conceptual frameworks relating to organizational justice and fairness. The concepts include organization behavior, fairness theory, and procedural and distributive justice, among others. I also review the relevance of organizational justice to public organizations and the organizational background and context of Mercy Clinic and my role in the project.

## **Conceptual Framework**

I used evidence-based studies as the framework for this exploratory qualitative study. The previous research I present in the section addressed Mercy Clinic's organizational behavior, which introduces the basic principles of human behavior that an effective manager can use when managing individuals and groups within this organization. Previous researchers established links between a leader's mindfulness, a leader's behaviors, and the follower outcomes (Schuh et al., 2019). In addition, organizations increasingly promote ethically responsible leadership behaviors such as procedural justice as a means of improving employee well-being and performance (Schuh et al., 2019). For instance, Gaillard and DeCorte (2020) stated that an organization that does not maintain and mitigate its ethics might be tolerating unethical behavior. Gaillard and DeCorte explained how employees' perception about working in an organization with a robust ethical culture often base their decision-making on the organization's values. Gaillard and DeCorte expressed how individuals within an organization, whether employees, managers, or senior leaders, violate a provision of law, regulation, policy, or procedure are both unethical, unlawful, and noncompliant.

### **Fairness Theory**

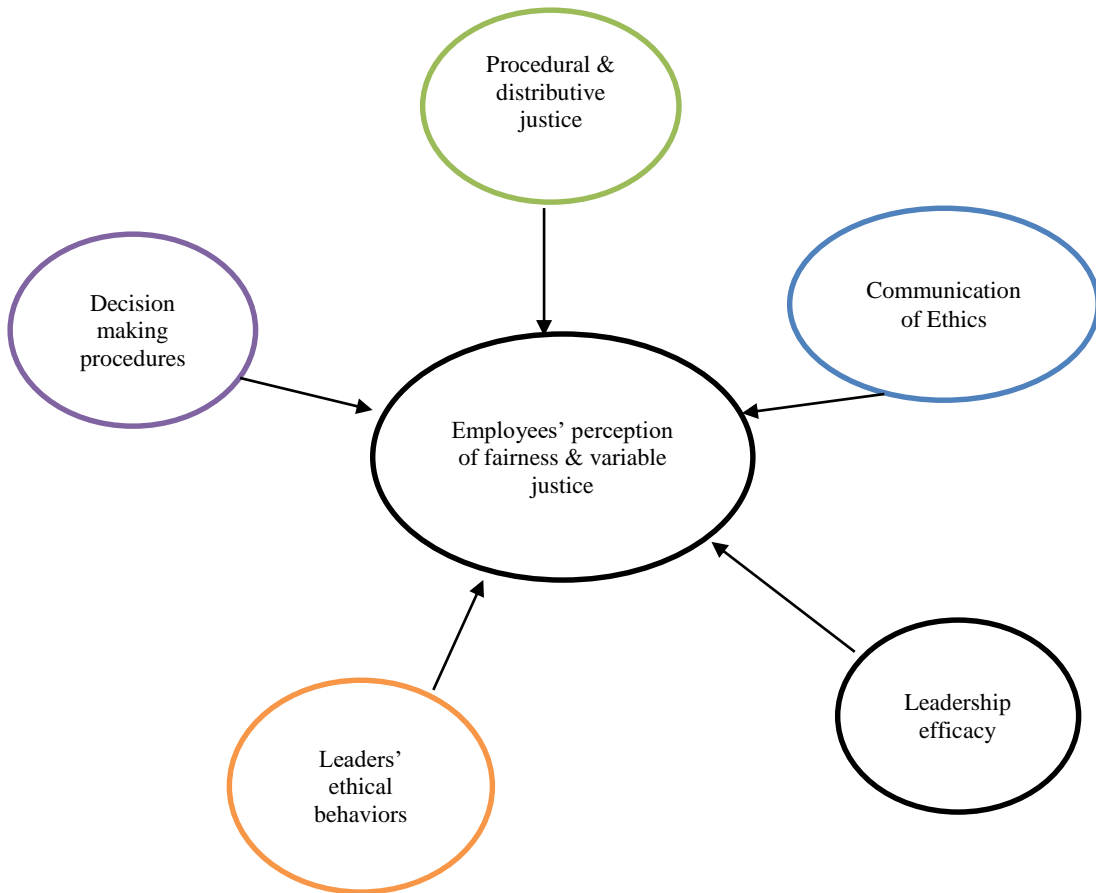
The fairness theory emphasizes how people appraise adversity using counterfactual cognition to form procedural fairness judgments (Van Dijke et al., 2020). Members of an organization rely on fairness information as a simple (and imperfect) decision heuristic to determine whether they can trust authorities not to exploit them. Fairness theory indicates that fairness judgments are founded on the decision-making

assignment of blame or accountability (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). The theory indicates that evaluation of the fairness of a situation is accomplished through counterfactual judgments that take place when certain conditions are fulfilled. According to the theory, the three fundamental elements for a situation to be considered unfair include injury, discretionary conduct, and moral transgression (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). First, the component of injury indicates that a situation is considered unfair, and harm must be done. Further, the perpetrators must have acted under their own volition. Last, moral transgression denotes that the act must infringe some moral or ethical normative standard (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). People judge the fairness of a situation by determining the prevailing conditions against other referential or hypothetical situations. This mental reimagining is the foundation of counterfactual thinking, where people would, could, and should make judgments. The outcome of this counterfactual evaluation influences the perception of unfairness (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001).

In conducting the study, I was guided by the following conceptual framework, which indicates how the concepts being investigated influence each other. For instance, decision-making procedures, ethics communication, leadership efficacy, and ethical behaviors influence employees' perception of fairness and variable justice. Figure 1 outlines the conceptual framework for the study.

**Figure 1**

Conceptual Framework



### **Synthesis of Writings Related to Procedural and Distributive Justice and Ethics**

In this section, I cover the concepts of procedural justice, distributive justice, and communicating ethics. The literature reviewed in the section shows how these concepts have evolved. I also outline how the concepts manifest in organizations.

#### **Procedural Justice**

Procedural justice influences and shapes the cooperation of the employees of Mercy Clinic. Procedures are important because they shape people's social identity



within groups, and social identity, in turn, influences attitudes, values, and behaviors (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Moreover, procedural fairness results are the outcomes of fairness. Present theory and research on group engagement model draw together the insights of the group-value model of procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988), and the relational model of authority (Tyler & Lind, 1992) and the antecedents of cooperation in groups (Tyler & Blader, 2000).

The earliest researchers of the psychology of procedural justice indicate that the opportunity to present information relevant to a decision enhances judgments of the fairness of the decision-making procedure (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Walker et al., 1974). In addition, people who were asked to talk about personal experiences of injustice were found to speak primarily about procedural issues, in particular about being treated with a lack of respect when dealing with others (Messick et al., 1985; Mikula et al., 1990).

An essential shift in injustice has been a change in how procedural justice was guided by the influential research program of Thibaut and Walker (1975). Thibaut and Walker linked their discussions of procedures primarily to issues of decision making, and in particular, to issues of decision making about the allocation of decisions. Because their procedural models were rooted in an era in which distributive justice dominated, their focus was natural. This context also influenced their theory development because they linked people's desire for fair procedures to their desire to achieve equitable outcomes. They proposed that people value procedural justice (operationalized in their research as voice or process control) because it facilitates decision-makers' ability to

make equitable judgments (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). In other words, procedures are valued insofar as they affect the outcomes that are associated with them.

