MAINSTREAMING EQUALITY IN CONSTRUCTION: THE CASE FOR ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE

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Despite over 20 years of initiatives, research, and agendas the UK construction sector has failed to embed equality into business priorities and approaches; with both women and minority groups remaining under represented and unfairly treated in construction trades and the professions. Literature in this area shows low levels of retention amongst minority groups, high levels of discrimination and key talent from across the population finding the sector unappealing due to its macho image and the lack of diversity. We posit that, before equality can be realised in organisations, the majority of employees must perceive a base level of fairness. To understand how this can be achieved, a review of Organisational Justice is presented; a theoretical perspective which can explain how to encourage co-operation across the workforce. In exploring this we consider how the perceived focus on equality with respect to pre-existing out-groups works against group differential theory and, therefore, question whether the co-operation from the in-group must be necessary for any initiative to be successful.

Keywords: ethics, equality, diversity, fairness, inclusion, organisational justice.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years research has found that the construction industry faces on-going challenges around equality. There is a lack of representation of both women (Greed 2006; De Graft Johnson et al. 2009) and minority groups (Holloway 2005; EHRC 2009) with 13% and 7% current representation respectively (Office for National Statistics, 2012). At 13.9% the proportional numbers are slightly more encouraging regarding the number of people with disabilities working in the sector, however this stems from the industry's high accident rate rather than equal recruitment practices (Newton & Ormerod 2005). Information on other groups is currently lacking (De Graft Johnson et al. 2009). Although recruitment is an issue, retention of under-represented groups in the sector could be argued to be a bigger problem which has stemmed from lack of support, barriers to progression and discriminatory treatment (Bagilhole et al. 2002; Dainty et al. 2010; Holloway 2005; EHRC 2009). Efforts such as Respect for People (McCabe 2003) and Working Group 8 (Greed, 2000) have, in the same timeframe, failed to yield significant impact and the industry is seeking fresh

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ideas on how to progress the equality agenda. This is driven by a number of factors including legislation, procurement, business improvement and ethics (Caplan et al. 2009).

Historically, work to improve equality has focused on minority group or groups, presenting a case that the industry must change to meet their needs. In contrast, this paper posits that, on its own, such work could actually increase the challenges for minority groups by further reinforcing their out-group status. It further proposes that, in order for mainstreaming to be successful, the traditionally recognised requirements of leadership, training, resources and clear roles (Howard 2010) must be accompanied by a positive perception of organisational justice amongst organisational members. This can be achieved by 'mainstreaming' equality into collective organisational consciousness to the point where it is recognised as routine, and essential, aspects of work.

Mainstreaming

Equality literature establishes three main phases in the development of the concept of mainstreaming: 'equal treatment,' which gives support to individuals but does not seek to address past wrongs, much like equality of context (Scott & Marshall 2009); 'positive action,' which includes diversity management and puts measures in place to overcome historic obstacles such as stereotyping and bias given that these measures have been criticised for isolating equality and misconstruing or misrepresenting the message (Liff 2006); and 'mainstreaming,' which recognises organisational institutions as predisposed to able-bodied, straight, white males and finds that other groups struggle to gain the same access to employment, promotions and board appointments (Rees 1998). Greed (2005) defines this with regard to gender as "the systematic integration of gender into all systems and structures of governance, policies, programmes, processes and projects into ways of seeing and doing, into cultures and organisations."

Policy and practice have moved away from diversity management and towards mainstreaming so, whilst it is still yet to be proven as a system of embedding equality, it is where current academic and practical interest is focusing and therefore where this paper is positioned.

The minimum requirements for gender mainstreaming (Howard 2010) to be recognised as a valid approach in organisations are generally agreed to be:

Leadership - positive policy commitment, with management support;

Strategy - incorporation of gender objectives into planning and implementation procedures;

Resources - experts acting as focal points with a catalytic role;

Training - awareness and skills-raising for all relevant personnel; and

Clear roles - clear identification of who has responsibility for implementation and a system of accountability.

