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**Abstract**: Australian researchers have recently applied procedural justice theory to examine the relationship between police practices and public satisfaction and confidence in the police service. The four basic public expectations of police that contribute to the procedural fairness effect are outlined: trust, respectful treatment, neutrality, and voice. Translating these key relational variables into action can be challenging. Although the group values relational model provides the best account for these data, reliance on this model in Australian studies is somewhat haphazard: many studies fail to mention any theoretical framework; in others, the key elements of procedural justice are poorly distinguished. Achieving clarity and consistency regarding these concepts as they apply to policing is the first step towards applying and testing these theories in practice. This review clarifies these concepts. The significance of practices that focus on trustworthiness and respectful treatment is emphasized. A systematic approach to test the group values model is recommended, using validated scales and labels that conform with commonly applied definitions of those elements. In this way, advances in research on this topic will be more transparent and accessible to practitioners, researchers, and end users.

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Four ingredients: New recipes for procedural justice in Australian policing

Introduction

Pragmatic policing programs specify what police should or should not do in specific situations. For example, evaluations of police interactional skills were conducted to reduce conflict and risk and to improve customer relations (Boni & Wilson, 1994). The outcomes of these studies were a series of procedural do’s and don’ts, or what has been called “recipe” knowledge (Sackman, 1991). Because many training programs are atheoretical (Wilson & Braithwaite, 1996) uncertainty exists as to reasons for the success or failure of any recommended strategies or techniques.

A leading contemporary theory on interpersonal relations that offers promising insight into the effective delivery of policing skills is “procedural fairness”, or “procedural justice” (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). A literature search on policing and procedural justice yielded in excess of 2,500 articles (Mazzerolle, Bennett, Manning, Ferguson & Sargeant, 2009). This article defines the four key ingredients of the group values relational model that underpins procedural fairness and describes ways that practitioners can implement these ingredients to enhance public satisfaction and confidence in the police. Based on this theory, new recipes for procedural justice can be devised that are testable and transferable internationally to other police forces, law enforcement agencies, and public services.

The procedural fairness effect

Numerous studies have demonstrated that most citizens care more about the treatment they receive from authorities than a favourable outcome (Tyler & Huo, 2002). An unexpected finding was that being treated in a fair way with respect, dignity, and concern for their individual
views was more influential in shaping the citizens’ impressions of justice than was a favourable outcome—a phenomenon called the “procedural fairness effect.” The willingness of the public to accept the decisions of the police and their confidence in the police have been linked to perceptions of the fairness of police procedures, not the case outcomes. From the plethora of studies that ensued to uncover psychological mechanisms producing the procedural fairness effect, the group values relational model (GVRM) proposed by Lind and Tyler (1988), emerged as the pre-eminent theory to account for procedural justice (Sivasubramaniam & Heuer, 2008).

The group values relational model

The GVRM posits that our sense of belonging and status in a social group or community affects our perceptions of justice. People derive feelings of self-worth from their group memberships. Consequently, in social interactions, including those between police and community members, people attend closely to information about their status within groups:

Essentially, the group value model posits that people do not judge procedures to be fair because those procedures deliver fair or favorable outcomes, and people do not value procedural features like voice or respectful treatment because they signal the likelihood of favorable outcomes. Rather, procedural features like trust, neutrality, respect (and voice) convey important symbolic or relational information—they convey that the individual is respected by his or her group—prompting people to judge those procedures as fair (Sivasubramaniam & Heuer, 2008, p. 63).

Fair procedures are interpreted as indicators of respect and value, and lead to cooperation and voluntary compliance with police and with the law; unfair procedures are perceived to show disrespect, exploitation of authority, and lead to noncooperation, distrust, and non-compliance (Tyler, 1990; Braithwaite & Makkai, 1994).

Key ingredients in the group values relational model

The four key ingredients in the GVRM are trustworthiness, respectful treatment, neutrality, and voice. These are defined below:
**Trustworthiness.** Trustworthiness refers to the degree to which the public perceive that authorities are motivated to be sincerely helpful and caring, give priority to the best interests of the community, and are honest and open (Tyler, 2008). Trust is the extent to which people believe that an authority is concerned about their well-being and acts to serve the best interests of the public (Tyler & Huo, 2002).