Procedural justice represents individuals' perceptions of the fairness of the process used to make decisions affecting them, such as those relating to pay, promotions, and punishment (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). This form of justice is associated with the structural characteristics of the decisions (Elovainio et al., 2004). As a result, employees consider the situation as unfair when judged, and they cannot exert some influence on the procedures by which decisions are made (Gilliland & Chan, 2001; Lambert, 2003; Tepper, 2001). According to Thibaut and Walker (1975), the absence of procedural justice makes long-term outcomes less controllable and predictable for individuals. In other words, this form of injustice generates uncertainty about employees' economic and social exchange relationships with their employing organization (Aryee et al., 2004).

### **Distributive Justice**

McDonough (2000) noted that psychological distress encompasses many negative symptoms related to anxiety, depression, irritability, self-depreciation, and social disengagement (Masse et al., 1998). Employees' psychological distress may be increased when they perceive injustice in their workplace. Rupp and Cropanzano (2002) stated that employees perceive their organizations as independent social actors capable of upholding justice or perpetrating injustice. Distributive justice refers to outcomes they receive relative to their contributions to the employing organization (Adams, 1965; Colquitt, 2001). The outcomes include, for instance, pay, promotions, and special awards (Lambert, 2003).

When individuals perceive that the outcomes they receive are insufficient based on the contributions they have made, they consider their treatment by the organization as unfair (Gilliland & Chan, 2001). Distributive justice was the first fairness construct studied by social psychologists. Building on the work of Adams (1965), distributive justice can be defined as the perceived fairness of the outcomes one receives from a social exchange or interaction. This form of justice was originally construed by Adams (1965) in terms of equity. According to Adams, people determine fairness by first evaluating their perceived contributions of inputs relative to the outcomes they have received. They then compare this ratio to some comparison or referent standard to determine whether the outcomes they have received for their efforts are fair. Later work on distributive justice highlighted that other standards or decision rules could be applied and, depending on the context, be seen as distributive fair (Young, 1995). For instance, equality rules argue that people should be rewarded equally; each should receive the same or have the same opportunity to benefit. In the case of no divisible, *lumpy* resources (e.g., a painting or some other resource that cannot easily be partitioned), equality might be achieved by providing parties with an equal chance of receiving the outcome, such as by using a random drawing (Young, 1995).

### **Communicating Ethics**

When employees of Mercy Clinic perform extra-role tasks that help coworkers, supervisors, and the organization achieves results, Mercy Medicine benefits in the form of improvements in productivity and overall performance. The acknowledgment of the importance of pro-social behavior in organizations can be traced to Barnard (1938), who

wrote that individuals must be willing to contribute toward the cooperative system. Katz (1964) and Katz and Kahn (1966) further explored the behavioral requirements necessary for organizational functioning, innovativeness, and spontaneity directed toward achieving organizational objectives, but that goes beyond role requirements. Organ (1977) was the first to suggest that such behavior, commonly referred to as organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), be included in appraisals of performance.

Exploring individual differences in how people deal with moral judgments is a recurring theme in ethics research. A number of taxonomies have emerged, each attempting to delineate the ethical frameworks that underlie ethical judgments (e.g., Brady, 1985; Kohlberg, 1984; Velasquez, 1992). Underlying each of the beliefs, those relatively stable individual differences in ethical ideologies affect people's ethical judgments. One approach contrasts process- and outcome-based concerns by distinguishing between formalist and utilitarian process-oriented. Under formalism, individuals subscribe to a set of rules or principles for guiding behavior (Schminke et al., 1997). Actions are ethical or unethical in and of themselves, to the extent that they conform to these rules. Alternatively, a utilitarian approach is outcome-oriented. Under utilitarianism, people define ethical actions as those that create the greatest net social good. Actions in and of themselves cannot be identified as ethical; only their outcomes can be so defined (Schminke et al., 1997).

Researchers have suggested that individuals' ethical propensities serve as lenses that moderate the relationship between organizational decisions and the perceived fairness of those decisions (Meglino et al., 1989). Ethical frameworks may affect how

individuals attend to, encode, and evaluate information. Additionally, researchers have suggested that individuals are sensitive to and react to the fit between individual and organizational values (e.g., Meglino et al., 1989), individuals should be most sensitive to those aspects of organizational decisions (processes or outcomes) that match their ethical orientations: formalism, utilitarianism, or both. This moderating effect of an ethical framework on the relationship between organizational decisions and perceived fairness should manifest in two ways (Schminke et al., 1997). The relationship between organizational procedures and their perceived fairness should be stronger for strong formalists who base their opinions about what is right on rules of action. The relationship between the distribution of organizational outcomes and their perceived fairness should be stronger for strong utilitarians who base their opinions on what is right on the outcomes of actions (Schminke et al., 1997).

Many organizations have a code of ethics that governs relations with employees and the public. This written code focuses attention on ethical values and provides a basis for the organization, and individual managers, to evaluate their plans and actions (Grigoropoulos, 2019). Human resource departments have been given a greater role in communicating the organization's values and standards, monitoring compliance with its code of ethics, and enforcing the standards throughout the organization. There are many methods that can be used to communicate ethical standards to the workforce. The code of conduct or ethics is a helpful instrument for an organization. Still, it is essential for an organization to develop written policies and procedures that further communicate the organization's stance on a particular matter and apply those in the operations of the

workforce's daily functions (Grigoropoulos, 2019). Designing effective training programs that involve the code of conduct or ethics can be a resourceful tool within an organization.

### **Relevance to Public Organizations**

The concept of organizational justice emerged in the 1960s, and it was drawn from social-psychological research on fairness or social psychology in general. During the period, social-psychology research offered a crucial tool for understanding work organizations. Research in organizational justice gained velocity in the late 1970s. The 1980s witnessed the proposition, debate, and reconstruction of novel theoretical positions (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001). The term organizational justice was conceptualized in this period, particularly in 1987 by Greenberg in a paper published in *Academy of Management Review*. Interest in organizational justice was further ignited by Folger and Greenberg in 1985, who published a chapter on procedural justice. By the 1990s, different issues in organizations were being scrutinized from the lens of organizational justice, including matters such as staffing, strategic planning, downsizing, performance evaluation, and pay systems (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001).

The concept of organizational justice evolved in three key waves. The initial wave was founded on relative deprivation, which denotes negative feelings when a person compares their state of affairs to a more advantageous alternative. The term also denotes theories that explain how these comparisons occur and their consequences (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001; Kılıç et al., 2015). Theories on relative deprivation indicate that individuals feel a sense of moral outrage or dissatisfaction when their acquired outcome

is less than the standard. This dissatisfaction intensifies with the importance assigned to the outcome by individuals (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001).

