chapter 10
Equity in organizations: issues of gender, race, disability and class

Well, there’s things that never will be right I know,
And things need changin’ everywhere you go,
But ‘til we start to make a move to make a few things right,
You’ll never see me wear a suit of white.

Chapter outline
- Introduction
- Equity and justice in work organizations
- Gender
- Race and ethnicity
- Disability
- Class
- Chapter summary
- Key concepts
- Chapter review questions
- Chapter case study: The Glass Ceiling Commission
- Notes

Chapter objectives
After completing this chapter, you should be able to:
- understand and explain how equity affects organizations
- describe some of the principal means by which equity issues are handled in organizational practices
- compare and contrast the current status of gender, race/ethnicity, disability and class policy in organizational life in major English-speaking countries
- outline relevant areas where further investigation is needed in the many areas relating to equity in the workplace.
Introduction

Understanding issues of equity across the major social divisions of society as it relates to work is vital for a deep understanding of organizational behaviour. The institution of paid work brings together people of all kinds. Indeed, with increased global migration, the workplace is becoming ever more diverse. Over the last 50 years remarkable changes have occurred, beginning with the movement of women into paid work in greater and greater numbers. Civil rights movements around the world have affected how all people think about visible minority status. And more recently people with disabilities are more effectively demanding the full rights of citizenship, which involve among other things the freedom to participate in paid employment, as is signalled by the increased efforts of the United Nations, for example, to help them achieve this.

**employment equity**: a strategy to eliminate the effects of discrimination and to make employment opportunities available to groups who have been excluded.

These broad social changes help set the stage for our discussion, but interwoven with them all is a particularly broad concern that is not often addressed in textbooks on OB. This concern is for the role of ‘social class.’ The fact that work is implicated in the production and reproduction of class divisions has been understood for at least 150 years. Indeed, this connection between work and social class may have become so taken for granted that it has slipped off the radar screens of many organizational analysts. In addition, we might say that if class divisions are a necessary component of paid work, how can we problematize these divisions if we do not at the same time problematize the way work itself is organized and understood?

Ironically, outside OB literature, up until the 1970s a large proportion of literature on work and inequities focused exclusively on issues of social class. Over the last 30 years, however, there has emerged a great deal of practical concern, policy and research about issues of gender, race and ethnicity. This, of course, should not be understood as making a case for the irrelevance of social class: clearly social class is a major factor that shapes the work experience. Rather, it means that people’s general understanding, as well as academic analyses, of work must become more sophisticated and nuanced to bring to light the relationships between race, gender, disability and social class.

In general terms, this chapter provides a systematic exploration of several of the key areas of equitable/inequitable practice in OB, as well as more broadly in the institution of work, including labour markets. We begin with a general section on the sub-field of ‘organizational justice,’ which has been developing for almost a quarter of a century.
The concept of ‘organizational justice’ will serve as the starting point for this chapter because, although we explore a variety of other forms of research literature, it is the topic that most firmly connects us to the field of OB, organizational psychology and the like. In other words, this discussion is essential, though not sufficient, for the full development of a broad and useful theory of equity in the context of OB. But first it is perhaps relevant to briefly look at the general issues of pay and employment equity, a sub-field of legal and social studies of work that is well established but that stands quite separate from the literature on organizational justice.

Pay and employment equity legislation is defined as laws intended to eliminate established inequalities in the pay received by women and (often specifically identified) members of minority groups working for a given employer. Different forms of this type of legislation exist across many countries. In social democratic countries such as those of northern Europe, it is linked with general work environment legislation. In countries without these types of centralized legislative framework, such as the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, it appears in stand-alone legal frameworks where litigation (as opposed to collective bargaining) is central. In these types of countries, pay and employment equity laws do not, as such, focus on the broader experiences of workers and inequity, even though employers found to be in violation of the legislation are often required to identify and eliminate many of the factors that have produced the violation. Rather, the focus is on comparisons based on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Establishing this value is not easy, of course, and, it reveals the many presumptions that infuse the world of work, which most of us take for granted.

A broader set of concerns, both in the work-based literature and in practice, revolves around human rights legislation. Here the concern is again discrimination, but the focus is much broader than that seen in pay and employment equity legislation. First, more personal characteristics are taken into account (that is, more than just gender and visible minority status), including disability, sexual orientation, age and even political or religious beliefs. Any analysis of human rights violation necessarily explores the full range of forms of discrimination and the factors involved, including those examined in the context of pay and employment equity. Here we might look at issues of the conditions of employment, harassment, mental duress, legal expenses (as well as pay) and so on. Employers found to be in violation of the legislation are often required by law to make employees ‘whole’ by restoring them to the circumstance they would have been in had discrimination not occurred.