**Respectful Treatment.** Simply put, respectful treatment refers to behaviour by police that demonstrates that they are protective of citizens’ rights, treat individuals with dignity, take them seriously, and attend to and value their input (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Of the four GVRM elements, respectful treatment can most clearly be paraphrased as “professional behaviour.”

**Neutrality.** Neutrality is conveyed by police procedures that demonstrate the absence of bias, by principled conduct and decisions, by consistency, even-handedness and transparency (Tyler, 2008).

**Voice.** In the GVRM, “voice” refers to the ability of community members to participate by expressing a viewpoint (Tyler, 2008). Being listened to by the police conveys that one has some social standing in the community, and shows that the authorities value community members and their opinion. Voice has a symbolic value in building procedural justice: by being involved and consulted in the police investigative or decision making process, citizens infer that they are valued by the authorities.

**Applying procedural fairness in Australian policing**

An important indicator of the status of procedural justice in policing is a series of surveys of community attitudes toward the police. The National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing (NSCSP), administered annually by Police Practitioners Working Group of the Australian and New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) since 1988, is “widely

Findings are monitored and reported nationally, by state and territory. Outcomes of the 2009 survey relevant to procedural fairness are reported below, with further examples drawn from contemporary studies of Australian policing. While the focus in this review is the Australian context, these issues are relevant internationally to other police forces.

Trustworthiness

Circumstances in which the police and the public engage in interpersonal contact are opportunities for the police to build a relationship of trust. Trust is widely acknowledged as a critical issue in policing, shown by a virtual explosion in the trust literature. Police behaviours that diminish trust in police, such as neglect, indifference, incompetence, and venality, as well as behaviours that engender and build trust in the police, have been extensively analysed (Goldsmith, 2005).

Findings from the NSCSP study of perceptions of police honesty and trustworthiness revealed that 77.1% of the community surveyed ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that most police are honest (ABS, 2009). To optimize the procedural fairness effect, it is important that citizens believe that there is sincerity in the police actions, not mere impression management (Greenberg, 1990). Analysis of Australian citizens’ participation in social and political activities revealed an association between engagement and interpersonal trust: the higher the level of interpersonal trust, the greater the participation and activity in social and political spheres (Bean, 2005). Although those cross-sectional data did not permit conclusions about causal relationships, they demonstrated the central role of community engagement in enhancing public trust in police.

Procedural justice research demonstrated that social engagement in the community builds trust, and that trust in others is associated with a willingness to conform to group norms.
In applying the GVRM, a series of studies have confirmed the pivotal relationship of trust in building perceptions of procedural fairness and in generating cooperation with the police (Reisig, 2007).

Respectful treatment

Several surveys of community attitudes to policing in Australia have explored police roles and public respect for the police (Boni, 1995). Nationally, surveys of perceptions of professional job performance by the police have demonstrated that 79.4% of people ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that Australian police perform their job professionally (ABS, 2009).

However, studies of police customer service complaints indicate that respectful treatment is an area of practice ripe for improvement (Burn, 2010). One customer service improvement study based on observations of interactions between police and the public resulted in an Index of Courtesy ranking the types of behaviours used by police according to the degree of respect reflected (Boni & Wilson, 1994). Absent any theoretical framework to guide managers and practitioners in choosing one technique over another, recipes for building respect may fail. By situating the recipes within the framework of the GVRM, strategies to increase respectful treatment and build procedural fairness are amenable to evaluation.

Practitioners who read emerging Australian procedural justice research are cautioned that in certain studies, researchers have respectful treatment is labelled as procedural justice (Murphy, 2009; Murphy, Hinds & Fleming, 2008). Semantic inconsistency across studies makes the findings difficult to interpret.

Neutrality

One important indicator of citizens’ perceptions of police neutrality is the outcome of surveys on public opinions of the police. The 2008 nationwide ANZPAA survey revealed that
perceptions of police neutrality across Australia were uniformly lower than scores on other measures of police performance, i.e., one in three people surveyed disagreed that the police treat people fairly and equally (ABS, 2009). The GVRM sheds some light on why this is so. In making assessments of police neutrality and even-handedness, the public scrutinize how well the police implement policies that members of different cultural groups in their community deserve equal access to police services. Put another way, the treatment that police accord to members of minority groups is used as a gauge of police neutrality. Confirmation that perceptions of police neutrality are shaped by encounters between police and members of ethnic minority groups comes from two Australian studies, one in Queensland and one in New South Wales.