The second wave focused on distributive justice, which is concerned with the fairness of outcome distributions. The wave is characterized by the development of theories such as equity theory by Stacy Adams in 1965 (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001). Adams theorized that individuals assess the differences between their input and the resulting outcomes, leading to feelings of either inadequate compensation or overcompensation. Individuals who feel that they are overcompensated compared to others would feel guilt or shame, prompting them to increase their input as a means of alleviating those feelings. However, Adams noted that employees and people, in general, are more tolerant of overcompensation inequity rather than underpayment (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001).

The third wave in the historical development of organizational justice focuses on procedural justice, researchers assessed the perception of fairness regarding processes and procedures utilized in decision-making regarding outcomes. Procedural justice is founded on the premise that people do not just care about inequity in outcomes, but also about how they are treated (Byrne & Cropanzano, 2001). The shift from outcomes to processes was informed by pragmatic needs in organizations making procedural justice a fundamental part of social interactions in the workplace.

Organizational justice is still relevant to 21st-century organizations. In the modern era, firms are interested in aligning employee interests with organizational interests, which is achieved by ensuring that compensation systems are founded on distributive,

procedural, and interactional justice (Gilliland et al., 2014). Firms that embrace these principles are more likely to attract and retain workers who work effectively. Ismail (2020) emphasized that the contemporary business environment characterized by global competition, dynamic technological changes, and changes in consumer demands calls for innovative human resource management practices that can help organizations maintain efficient and effective operations. The researcher insisted that the values of organizational justice have significant implications for organizations, especially in a world where equality has become a prominent subject (Ismail, 2020). As such, firms must embrace human resource practices that espouse fairness.

The concept of justice and organizational fairness is important to public organizations since it influences employee morale. Sutanto et al. (2018) opined that organizational justice has become a crucial approach to employee motivation over the last 30 years. As per the resource-based view, human resources are a key source of non-duplicable competitive advantage. As such, managers strive to attract and retain the best human resources (Ghazi & Jalali, 2017). Motivation is one of the key determinants of employee turnover; however, job characteristics, including organizational justice, influence employee motivation. Researchers show that organizations serve a crucial role in the justice process and how leaders deal with subordinates influences the subordinates' beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors (Ghazi & Jalali, 2017). Consequently, employees demonstrate reduced morale where organizational justice is lacking. Further, a lack of organizational justice creates feelings of distress among employees, which



reduces their motivation (Sutanto et al., 2018). Notably, public organizations should embrace organizational justice to improve motivation among employees.

Organizational justice significantly influences employee and firm performance. Perception of injustice in the workplace demoralizes workers leading to negative behaviors such as alienation and nonperformance. Researchers indicate that injustices also increase feelings of burnout, which further affects performance. Besides, injustices affect employee job commitment leading to negative work attitudes and counterproductive behavior (Ismail, 2020). For instance, workers would not be willing to be creative and innovative in scenarios where they discern injustices, but rather keep their ideas to themselves. Additionally, researchers support that fair evaluation and reward systems elicit positive work behaviors as well as increased levels of creativity and innovation among employees (Ismail, 2020).

Lack of organizational justice can trigger massive turnover among workers. Turnover increases operational costs in organizations due to the need to recruit and train new workers. Available statistics indicate that businesses in the US reported an annual turnover rate of 26.3% in 2017. Researchers have estimated that the cost of replacing an employee ranges between one-half to two times the worker's annual salary. Further, the cost of replacing one employee in a 100-person firm that offers an average of \$50,000 annual salary could incur turnover and replacement costs estimated at \$660,000 to \$2.6 million per year (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). Turnover affects the morale of the remaining workers, can lead to loss of customer relationships, threaten brand image, and create unnecessary litigation (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). Most employee turnover is preventable

as 52% of employees who quit their jobs voluntarily report that their firms or managers could have mitigated their exit. However, 51% of such employees indicate that neither their managers nor leaders were interested in discussing job satisfaction three months before quitting (McFeely & Wigert, 2019). These statistics outline the need for managers to make efforts towards understanding employees' frustrations, their aspirations, and reasons for turnover intentions.

The principles of organizational principles are just as important for nonprofits. These organizations require to attract and retain qualified employees who can facilitate the attainment of strategic goals. Arik et al. (2016) emphasize that human resources are a key internal resource in nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits that can target, recruit, manage, and promote volunteers to pursue and implement their visions achieve a core competence that cannot be replicated easily. Further, strategic human resources such as the board of directors for nonprofits help govern the firms and provide access to resources. The directors leverage their experience, reputation, and know-how to guide the organizations (Arik et al., 2016). Notably, perceptions of injustice against some board members would lead to dissatisfaction, demoralization, poor performance, and organizational productiveness (Gori et al., 2020).

In nonprofit organizations, workplace unfairness could lead to turnover. Gori et al. (2020) noted that employee dissatisfaction is usually linked with reduced commitment, poor job outcomes, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. Phillips and Hernandez (2018) noted that nonprofits, especially social services agencies in the U.S., have been experiencing high turnover. In 2013, one in every five nonprofits reported

turnover as their major human capital challenge (Phillips & Hernandez, 2018). Apart from losing qualified and trained employees, turnover is associated with negative financial implications. For instance, nonprofits have to incur direct costs for recruiting and training new employees. The organizations also bear indirect costs since the quality of services is affected (Phillips & Hernandez, 2018). The firms can also lose funding since funders pay attention to performance and outcomes.

Previous researchers have highlighted measures that can be adopted to promote fairness in the workplace. For instance, Cox et al. (2017) noted that firms can use good decision-making approaches to achieve fair decisions. For instance, managers should use an objective approach and look out for biases during decision-making. Further, managers should use a structured approach to decision-making to facilitate transparency and create an audit trail. Leaders should re-evaluate any new information and revisit decisions revisited. The researchers also endorse systematic interventions for facilitating learning and challenging unjust practices. Cox et al. (2017) further proposed the provision of standardized training and guidance for leaders and other decision-makers. However, organizations should strive to attain a balance by applying their human judgment and critical thinking to consider variations in the decision-making landscape.

Leaders can adopt ethical leadership to promote justice and fairness in organizations. This leadership approach is characterized by gratitude, humility, justice, mercy and compassion, prudence and objectivity, magnanimity, integrity, and resilience. These leadership traits enable leaders to serve as role models for their employees by projecting the outward-facing ethos that workers should embody (Hegarty & Moccia,

2018). Consequently, this ensures that members of an organization act within a paradigm of moral behavior.

Policies can also be used to foster organizational justice and fairness. For instance, firms can leverage the recruitment process to hire individuals with an ethics-focused mind (Cox et al., 2017). Additionally, leaders can develop policies such as ethics statements to guide the behavior of the organizational members. Disciplinary procedures should also be clear, and employees should have input in the development of sanctions.

### **Organizational Background and Context**

Mercy Clinic is a Christian charity organization operating in the healthcare sector. As per the clinic's website, the organization provides free medical services to the Florence and Williamsburg counties community members who have no access to medical insurance. The organization operates over 45 acute care and specialty hospitals across the two regions. The perception of fairness in the organization and the manifestation of variable justice in the clinic's decision-making is critical. Communication of ethics is another variable that needs to be understood in the context of the organization.