Rees (2005) named three key principles to mainstreaming: treating the individual as a whole person; democracy and fairness; and justice and equity. Rees identified that many of the mainstreaming tools are the same as would be used in the diversity management agenda but, where diversity management is centred on the business case, mainstreaming arose from a social case due to its roots in fairness, justice and respect

(Rees 1998). In the work environment, employees will usually divide into "in" and "out" groups. In westernised societies in-groups can normally be defined as Male, White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (MWASP) whilst out-groups are typically those who do not fit this group (female, gay, ethnic minority, disabled, and so forth) (Stone-Romero & Stone 2005). Past efforts at equality in the workplace have focused on the perspective of the out-groups ensuring that their needs are recognised. Consideration has not been given to the perceptions of fairness as seen by the in-group, which could create a barrier to progress.

Critics of mainstreaming argue that it fails to manifest distinct leadership, encounters resistance among staff and is often ownerless (Brouwers 2013) meaning it can be hard to prove or disprove which organisations are substantively addressing the equality agenda and which are simply paying it lip service (Beveridge & Nott 2002). Much of this criticism cites a lack of co-operation amongst employees and leaders. Some organisations fail to "buy in" to the equality agenda simply using the terminology to appear current, with others only taking it up to access procurement frameworks (James et al. 2009). This suggests that the benefits of equality are not being realised and, whilst the business model has put forward the case for the organisation as a whole, the impact on the average individual worker has not been established. For mainstreaming to be successful it must do more than overcoming the employee resistance to new equality measures (which, Brouwers (2013) observes, is often exhibited as apathy and low prioritisation (Brouwers 2013)). Mainstreaming must also establish co-operation from employees as a majority. Howard (2010) notes that, in the case of gender mainstreaming, there is a tendency to see non-experts (which most employees are) as passive recipients rather than active resisters. She argues that, to move forward this agenda, employees' position must be better understood to create co-operation. It is here that the principles of organisational justice - the idea that people's feelings of how fairly they have been treated are assessed in comparison to others - can be introduced to foster cooperation using group identity to establish a collective environment. Organisational justice can also explain why resistance to the mainstreaming of the equality agenda might emerge.

Organisational Justice

The central tenet of organisational justice is the idea that people's feelings of how fairly they have been treated are assessed in comparison to others (Leopald 2002). Its literature has developed in four distinct waves (Colquitt et al. 2005): distributive, procedural, interactional and integrative.

Distributive justice, first coined by (Homans 1961), is based upon outputs such as pay, job status and status symbols, and inputs such as education, training and intelligence and effort extended on the job (Adams 1965). It finds that outputs and inputs must be equal to achieve employee satisfaction. Adams (1965) established that, when individuals perceived a situation as inequitable, they responded with either guilt (about whether output should exceed input), which caused them to increase input, or anger (if input exceeded output), which caused them to decrease input. Adams compared these findings to earlier studies of relative deprivation (Stouffer et al. 1949) and found that perceptions of fairness were linked to comparisons with others.

Procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker 1975; Leventhal 1980) advanced this theory by establishing that, if the process around the distribution of outcomes was determined as fair, negative emotions and reactions could be overridden. Procedural justice was, therefore, more concerned with the process followed when deciding on the resources

to be allocated than the allocation itself. Interactional justice (Bies & Moag 1986) was concerned with the interpersonal nature of procedures such as treating people with respect and sometimes also embraced the sometimes-distinguished informational justice (Jerald Greenberg 1993), which attempts to provide individuals with reasons for the decisions that are made. Some researchers consider interactional and informational justice to be part of procedural justice and are at pains to point out that the original studies never considered them to be separate (Stone-Romero & Stone 2005).

In the final wave, integrative justice, theorists attempted to integrate the previous three waves by working on models which allowed the consideration of all justice dimensions (Colquitt et al. 2005): it is within this area that this paper is positioned. Two such models - the group-based differential justice model and the group engagement model - are considered particularly insightful.