This brief introduction to the legal dimensions of equity law provides a lead-in for a broad and introductory exploration of the issue of equity, and specifically organizational justice, in the research literature on OB. Indeed, as we shall see, the two basic legal frameworks outlined above (as well as case research on collective bargaining) offer examples of the many different forms of organizational justice. First, however, we must ask, what is known about how the issue of justice and the perceptions which surround it affect the actual behaviour of and within organizations?

Valuable work has recently been completed on these issues, in the form of general reviews of research and theory. This research comes in a variety of forms: field research, experimental research and ‘action’ (or ‘proactive’) research. Each form and method has made important claims about the relations between different types of justice and variables such as job satisfaction, employee commitment and evaluation of authority.

We can identify three basic lines of inquiry in the area of organizational justice: the distributive, procedural and interactional approaches. (Some researchers iden-
Gender, race, disability and class  

Chapter 10

8

C R I T I C A L  I N S I G H T

plate 28 Women continue to be over-represented in the care-giving professions

Source: Getty Images

C R I T I C A L  I N S I G H T

The writings of G. S. Leventhal are important original attempts to define ‘organizational justice’. Early on, Leventhal and his colleagues generated six criteria for procedures to be perceived as ‘fair’. How many criteria can you come up with? After your attempt, read Leventhal, Karuza and Fry’s article, ‘Beyond fairness: a theory of allocation preferences’.5

Some of the research that has been carried out certainly sheds light on behaviour in work organizations. As in most sciences, the researchers tend to be preoccupied with how powerful the effects they identify are, and which specific theories are the most powerful predictors. Interested readers can look at the primary sources, but, for our purposes we can say that organizational justice (or at least perceptions of it) correlates highly with positive outcomes and experiences of work as follows. Not only do we see that certain dimensions of personality shape organizational justice,6 but we also see that increased organizational justice is found to be correlated with higher job satisfaction,7 higher organizational commitment,8 higher levels of trust,9 more positive evaluations of managers,10 enhanced organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB),11 lower turnover and absenteeism,12 as well as lower levels of workplace sabotage and revenge.13 The literature on work performance is mixed, but overall it shows a positive correlation between forms of justice and better work outputs.14

tify four or more approaches, for instance distributive, procedural, interpersonal and informational, but here we use a three-type model.) Briefly, the types can be roughly defined as follows:

- **Distributive justice** refers to outcomes and allocations emerging from processes.
- **Procedural justice** refers to the procedures set in place to produce the perception of fairness.
- **Interactional justice** refers to the interpersonal treatment of people using these procedures.

In general, it is important to note that ‘justice’, in this field of research, is understood to be socially constructed. It concerns practices and organizational structures, and the policies and procedures that shape them. Note too that typically, justice is understood to be subjective, in the sense that ‘fairness’ is what the majority perceives it to be.4 However, justice can also be understood in more objective terms – involving proportional shares of resources, outputs and so on – and we use this understanding in this discussion. We feel it is necessary to include both the subjective and objective dimensions of justice at work, because when the focus is on subjective formulations of justice – what people think to be just – it is easy to sidestep many contentious issues regarding rights, responsibilities and social justice in a broader, more politicized sense.
For our purposes, perhaps the most important point to be taken from all this is that the concept of ‘justice’, and with it ‘equity’, emerges and takes on personal relevance only in the context of the existence of systematic injustices and inequities. That is, it occurs in a system of tension and conflict. Work, in other words, is contentious; and it is this fact that makes it reasonable for any of us to notice or care about justice and equity in this context. What makes work contentious is, of course, the subject of whole bodies of literature across a wide range of disciplines from political economy to industrial relations, including women’s studies, sociology and so on. For this chapter, however, we can say that this system of conflict and tension can be understood in two major dimensions, horizontal and vertical, which bear directly and distinctly on each of the social variables of gender, race and ethnicity, disability and class we examine later in the chapter.

The tension in the employer–employee relationship should not be confused with tension in the relationships between groups and individuals. Although in reality they coexist with each other, analytically they represent two relatively distinct sets of dynamics, structures and determinants. This distinction is essential if we are to understand the different dynamics of justice and equity across different social groups which feature a mix of characteristics. Tensions that emerge from individual participation in group, team or organizational contexts are related to human individuality, the burdens of negotiating scarce resources, and conflicts arising from interdependency within work structures and processes. Organization theorists call these horizontal tensions. They tend to emerge from the relationship between the individual and the group or organization, where individual agency meets forms of collective need and social structure. Strictly speaking, these tensions can emerge in any form of collective activity, both in and beyond the workplace (such as in social movements, community groups, families, non-profit work and trade unions).