### **Organizational Need for the Administrative Study**

Previous researchers have shown that organization justice and fairness are essential in improving job satisfaction among employees (Lambert et al., 2021; May et al., 2020; Saifi & Shahzad, 2017). How employees perceive the workplace as exercising fairness and variable justice and how leaders communicate ethics in an organization determine their level of satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2021). Consequently, satisfied employees contribute to the increased productivity of the organization. In the context of

healthcare institutions, the quality of services provided to the patients depends on the skills of the healthcare professionals and their level of satisfaction and motivation.

An aging population, the changing patterns of disease, new funding models, and variation in worker expectations have led healthcare providers to rethink their strategies of managing their workforce (Brandis et al., 2016). Healthcare providers are presently experiencing global shortages of skilled healthcare employees. Changes in the nature of work have worsened the shortage of skilled workers, poor image of some healthcare professions as a career, aging workforce, and the advancement of technology and the impact of globalization (Brandis et al., 2016). The transformational changes occurring in the sector imply the focus on employees' perception regarding their workplaces, with the aim of minimizing turnover and negative workplace outcomes, including reduced productivity and increased stress associated with change. Many healthcare transformations do not succeed because of overlooking the importance of the employees' perceptions (Songstad et al., 2011). Individual transformation must be parallel to that of the institution, and employees' perception of the management and the existing level of job satisfaction has a bearing on how they adapt to changes.

Models of health service delivery are required to respond to the changing consumer expectations, shrinking budgets, and the performance expectations of both providers and recipients of healthcare services. This creates a need for a better understanding of the perception of healthcare employees' and the strategies that can be used to improve the work environment. Three factors that have increasingly been identified as having a strong influence in the work environment are the perception of

fairness, variable justice in decision making, and communication of ethics in the organization. According to Brandis et al. (2016), perception of fairness has a positive significant bearing on job satisfaction which contributes to an organization's productivity. Orchard et al. (2020), on the other hand, found that perception of fairness among employees on aspects such as salary, promotion, and recognition, affect their health and productivity. According to Ghasi et al. (2020), the perception of variable justice also affects employees' satisfaction and productivity.

The principle of ethics in communication in healthcare, helps managers in decision making whereby the well-being of the majority and the principles of equity, fairness, and objectivity are considered (Brandis et al., 2016). Despite the importance of these factors in the organizations, they have not been well researched, particularly from the perspective of nonprofit healthcare organizations. Such organizations as Mercy Clinic have many employees, most working as volunteers need to ensure employees perceive their actions as promoting fairness and that variable justice is manifested in the decision making. Ethics in communication also need to be ensured. There is, therefore, a need to fill this gap.

### **Institutional Context is Applicable to the Problem**

As established, Mercy Clinic is a nonprofit and a Christian primary care charity clinic. The institution uses volunteer physicians who treat patients that cannot afford medical insurance. The employees and volunteers join hands in the provision of free medical and dental assistance to care for disadvantaged members of the community (O'Malley, 2019). Healthcare services at the clinic are provided to patients between the

age of 18 and 64 years who are suffering from hypertension, heart disease, diabetes as well as chronic diseases requiring medical attention for a minimum of six months. These patients are provided with services such as lab work, x-rays, mammograms in addition to some specific appropriate surgeries.

The employees who are the focus of the present study are majorly volunteers including physicians, physician's assistants, nurses, and dentists. According to the clinic's website, In 2019, the healthcare providers at the hospital attended an estimated 1,600 onsite medical patients and 290 onsite dental care patients, which culminated in about 1,890 patient visits. On average, there are eight different medical providers and six dentists at the site. There are volunteer dental and medical surgeons in addition to other specialties who volunteer their time for the clinic, but often, such patients are not treated at the facility. As per the clinic's website, an estimated 44,000 employees and volunteers work in the clinic's 45 acute care and specialty hospitals.

The communities served by the clinic are Florence and Williamsburg counties. Florence County is located in South Carolina and has a population of 136,885 people (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The county has a population density of 157 people per square mile. Whites are the most predominant citizens in terms of race at over 58%, followed by 39% African Americans and 0.22% Native Americans (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The median age of the population is 36 years, with more than 74% of the population being over 18 years, thus qualifying for services at the clinic (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Williamsburg County, on the other hand, has a population of 31,324 people (United States Census Bureau, 2021). The predominant race is African

American or non-Hispanic at 64.4%, followed by white at 31.2%. More than 70% of the population is above 18 years old (United States Census Bureau, 2021).

The goal of the clinic is to maintain free medical services that is founded on Christian principles of love, faith as well as compassion. The mission of Mercy Clinic is the provision of free medical and dental care for low-income, uninsured adults from Florence and Williamsburg Counties using the Judeo-Christian principles of love, integrity, and compassion. The vision of the organization is to become the best faith, best quality healthcare provider in the Pee Dee areas that serve low-income uninsured adults. The strong core values that guide the organization are love, respect, compassion, integrity as well as teamwork.

### **Definitions of Organizationally Used Terms**

***Nonprofit.*** Organizations that are tax-exempt firms whose main goal is serving public interests ranging from charitable, scientific, educational, literary, and religious interests (Kolb, 2018). Being a nonprofit organization implies that Mercy Clinic is primarily funded through charity and religion.

***Volunteer health care workers.*** Health care workers who offer their services but do not receive a salary. However, they may receive perks such as small financial incentives (Mohajer & Singh, 2018). This implies that medical professionals do not charge a fee for their services at the hospitals. The professionals may be working in other institutions at the same time where they are compensated.

***Uninsured adults.*** People between 18 and 60 years who lack insurance cover and thus have to pay for healthcare out of pocket. Uninsured persons have less access to



preventative care and are more likely to be hospitalized due to conditions that would not need admission if treated early (Castaneda & Saygili, 2016). The clinic takes the initiative of assisting them by treating them at no cost.

**State context applicable to the problem.** The communities served by the Mercy Clinic are primarily in South Carolina State. The clinic is subject to employment laws and legislation in the state. The chief legislation applicable in the context of the problem is the South Carolina Human Affairs Law. Section 1-13-40 of this law establishes the executive department of the South Carolina Human Affairs Commission. The aim of the commission is to foster fair treatment for and prevent discrimination against employees. Hence, the concept of fairness and justice is enacted in law, and Mercy Clinic has to adhere to it. In terms of ethics is communication within an organization South Carolina Ethics Act is the applicable law. The act prevents employees from unethically providing advantages or disadvantages to employees on the basis of unethical principles of policies. Hence, Mercy Clinic must maintain high ethics with employees to comply with the law.

#### **Role of the Doctor of Public Administration Student**

I am not affiliated with the organization in any way. As a Doctoral Public Administration scholar, I have an interest in exploring the problems of fairness. I was obligated to research the problems and provide evidence to improve the relationship between management and their employees. This project has the potential of improving the relationship between Mercy Medicine and its employees. This will promote the management efforts in addressing the perceptions of fairness within the organization.

My motivation for conducting the study was to acquire novel insights on the perception of fairness and justice in non-governmental organizations. The study offered me an opportunity to advance the available knowledge on the two concepts. Having interacted with workers, I know the perception of injustices in the workplace creates feelings of dissatisfaction and resentment. The project may have suffered bias due to the nature of the self-developed interview prompt that was used in data collection. However, my professor reviewed the interview prompt to ensure it aligned with the project's purpose.