In and Out Groups: The group-based differential justice model

To understand why there might be resistance to a equality agenda the group-based differential model shows how members of the in-group react to the allocation of resources to out-groups. Organisational justice had failed to give any real consideration to discrimination towards out-group members until Stone-Romero and Stone (2005) proposed the group-based differential justice model which examined how those who allocated resources (allocators) behave with regard to the usually dominant in-group in comparison with out-group members. They found that, when allocating outputs, the measurement of inputs was influenced by the allocator's pre-existing beliefs. They also found that success by a member of an in-group was seen as ability, whereas failure was seen as being unlucky. Conversely, allocators saw out-group member success as luck whereas failure was seen as lack of ability. An example of this is seen in Dainty et al. (2000) where women were consistently given lower appraisal scores by their managers than their male counterparts. These findings have clear implications for the career progression of individuals in out-groups, but there are also implications regarding how this affects group dynamics. From a distributive justice position, even where outputs have been justly allocated, members of the in-group may perceive them to be unjust. This may result in a reactive reduction in input from the in-group or an attempt to make the out-group increase their input (Adams 1965; Bagilhole et al. 2002). If this approach fails then the in-group may display deviant behaviours (Aquino et al. 1999) either towards the organisation such as arriving late, ignoring instruction or theft (organisational deviance) or towards the individual such as teasing, gossiping, harassment, ethical or racial slurs (interpersonal deviance) in an attempt to restore perceived equilibrium. An example of deviant behaviour in construction can be seen in Dainty et al. (2000) where women were both overtly and covertly discriminated against by men. An additional factor that must be considered is the use of procedures to reinforce norms that favour the in-group (Stone-Romero & Stone 2005) such as promoting those who have strong peer support (Holloway, 2005).

Where the out-group individual perceives that there is a discrepancy in output or procedure, the out-group individual's response can be cognitive, attitudinal or behavioural. Cognitive reactions from the out-group can be balanced by either down-playing their own input to create psychological equilibrium or failing to recognise the variance in input from the in-group (Greenberg & McCarty, 1990). For example, female students may pass off sexist remarks from their lecturers as unintentional

(Powell et al. 2006). Attitudinal reactions can result in increased anger, decreased satisfaction, decreased organisational commitment and the intention to quit the job (Bagilhole et al. 2002). Behavioural reactions might comprise either increasing inputs or attempting to make the group decrease outputs, or organisational or interpersonal deviance action. All of the responses are likely to put additional strain on the out-group, affecting their productivity, happiness and identity in the workplace. Stone-Romero & Stone (2005) encourage further work in this area and acknowledge that there is currently not a strong enough body of work to support their theories substantially. Despite this call, little study of group based differential justice has occurred. Although there is some work from (Steiner & Bertolino 2006) which continues the discussion, it does not provide significant developments. Understanding of in-group and out-group behaviours needs to be considered alongside models of co-operation. Without this, efforts to mainstream equality risk being perceived by the in-group as an additional output of the out-group resulting in, at best, loss of productivity and, at worst, deviant behaviour from the in-group.

Organisational Justice and Co-operation: The group engagement model

Moving on to understanding how organisational justice can encourage co-operation, we consider the group engagement model. Since the powerful effect of perceived justice on the workplace had previously been established (Adams 1965; Greenberg 1990; Alexander & Ruderman 1987), Blader and Tyler (2005) felt that organisational justice could further explain how fairness in the workplace could encourage co-operation between employees. They identified relatively little work in this area and encouraged more; considering the next step to be understanding how to harness organisational justice to achieve a co-operative workforce. They identified a number of models of justice - particularly relational and identity models - as avenues for research into employee co-operation. The group engagement model (Tyler & Blader 2003), which does not differentiate between in-group and out-group members, argues that employees are not motivated by the resources given to them (Adam's (1965) distributive justice) or the way resources are allocated (Thibaut and Walker's (1975) procedural justice) but rather by how these actions inform group identity. Tyler and Blader (2003) proposed that perceived fair allocation of resources received by the group leads to pride and respect, which in turn creates a positive identity and leads to co-operation of the group members.