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) regularly surveys Queensland residents to measure changes in public opinions about the police. Results of the 2008 Queensland survey showed that the majority of the residents surveyed (65.2%) perceived an absence of police neutrality, indicating that Indigenous Australians were treated differently from white Australians. In 2008, for the first time, survey respondents self-identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders (Sum, Chan & Legosz, 2009). While only a small percentage of the sample of 1512 self-identified as Aboriginal (1.3%), Indigenous respondents were four times more likely than members of other ethnic groups to report an unsatisfactory encounter with the QPS. Perceptions of police bias were not restricted to members of minority groups. Similar outcomes emerged in a study of a university sample of ethnic minority youth in Sydney, Australia (Sivasubramaniam & Goodman-Delahunty, 2008). Both minority youth and the Caucasian majority believed that police targeted members of certain ethnic groups, and there was general consensus as to the particular groups that police were perceived to single out for scrutiny (e.g., Indigenous youth). Together, these studies indicated that most community members perceived that the police singled
out minority group members, whether juveniles or adults, for differential treatment, providing empirical validation of the damage to broader community-police relations of those negative perceptions (Tyler, 2005).

Poor group relations between police and minority groups have the potential to negatively influence the overall perception of police neutrality, and diminish public satisfaction and confidence in the police (Gallagher, Maguire, Mastrofski, & Reisig, 2001). A practical implication is that police should give more priority to building positive relationships with minority groups and establish protocols of fairness in interactions with minorities to change public perceptions and increase public satisfaction and confidence in the police.

Voice

One way to increase the public voice in interactions with the police is to allow members of the public to ask questions about police procedures and practices and to respond to these inquiries during regular policing duties. This innovation is being tested in a unique field study by the Queensland Police (Hosking, Mazerolle & Bennett 2009). One group of officers who engage with drivers randomly stopped for a breath test gives them an opportunity to voice their concerns orally, in the course of the traffic stop, but also by completing a written survey. Preliminary results indicated that satisfaction measures completed by the drivers following the intervention exceeded ratings from drivers in the regular group.

**Procedural justice, police legitimacy and legal compliance**

The three procedural ingredients most integral to procedural fairness and most influential in shaping people’s evaluations of justice are respectful treatment; trustworthy authorities, and neutral procedures. The fourth feature, voice, is less influential (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2008).
A longitudinal study of adults in Australia who were arrested for driving while intoxicated demonstrated a relationship between initial perceptions of procedural fairness of the legal procedures, and citizens’ perceived legitimacy of the law and obedience to the law. A follow-up inquiry conducted two years later revealed that drivers who perceived the procedures as more fair at the time of their arrest viewed the law as more legitimate, and had lower re-offence rates than their counterparts whose perceptions of fairness at the time of arrest were negative (Tyler, Sherman, Strang, Barnes & Woods, 2007). Notably, civic participation and cooperation was mediated through trust in the police rather than the perceived legitimacy of the authorities (Boeckmann & Tyler, 2002; de Cremer & Tyler, 2007, p. 645):

When trust was high, procedural fairness explained 58% of the variance in cooperation. However, when trust was low, procedural fairness only explained 21% of the variance in cooperation. Hence, as would be expected, variations in the fairness of the procedures had a stronger impact on cooperation when people had high levels of trust in the authority involved.

These findings confirmed that trust is the key relational variable that moderates perceptions of procedural fairness and compliance with the law. Other North American research using more refined and validated measurement scales rigourously tested whether procedural justice judgments affect police legitimacy, and confirmed this relationship, which in turn influences both cooperation with police and compliance with the law (Reisig, Bratton & Gertz, 2007). Trust in the police predicted both legitimacy and legal compliance.