### **Summary**

Organizations promote ethical behaviors such as procedural justice as a way of enhancing employee well-being and performance. Failure to ensure organizational justice could lead to unethical behaviors and culture. The literature further indicates that employees' perceptions of justice are key determinants of organizational outcomes such as turnover, job commitment, and performance. The fairness theory explains that employees assess the fairness of a situation through counterfactual thinking and judgment. In relation to ethics, researchers indicate that individuals' ethical propensities moderate the perception of fairness in organizations. As such, employees decode the perceived fairness of organizational decisions based on how the decisions fit within personal and organizational values. Organizational justice is important to public organizations, including nonprofits, due to its impact on employee outcomes. Perception of unfairness in organizations, especially nonprofits that rely on volunteers, could hinder them from accessing qualified volunteers or lead to other adverse employment outcomes,

including absenteeism and turnover intentions. As a result, this would affect the quality of services provided to the target populations. In chapter 3, I outline the procedures adopted to collect and analyze data in the project.

### Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

#### **Introduction**

Organizational fairness and justice are key determinants of employees' citizenship behaviors. Fairness influences employee satisfaction and morale (Ghazi & Jalali, 2017; Ismail, 2020). Employees' motivation is high in scenarios where they perceive organizational policies and procedures as fair (Ghazi & Jalali, 2017). Contrarily, satisfaction and morale dip in scenarios where organizational policies are deemed unfair. In such situations, employees report feelings of distress and burnout, which contribute to nonperformance (Ismail, 2020; Sutanto et al., 2018). Additionally, lack of justice and fairness negatively affects workers' commitment to their jobs resulting in absenteeism and turnover (Ismail, 2020; Sutanto et al., 2018). Workers are among the key sources of nonduplicable sources of competitiveness in organizations. As such, managers should identify and address issues that create dissatisfaction among employees. Further, it is important for organizations to embrace practices, policies, and procedures that espouse fairness (Ismail, 2020).

Mercy Clinic is a nonprofit organization that provides health services to citizens in Florence and Williamsburg counties. The organization has been in existence for over 25 years. Its core purpose is to provide free medical and dental services to underserved persons, including low-income earners and uninsured adults. The clinic provides patients with primary care, dental care, and free medications. As per the organization's website, the clinic's mission is to provide free healthcare services based on the Christian principles of love, faith, and compassion. On average, eight medical providers and six

dental providers offer their services at the clinic on a monthly basis. The providers are supported by volunteers who donate their services to the clinic. For instance, over 120 persons volunteered approximately 300 hours of medical and dental care, while nonmedical volunteers offered more than 5400 service hours (Nonprofit Metrics LLC, 2021). However, there is a lack of research on how the service providers and volunteers at the clinic perceive fairness. Subsequently, the purpose of this explorative qualitative research project was to close this gap by exploring how employees in the organization perceived fairness, how variable justice manifests in the institution's decision-making, and how ethics are communicated across the organization. I also explored how leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors at the nonprofit create fairness among employees.

In this chapter, I presents a recap of the practice-focused questions that guided the project. I also cover the sources of evidence, including project participants, procedures, and protections. I also outline the methods used to analyze the evidence.

### **Practice-Focused Questions**

There is a research gap on how service providers and volunteers at Mercy Clinic perceive fairness in the organization. There is limited research evidence on how variable justice is manifested in the organization's decision-making procedures as well as how ethics are communicated to the workers. Additionally, there is limited knowledge on how leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors in the clinic perpetuate fairness among the workers. In this qualitative exploratory project, I sought to close this research gap by exploring how the employees perceive fairness, the manifestation of variable justice in the institution's decision-making procedures, and the communication of ethics in the

clinic. Further, I explored how leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors create fairness in the nonprofit. I was guided by the following practice-focused questions:

**RQ1.** How do Mercy Clinic employees perceive fairness?

**RQ2.** How do the clinic's decision-making procedures create variable justice?

**RQ3.** How are ethics communicated in the clinic?

**RQ4.** How do leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors promote fairness in the clinic?

The qualitative research design aligned with the practice question because it is used in situations where researchers want to understand participants' attitudes, perceptions, and views towards a particular phenomenon. The qualitative design is based on the philosophical framework of constructivism which states that reality is developed subjectively (Aspers & Corte, 2019). A qualitative research design is appropriate in situations where an in-depth understanding of human attitudes and reactions towards a phenomenon is required.

### **Sources of Evidence**

I retrieved evidence derived from published materials, particularly peer-reviewed journal articles from different electronic academic databases. I also used primary data collected from Mercy Clinic employees through an open-ended interview prompt. I was able to rigorously evaluate the employees' perception of justice in the organization. I also conducted a comparative analysis of the project findings using the secondary data from published sources. I used the secondary findings to support or critique the primary results.

### **Published Outcomes and Research**

I reviewed journal articles on organizational justice to collect data with regards to the influence of decision-making procedures on variable justice in organizations. I also reviewed published research evidence on the effect of leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors on fairness in organizations. I retrieved the articles from online databases such as Walden University Library, Research Gate, ScienceDirect, Taylor and Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Google Scholar, Sage Publications, and Journal Storage (JSTOR). I used keywords such as *leadership*, *organizational justice*, *decision making*, *employee perceptions*, and *ethical behavior*. I used Boolean operator ‘AND’ to join the keywords and narrow down the search.

I limited the scope of the review to peer-reviewed journal articles to ensure the validity of the findings. Further, I limited the search to recent articles published within the last 5 years (2016–2021). I reviewed the abstracts of the retrieved articles to determine the relevance of the studies to the project. Further, I used the keywords across different databases to expand the number of relevant articles retrieved. Using this strategy, I ensured that the search was comprehensive and exhaustive.

### **Evidence Generated for the Administrative Study**

I collected primary data from Mercy Clinic employees through an open-ended interview prompt (Appendix A). I collected the data from a convenience sample of six out of 15 employees drawn from different departments and levels in the organization. As such, their views were relevant to the practice-focused questions since they are living the

reality of organizational justice and fairness in the clinic and have experienced the impacts of the leaders, ethics, and decision-making procedures in the institution.

### ***Participants***

A sample of six out of 15 employees from Mercy Clinic participated in the project. The participants come from different departments and levels in the organization. I used convenience sampling to select the project participants. This sampling technique involves the volunteering of participants based on factors such as ease of accessibility, availability, and willingness to participate in a study (Etikan et al., 2016). Convenience sampling is appropriate since it is inexpensive and less time-consuming than other sampling strategies.

### ***Procedures***

I collected primary data using interviews which were guided by self-developed open-ended interview prompt (Appendix A). The interview prompt had two sections: demographics and the organizational fairness section. The first section, demographics, contained questions relating to the participants' education level, age, and gender. The second section focused on questions relating to how the participants perceive organizational fairness, communication of ethics in the institution, the influence of leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors influence fairness, and how ethics are communicated in the clinic.

I developed the interview prompt based on the available literature on organizational justice and fairness, communication ethics, and leadership and ethics. To ensure construct validity, the interview prompt was reviewed by the professor to ensure



the questions aligned with the purpose of the project. The interviews were held face-to-face while observing COVID-19 measures such as hand sanitization and social distancing. I recorded the participants' responses manually. I conducted the interviews over 2 weeks.