The group engagement model suggests that there are two stages to forming group identities: the first stage (first stage identity) involves social categorisation, where categories that define the group such as interests, tasks, gender, and so forth are used by the group to construct its own identity. In construction, these categories may encompass a tough working environment which can be expressed by enduring weather conditions, discomfort, as well as drinking and horse play. Combined with macho stereotypes and rejection of health and safety (Ness 2011), this provides a strong first stage identity. Employees perceive they must adopt this stance in order to be part of the group and thereby create an even more dangerous and challenging working environment (Caplan et al. 2009; EHRC, 2009; Greed, 2000).

The second stage (Figure. 1) involves linking views of self-worth to group membership through organisational justice. Where group identity is informed in the absence of organisational justice, the group works against the organisation displaying unproductive and disruptive behaviours (Aquino et al. 1999). Where the group perceives fair process and distribution, however, it works with the organisation and is

more likely to co-operate (Blader & Tyler 2009). In the construction sector, the second scenario is associated with low distributive and procedural justice; itself characterised by the long working hours, poor facilities, high health and safety risks and low pay often revealed as false self-employment (Harvey & Behling 2008; Ness 2011; Latham 1994; Constructing Excellence 2009). In the main, distributive and procedural justice is poorly applied with an adversarial culture remaining in the sector (Latham 1994; Constructing Excellence 2009).
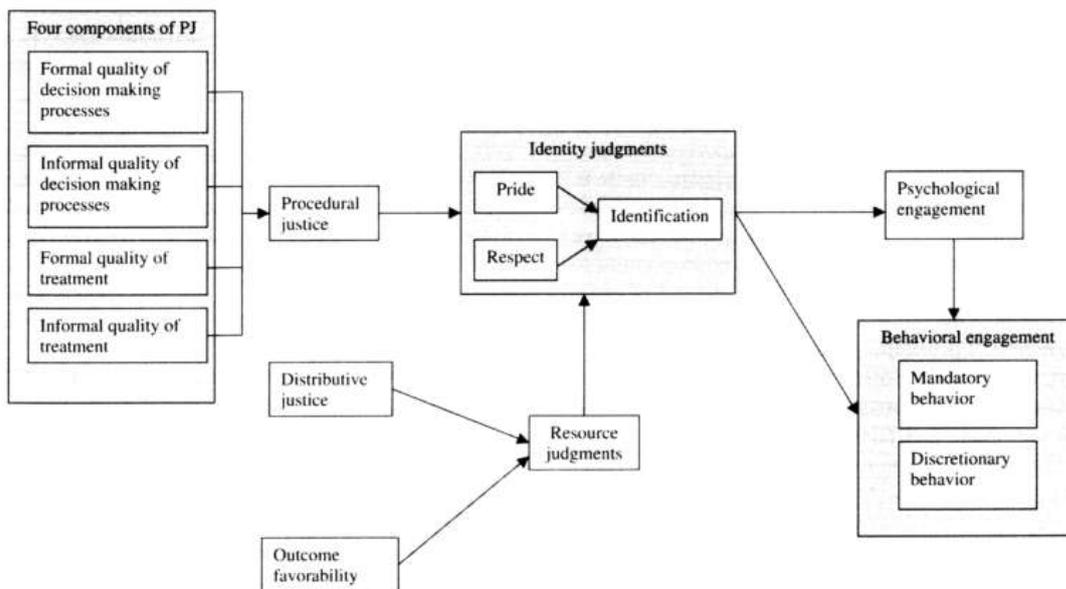

Figure 1. The Group Engagement Model (T. Tyler & S. Blader 2003)

Based upon the group-based differential model (Stone-Romero & Stone 2005) it would seem that an uncooperative group (i.e. a group perceiving low distributive and procedural justice) will lead to organisationally disruptive behaviour and interpersonally disruptive behaviour that will affect out-group members disproportionately. Where this deviant behaviour is directed at the organisation it will affect the return on investment of diversity initiatives (Kochan et al. 2003; Jehn et al. 1999). Where it is interpersonal, it will affect the attitudinal and behavioural response of out-group members, contributing to their low retention rate and high levels of discrimination. Any attempt to mainstream equality where these organisational traits are present will result in not only a negative response, but an amplified one.