**Procedural fairness, satisfaction and confidence in the police**

Results of studies applying the four ingredients of the GVRM are emerging. In general, these findings validate the relationship between the presence of those elements, increased satisfaction and confidence in the police, and ultimately, increased perceived police legitimacy.
Research on public satisfaction with the Australian police has a long tradition. A review of the contents of 17 surveys of Australian community attitudes to policing revealed measures of (a) levels of overall satisfaction and satisfaction with respect to specific performance elements; (b) perceptions of police effectiveness and efficiency; (c) police professionalism and demeanour; (d) perceived levels of crime and community concerns about crime rates; and (e) public cooperation with the police (Boni, 1995). The GRVM suggests that analyses that tap the four ingredients of procedural justice and test the relationship between their presence and satisfaction levels will identify practices where practitioners can focus attention to increase public satisfaction and confidence in the police.

Satisfaction is a construct that incorporates cognitive, emotional and behavioural components. In fact, ten dimensions of customer satisfaction that provide a comprehensive set of satisfaction measures have been distinguished: quality, value, timeliness, efficiency, ease of access, environment, inter-departmental teamwork, front-line service behaviours, commitment to the customer and innovation (Berry, 2002). Thus, one weakness of some policing surveys is reliance on a single-item global satisfaction measure. Despite this limitation, outcomes reveal a high degree of general satisfaction with the police (Chan, 1996). For example, results of the most recent NSCSP disclosed that approximately two-thirds of the participants (persons over 15 years of age) were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with police services in the period 2007-2008 (ABS, 2009).

A noteworthy outcome in studies of satisfaction with public services in Australia and internationally is that direct participation or contact with the agency increases citizen satisfaction (Goodman-Delahunty, Brewer, Clough, Horan, Ogloff, & Tait, 2008; Rottman, 2007). Results of the NSCSP confirmed this effect: among persons (n=22,682) who had contact with the police
in the past 12 months, satisfaction was significantly higher (80.1%) than among all persons surveyed (66.3%), of whom a substantial proportion (approximately 14,000) lacked contact with the police in the same period (the mean confidence level for only those persons without police contact in the past 12 months was unreported, ABS, 2009)

Confidence in the police

Confidence has been described as an assessment of organizational performance (Bean, 2005) although it too is a multidimensional concept, and may tap diverse attitudes ranging from public support for order and stability (Mishler & Rose, 1998) to anxiety about crime victimization (Sherman, 2002). A national survey of confidence in police showed that seven out of ten Australians had ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a great deal of confidence’ in the ‘police in my state or territory’ (Bean, 2005). Confidence in the police was inversely related to perceptions of police honesty and integrity: as perceptions of police corruption declined, confidence in the police increased (Indermaur & Roberts, 2005), underscoring the importance of trustworthiness to enhance community confidence in the police.

Prior studies have revealed some complexities in the relationship between participation in the criminal justice process, satisfaction and confidence (Myhill & Beak, 2008; O’Brien, Goodman-Delahunty, Clough & Pratley, 2008). For example, results of the Public Attitude Survey regarding the Metropolitan Police Service in the United Kingdom disclosed that four elements, including the level of police engagement with the community, had strong significant effects on ‘overall’ confidence in the police (Stanko & Bradford, 2009).

Conclusion

While police focus on outcomes such as reducing crime, increasing arrests, and increasing clear-up rates, the public attends more to the ways that the police exercise their
authority and the perceived fairness of their interactions with members of the community. Since the police are often the first and primary contact for citizens with the justice system, the interpersonal treatment that members of the public receive and perceive in these interactions is pivotal in shaping public expectations, cooperation and compliance with the law. Even short positive experiences with the police can have enduring beneficial effects (Tyler, 2008).

Australian and international studies demonstrate that the principles of the GVRM and procedural fairness generalize to law enforcement contexts. Awareness of the influence of GVRM variables in policing has been obscured because practitioners investigating the four ingredients have not relied on the GVRM (e.g., Boni & Wilson, 1994) nor made their reliance on the model explicit (Hinds & Murphy, 2007). Achieving clarity and consistency regarding these concepts as they apply to policing is the first step towards applying and testing these theories in practice. Programs for community participation in police procedures devised accordingly may lead to improvements in satisfaction and confidence in the police and increased compliance with the law.

References