### ***Protections***

The Mercy Medicine executive director informed the employees ahead of time that the organization would be partaking in a research study for educational purposes and that it was completely voluntary. I recruited the project participants through an email (Appendix B). I conducted the project in line with different principles of ethics in research, such as informed consent and privacy, and confidentiality. I had acquired the permission to conduct the study at the clinic from the clinic's management. I engaged the clinic's executive director who allowed the study to be conducted at the clinic. Further, I obtained permission from Walden Institutional Review Board to ensure the project met the set research ethics. I observed the principle of informed consent whereby I requested the participants to sign an informed consent form before participating in the project. I notified the employees that participation was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw from the process at will.

Identifiers such as names, employment numbers, or positions were not part of the collected data to protect participant privacy and confidentiality. I applied additional measures to protect the confidentiality of the collected data by locking it in a drawer that could only be accessed by me. I will store the filled interview prompts for 3 years after project completion, after which I will shred and delete them, respectively.

### **Analysis and Synthesis**

I analyzed the qualitative data collected in the project manually through content analysis. The data analysis approach entails systematic reduction and scrutiny of data to identify key themes (Roller, 2019). I made meaningful interpretations from the themes keeping in mind the context of the project.

I used different measures to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the project findings. First, I created a categorization matrix and used it to facilitate the theme identification process through the abstraction of codes, themes, and subthemes from the qualitative data. Second, I used member-checking to ensure the developed themes matched the collected data. Member checking involves presenting the themes to the participants so that they can affirm the themes align with their responses. The approach is adopted as a measure of ensuring the dependability and authenticity of qualitative findings (Birt et al., 2016).

I applied a deductive approach during data analysis. The approach involves organizing the data using the categorization matrix, reviewing the data, and identifying codes and categories (Kyngäs & Kaakinen, 2020). The codes are then used to guide the identification of key themes and subthemes, which were then be reported as the project findings. Kyngäs and Kaakinen (2020) emphasized that the findings derived from content analysis are reported in the form of concepts, categories, and themes.

### **Summary**

The project involved an exploration of how Mercy Clinic employees perceive organizational fairness. In this project, I sought to determine the impact of decision-

making procedures, leadership efficacy, and ethics on variable justice in the clinic. I adopted a qualitative exploratory design, and collected primary and secondary data to answer the practice-focused questions. I collected primary data from a convenience sample of 15 employees at the clinic, and secondary data from peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on organizational justice. I observed principles of ethical research such as informed consent and privacy and confidentiality during data collection. I analyzed the qualitative data using content analysis. In section 4, I present the project findings and implications.

#### Section 4: Evaluation and Results

Organizational fairness and justice have a significant influence of citizenship behaviors, satisfaction, and morale among workers. Morale is usually high in work settings where organizational policies and procedures are perceived as fair and vice versa (Ghazi & Jalali, 2017). Burnout, distress, nonperformance, lack of job commitment, absenteeism, and employee turnover are common in firms characterized by unfairness and injustice (Ismail, 2020; Sutanto et al., 2018). Workers are one of the most crucial sources of nonduplicable competitiveness in organizations. Leaders should identify and address the issues that cause dissatisfaction among employees. Additionally, leaders should promote fairness through organizational practices, policies, and procedures (Ismail, 2020).

Mercy Clinic is a nonprofit organization offering healthcare services in Florence and Williamsburg counties. The clinic has a large pool of volunteers and workers who provide medical services to underserved populations in the two counties. There is a paucity of research focusing on how the workers and volunteers in the clinic perceive fairness. I investigated how the clinic's employees perceived fairness, how variable justice manifested in the clinic's decision-making, and how ethics were communicated across the institution. I also investigated how leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors influenced fairness in nonprofits.

In this chapter, I present the findings from the face-to-face interviews collected from six Mercy Clinic employees. I analyzed the interviewees' responses through content

analysis to determine the differences and similarities. In this chapter, I also cover the recommendations drawn from the interview findings.

I generated the evidence I have presented in this chapter from published research, especially peer-reviewed journal articles. I collected primary data from a sample of six employees from Mercy Clinic. I collected the data using an open-ended interview prompt. I organized the interview data using a categorization matrix to identify the key patterns, which I then used to develop the key themes and supported them with excerpts from the participants' responses. I collected secondary data from journal articles and used it to conduct comparative analysis of the findings by supporting or critiquing the primary results.

### **Findings and Implications**

In this section, I present the findings from the interviews with the six participants. First covers the participants' demographics. This is followed by a thematic analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions. I also discuss the implications arising from the findings.

#### **Participants' Demographics**

The demographics collected during the interviews included the ethnic background, gender, age group, educational level, and level of employment. Five participants were White, while the other respondent was Hispanic. In terms of gender, five respondents were female. In relation to age, most of the interviewees (three) were aged between 55 and 70. With respect to educational level, two respondents had high school diplomas, whereas another two had graduated college. One interviewee had a

bachelor's degree, whereas the most educated participant had a master's degree. Lastly, three participants were employees, whereas the others were equally distributed across the supervisor, management, and executive levels. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographics*

Demographic characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
<b>Ethnic background</b>		
White	5	83%
Hispanics	1	17%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	1	17%
Female	5	83%
<b>Age</b>		
55-70 years	3	50%
35-50	1	16%
51-54	1	17%
70-	1	17%
<b>Education level</b>		
High school	2	33%
College	2	33%
Bachelors	1	17%
Masters	1	17%
<b>Employment Level</b>		
Employee	3	50%
Supervisor	1	17%
Management	1	17%
Executive	1	16%

### **RQ1: How do Mercy Clinic Employees Perceive Fairness?**

Table 2 presents the codes and subthemes that were generated to answer the above research question.

**Table 2**

*RQ1 Themes*

Code	Number of Participants	Subtheme
Workers are fairly treated	3	Great and ethical management
Unfair treatment	4	Leniency and accommodation of some workers

#### **Theme 1: Perception of Fairness at the Clinic**

Two themes emerged under this theme: great and ethical management and leniency and accommodation of some workers. In this section, I present a discussion of these themes.

##### ***Fair Treatment***

Three interviewees, comprising half of the total participants, were of the perception that everyone is treated fairly at Mercy Clinic. For instance, Participant 2 said, “Yes, but there’s some who are given more leniency.” Participant 3 emphasized that everyone at the clinic is treated fairly, but she did not expound on the response. Participant 6 responded, “Yes because the management is great.” The respondent added

that “issues are handled ethically in line with organizational guidelines.” Further, the participant added that “the management built morale within the organization, and team efforts and ethics are emphasized daily.”

Previous researchers have established that good and ethical management fosters an environment of fairness in organizations. Ethical leaders are fair, and they assign importance to transparency, balanced decision-making, and fair and equal treatment to their subordinates. Further, ethical leadership creates perceptions of organizational fairness among workers (Al Halbusi et al., 2021). Leaders are the representatives of their organizations, meaning their actions and decisions significantly impact the employees’ perceptions of distributive and procedural justice (Al Halbusi et al., 2021).