Therefore, any attempt to mainstream equality must consider perceptions of organisational justice within the organisation or risk exacerbating the situation. It is proposed that in order to mainstream equality into any organisation the original requirements of leadership, training, resources, clear roles, strategy and management must be accompanied by perceived organisational justice. Figure 2 shows that that this model can be heavily influenced both positively and negatively by forces external to the organisation such as politics, procurement and the economy.
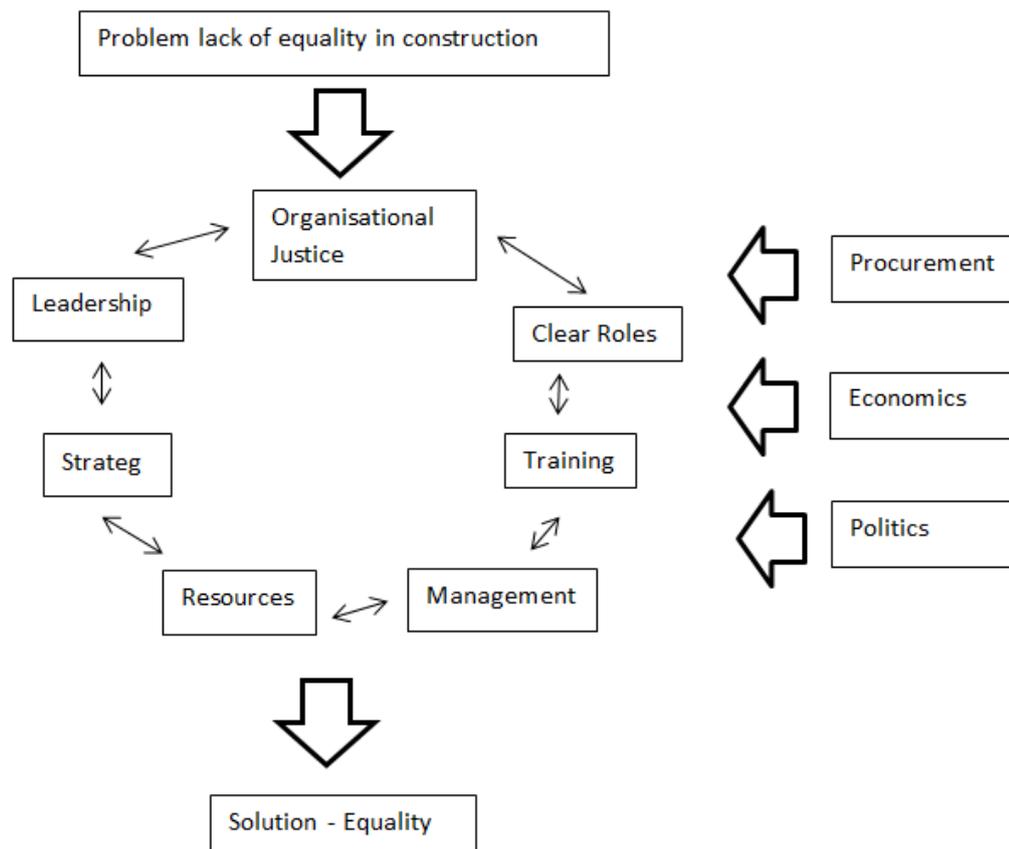
Figure 2. Requirements of mainstreaming

CONCLUSIONS

Whilst prior work on both discrimination and co-operation within the field of organisational justice remains limited, this initial review suggests that its principles can help explain some of the challenges faced by the construction industry when attempting to mainstream equality. Further work is now required to test the proposition that, in order to mainstream equality, construction organisations must consider organisational justice in the creation of a co-operative environment by building positive group identity through the use of the group engagement model and the group-based differential model to balance and thus dissipate in-groups and out-groups.

It is further proposed that achieving a co-operative environment through the use of organisational justice will allow equality mainstreaming practices a greater chance of success. This is attributed to an increased sense of pride and respect felt by the in-group as explained in the group engagement model. This theory could be tested in organisations undertaking mainstreaming initiatives by regular employee surveys that measure how employees responded to integrated justice perceptions of their and organisation. Survey results could be measured against social return on investment within the organisation to see if there is a link between perception of fairness and success of on-going mainstreaming.

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