#### ***Leniency and Accommodation of Some Workers***

Participants 1, 4, and 5 were of a contrary opinion. Particularly, participant 4 expounded that “certain people are accommodated, and others are not. In some instances, some employees are reprimanded while others are not punished.” Participant 5 added that “some people do their job and some don’t, having others to do their jobs.” The participant added, “some people work hard and are not treated fairly. I do not believe job duties are equitable due to hiring of an individual who cannot fulfill the daily duties that they were hired for.” Additionally, Participant 2 had also pointed out that though there is fair treatment at the clinic, some employees are treated more leniently than others. Some workers do not perform their roles as expected, creating a burden on others. The unexpected acquired additional responsibilities of those who are perceived as not doing



their part made it difficult for some of them to sustain their own individual job duties most of the time.

Available studies indicate that social loafing affects workers' perception of fairness in organizations. A study by Thanh and Toan (2018) established that employees report a higher perception of distributive and procedural justice in situations where they feel that there is clear division and performance of tasks. The researchers emphasized that clear policies and procedures help workers determine the roles and accomplishments they should achieve, thereby minimizing collective negligence. Tosuntas (2020) emphasized that social loafing affects group performance, efficiency, and employee satisfaction. Distributive justice is one of the antecedents of social loafing, whereby the behavior is more prevalent in scenarios where there is low task visibility, and the contribution of individuals within groups is not identifiable. Naicker and Purumasur (2018) emphasized the need for effective group processes, including clearly defining responsibilities, the establishment of performance targets, peer evaluation, and communication procedures towards minimizing social loafing. Individual outcomes and rewards can also aid in reducing social loafing since workers are recognized for their individual performance.

**RQ2: How Do the Clinic's Decision-Making Procedures Create Variable Justice?**

I answered this research question through the second and the third interview questions. I identified the following codes and subthemes.

**Table 3***RQ2 Themes*

Code	No. of Participants	Themes
Witnessed incidences of preferential treatment	5	Preferential treatment
Hiring practices	2	Poor Hiring Practices

**Preferential Treatment in the Organization**

Using the second interview question, I explored whether the participants' had witnessed incidences of preferential treatment at the clinic. Five interviewees, including Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, said they had witnessed such incidences. Participant 1 responded, "Yes, there is no fairness." The participant noted that she had witnessed a scenario where an employee was hired, but she was not qualified for the job; thereby, others had to perform her duties, yet she kept her job. Participant 2 and 3 did not expound on their responses.

In the third question, I focused on the application of ethics in the implementation of policies and procedures. Four respondents indicated that the management maintained ethics. Participant 2 noted that "Yes, but the moral is being affected by decision-making procedures." Participant 3 also agreed that the upper management observes ethics. Participant 4 opined that "Yes, hiring procedures had to be revisited and updating of organizational procedures done to fit today's demands." Participant 6 added that "organizational guidelines are done ethically, and the leadership has built up the morale

in the organization.” Further, “team effort and ethics are emphasized daily. Additionally, workers are bound by their faith.”

### **Poor Hiring Practices**

Participant 1 noted that the hiring procedures at the clinic were unfair since some workers were hired despite being incompetent. The respondent added that the management did not take action regarding the hiring choice. Her exact words were, “An employee should not have been hired, she’s not qualified for the job giving everyone her job duties, and she keeps her job. And they, management, will not do anything about the hiring choice.” Participant 4 added that “hiring choices are not done fairly, and if the person does not end up being a good fit, the decision is not corrected.” Participant 5 did not expound on his response.

In response to the third interview question, Participant 5 cited that hiring procedures that were perceived as being unethical. The participant's sentiments were, “No, it was not done ethically in the hiring process, and people do not do their jobs.” However, the participant added that these concerns had been aired to the executive for improvements to be made. Similarly, Participant 4 had noted that these procedures had been revisited and revised to meet current demands.

Evidence from secondary data show that decision-making procedures influence fairness and justice in organizations. Good decision-making approaches can be used to foster fairness by eliminating bias and ensuring transparency (Cox et al., 2017). According to Oktem and Oztoprak (2019), decision-making processes in organizations promote distributive and procedural justice especially when prejudice is avoided and

objectivity is maintained. Organizational decisions should be fair and consistent with the values, views, and needs of the employees. Additionally, they should align with professional ethics principles and values espoused in the firm. The decisions adopted in organizations affect the perception of procedural justice and influence the trust relationship between managers and workers. Available studies indicate that leaders can foster procedural and distributive justice by developing organizational policies that address inequity (Cox et al., 2017). Additionally, leaders are encouraged to re-assess any new information and revisit past decisions as a means of correcting past mistakes and fostering organizational justice (Cox et al., 2017).

### **RQ3: How are Ethics Communicated in the Clinic?**

Due to limitations in the primary data, I answered the research question using secondary data derived from journal articles. Leaders serve as role models by maintaining ethical behaviors and fair decisions. Notably, leaders can use their behaviors to model and communicate organizational ethics to their subordinates (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). Additionally, organizational leaders use written codes of ethics to communicate ethical values to their workers. Stakeholders use codes of ethics to evaluate their actions and align them with acceptable values (Grigoropoulos, 2019). In addition, leaders communicate ethics to the workers through just and fair human resource management practices. Firms are encouraged to embrace and apply written policies and standards to daily functions to create an ethical working environment (Grigoropoulos, 2019).

**RQ4: How Does Leadership Efficacy And Ethical Behaviors Promote Fairness In  
The Clinic?**

I answered the research question using the interview responses from the fifth and sixth interview questions. The major theme that emerged from the interviews related to fair enforcement of policies.

**Table 4**

*RQ4 Themes*

Code	No. of Participants	Theme
Fair policies and procedures	5	Fair enforcement of policies

**Fair Enforcement of Policies**

Most of the respondents thought that policies and procedures are equally and fairly enforced among the employees. Participant 2 noted that “policies and procedures are fairly and equally enforced to everyone.” Participant 5 believed that the clinic’s policies and procedures were sometimes enforced equally and fairly. However, the respondent did not expound further on this response. However, participant 4 had a contrary opinion, and she raised the issues of hiring unqualified workers once more. The participant opined that “No, employees duties are given to others because they cannot perform them and keep their jobs.”

Most participants viewed the clinic’s management and employees as ethical people. The participants agreed that the organization is on the right track because of the

effectiveness and efficiency of the leadership. They feel it is critical for a leader to keep control over the organization and its employees while still carrying out the organization's vision and mission in an ethical manner. All six participants stated that their religious faith and the ministerial aspect of the non-profit influence their decision to work at the clinic. Their focus is not on the money they earn but rather on working with the underserved communities.

Evidence from secondary data shows that leadership effectiveness and ethical behaviors affect fairness in organizations. Leaders who embrace ethics promote justice and fairness. Additionally, such leaders act as role models to the workers by projecting the ethics that the subordinates should embrace (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). The findings of a study by Hendrian and Patiro (2019) showed that transformational and transactional leadership have a positive, significant impact on procedural and distributive justice. They lead to the development of positive emotions among workers. Bakotic and Bulog (2021) leaders influence ethics by creating a work environment characterized by friendliness, honesty, and positive social interactions. Additionally, leaders should create a perception of justice, trust, and respect in daily interactions. This helps leaders develop and maintain a positive working environment where the fairness of interpersonal treatment is prioritized.

### **Unintended Limitations**

Several limitations hindered the data collection process. For instance, I had anticipated to interview 15 participants. However, I only managed to interview six employees at Mercy Clinic as the other subjects were not willing to participate in the

study. Additionally, most interviewees did not expound on their answers resulting in shallow responses. For instance, the participants did not provide meaningful responses on the communication of ethics at the clinic. Consequently, this affected the depth of the study findings.

### **Potential Implications for Social Change**

One of the prevalent themes outlines the effects of hiring practices on perceived organizational justice and fairness. The participants perceived hiring and retaining nonperformance as an injustice since they had to take up additional duties to close the performance gap created by the social loafers. Human resource practices influence the perception of justice and fairness in organizations. Practices perceived as unfair and unjust create cynicism among workers resulting in low job commitment and lack of job satisfaction (Atikbay & Oner, 2020). Non-profits such as Mercy Clinic should embrace fair human practices to ensure uninterrupted service delivery to underserved populations. Particularly, non-profits should hire qualified volunteers and employees to deliver services. Failure to do this would lower the morale among the workers affecting the organizations' effectiveness and their impact on society.

### **Recommendations**

The human resource managers of Mercy Clinic should continue improving the organization's hiring practices to ensure a better fit between recruits and the firm's values. The managers should hire performers who understand the importance of completing their assigned duties. On the same note, the managers should fire non-performers to eliminate social loafing. This will help improve the perception of

procedural justice and fairness at the clinic since employees will not have to pick up extra duties due to nonperformance by their colleagues. Atikbay and Oner (2020) emphasize that a high perception of organizational justice among workers shapes positive attitudes and behaviors.

The leaders of Mercy Clinic should treat workers equally. One of the respondents voiced that some workers are accommodated more and treated with more leniency. This creates a negative perception of organizational justice and fairness in the clinic.

Researchers have emphasized the importance of fair decisions in organizations (Cox et al., 2017). Managerial decisions should be founded on an objective, structured approach that should promote transparency and eliminate bias. Additionally, the managers should be trained and guided on fair decision-making and critical thinking to apply human judgment in evaluating different scenarios and making just decisions.

The executive at the clinic should continue emphasizing the importance of effective leadership in the organization. Effective leadership gives structure to the ethical configuration in an organization. Ethical culture is a function of many factors, including the organization's policies on ethics, top management's leadership on ethical issues, their influences on coworkers, and the opportunity for unethical behavior (Cox et al., 2017; Schuh et al., 2019). The more ethical others perceive an organization's culture to be, the less likely they are to make unethical decisions, and one way of doing so is through effective leadership (Atikbay & Oner, 2020; Cox et al., 2017).



### **Strengths and Limitations of the Project**

The qualitative nature of the study was one of the key strengths as it facilitates in-depth exploration of a research topic. The other strength relates to using both primary and secondary data to ensure the in-depth exploration of the topic. However, the small sample size was a major limitation in the study since only six out of the 15 participants were willing to be interviewed. The homogeneity of the sample is also a limitation since the participants were drawn from the same organization. The interviewees' short responses further hindered the acquisition of in-depth insights on their perception of fairness, the influence of decision-making procedures on variable justice, communication of ethics, and the role of leadership efficacy and ethical behaviors in promoting justice. Future researchers should replicate the study using a larger sample size drawn from different non-profits to reduce homogeneity. Researchers should also explore the impact of human resource practices on ethics, fairness, and justice in non-profits. Further research is also necessary to determine how ethics are communicated at the clinic. Future researchers can conduct qualitative research to explore how leaders in the clinic and other non-profits communicate ethics to subordinates.

## Section 5: Dissemination Plan

The management of Mercy Clinic can use the findings of the current study to develop a better relationship with employees in terms of organizational behavior and workplace climate. I will disseminate the study findings to the executive director and the six participants who participated in the research at Mercy Clinic via email as stated on the consent form. The final approved proposal will contain a summary of the major sections of the study report, including the problem statement, the methods, findings and recommendations, and the implications. My goal will be to create awareness of the influence of organizational procedures, policies, leadership, and organizational communication on justice and fairness in the clinic. I will give a complimentary copy of the study report to the executive director for allowing their organization to be used as a case study.

I will disseminate the findings to a wider audience, including other scholars, researchers, and educators. I will attain this goal by publishing the study on ProQuest, where it can be accessed by scholars. ProQuest publishes millions of dissertations and theses, making it an ideal platform for the study. The findings could be used as the foundation for further research on organizational justice in nonprofits.

### **Summary**

Organizational justice and fairness influence workers' citizenship behaviors. In this study, I investigated the perception of justice and fairness in Mercy Clinic, a nonprofit operating in the healthcare sector. The findings showed that procedural justice affects the perception of fairness in organizations. Additionally, the policies and

procedures and human resource management practices affect the workers' perception of justice and fairness. Nonprofits such as Mercy Clinic should embrace practices, policies, and procedures that promote justice and fairness. Leaders in such organizations should espouse justice and fairness to create and exemplify an ethical culture through their decisions and behaviors.

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## Appendix A: Interview Prompt

I am Yolonda Holmes-Echols, a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am inviting you to participate in my study titled “Effectively Communicating Ethics Using Procedural and Distributive Justice: An Exploratory Study” You are invited to participate due to the fact that you are an employee of Mercy Clinic . If you agree to participate in the study, you will be required to answer 10 questions. It should take 5 to 10 minutes to complete the interview prompt, depending on how much information you have to include. This communication and accompanying document(s) are privileged and confidential and are for the sole use of research and educational purposes. **Please take your time and answer each question as accurately as possible.**

What is your ethnic background and gender?

- |                           |            |
|---------------------------|------------|
| (a) White                 | (a) Male   |
| (b) African American      | (b) Female |
| (c) Hispanic              |            |
| (d) Asian                 |            |
| (e) Native American       |            |
| (f) Other (specify _____) |            |

What age group do you belong to?

- (a) 21-30
- (b) 35-50
- (c) 55-70

(d) Older

What is your highest level of education?

(a) High School Diploma

(b) GED

(c) Some College

(d) Bachelor Degree

(e) Master's Degree

(f) PH.D

(g) Other: (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

What is your level of employment?

(a) Executive level

(b) Management level

(c) Supervisory level

(d) Employee level

Is everyone at your job treated fairly? Why do you think so?

Have you witnessed incidences where preferential treatment is given to certain employees? What happened during one such incidence?

Do you believe the upper management uses ethics when implementing policies and procedures? Give an example.

Because there's special treatment of certain employees, do you believe or know for a fact when it came to being reprimanded, that employees were not punished?

Are policies and procedures enforced to everyone equally and fairly? Why or why not?

Do you believe upper management-level employees are ethical? Why or why not?

## Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Email

Greetings,

I will be conducting interviews as a research study to how fairness, organizational behavior, and ethics are perceived and experienced by individuals in a nonprofit organization. The aim of this study is to benefit the relationship between management and their employees and contribute as an empirical study that can be built upon for future research.

The interview will take no longer than ten to fifteen minutes. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspective. Your response to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be spaced out to allow time for the interview to take place. There is no compensation for participating in this study.

If you are interested to participate please email me directly and we can set the time for the interview. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.