The tensions that arise in the context of employer/employee (or capital/labour) relationships necessarily involve these tensions which are inherent in individual and group/organizational relationships, but there is a distinct set of further tensions that are more or less unique to economic life under capitalism. These tensions revolve around a specific class-based form of what could be called vertical tensions, which appear both within specific work organizations and in society generally. This set of relationships and tensions is rooted in the processes of appropriation. By this is meant the process by which the capital accumulation that defines the success of a business firm requires control to be placed in private hands, in ways that are shaped by market exchanges, technological development and inter-capitalist competition, in the last instance.

It is true that the vast majority of decisions by firms in capitalist economies revolve around the satisfaction of projected, rather than direct, human needs. This may or may not be a problem, depending on your viewpoint, but what is generally

Two recent articles on discrimination in the workplace, one by Brief and colleagues, ‘Just doing business: modern racism and obedience to authority as explanations for employment discrimination’, and another by Yoder and Berendsen, “Outsider within” the firehouse: African American and white women firefighters, add depth and subtlety to our understanding of how and why these practices persist. Each article outlines detailed research on the issues involved, including racial prejudice, tokenism, justice and power relationships. At the same time, these articles do not identify the core problems and barriers in quite the same way. Compare and contrast these two articles (and one or more others you find most relevant). Then see how each speaks to the general models of organizational justice discussed in this section.
not disputed is that the employer/employee relationship that emerges is full of vertical tensions and contradictions. These and other distinctions draw our attention to the essence of the central contradiction and lines of tension that define the employer and employee relationship under capitalism. The distinction between vertical and horizontal tensions also provides a foundation for understanding some of the more specific discussions about equity across different social groups. We present these below, beginning with the issue of gender.

To understand organizational behaviour and gender, we must take time to understand the aggregated results of organizational behaviours from the specific standpoint of women. Over the last 30 years, women have come to account for approximately half the labour force in most core capitalist countries (such as the G10 countries). At the same time, however, the wage gaps between men and women have hardly narrowed. Indeed, in the 1990s the gap may even have widened. It is clear when we look at the available statistics that differential wages as well as differential occupational distributions persist.

Two phrases seem to best describe the status of women in the workplace. One is the ‘glass ceiling’, the concept that despite their equal or greater educational training and performance, women remain systematically excluded from top corporate jobs. The other is the idea of ‘sticky floors’ on which women workers appear to be disproportionately glued. In other words, while women participate in paid work in numbers equal to men, they appear to be excluded from the top jobs, while vast numbers are clustered in low-paying, low-prestige jobs with little or no opportunity for advancement.

This appears to happen through a combination of outright discrimination as well as educational and occupational segregation. To take a specific example, in the United States the median wage for women continues to be only three-quarters that of men. Studies of hiring practices in the United States have found that women are more likely to be found working in firms that are owned or managed by other women. Finally, gender-based harassment at workplaces both persists and has recently been shown to be much more broad than had originally been thought. This harassment undermines efforts to develop career progression and decent working conditions for women.

A significant amount of research over the last decade has looked at the dynamics of gender and management. ‘Good news’ stories are occasionally seen in the media about the burgeoning numbers of business and governmental leaders who are women. However, these are not necessarily representative of the contemporary reality. For example, in 1999 there were only two female chief executive officers (CEOs) of Fortune 500 companies (the largest 500 companies in the United States), and a mere 4 per cent of all senior corporate officers in the United States were women. Similar statistics show that in the United Kingdom, less than 4 per cent of corporate leaders were women. Yet another sobering comparison: in the United States, at the current rate of change it will take approximately 300 years for women to reach the representative 50 per cent mark in corporate leadership, and a remarkable 500 years for them to provide 50 per cent of political leaders.

It is not just a matter of fairness. Gender inequities in the workplace have recently been shown to have important, and under-examined, effects on the health of women. One researcher who has examined this issue explicitly shows that, at both the macro (large-scale) and micro (individual) levels, there is a close correlation between gender inequality at work, itself shaped by organizational practices, legal infrastructures and cultures of specific countries, and the overall mental and physical health of women.
Some studies have effectively conceptualized gender effects in small-group behaviour, and a variety of key researchers have linked general changes in work to a critical discussion of the emergence of new managerial styles which, on the surface, might seem to favour women. Of course, as Wajcman points out, we need to consider to what degree these claims are based on gender stereotypes that may or may not be warranted:

Traditionally, men have been seen as better suited than women to executive positions. The qualities usually associated with being a successful manager are ‘masculine’ traits such as drive, objectivity and an authoritative manner. Women have been seen as different from men, as lacking the necessary personal characteristics and skills to make good managers. The entry of women into senior levels within organizations over the last decade or so has brought such stereotypes into question.

At the same time, of course, denying the essential validity of stereotypes does not prevent stereotypes from having real material effects in people’s lives. In the majority of workplaces these stereotypes flourish, and through this and other factors, major barriers to female advancement are constructed.

Is there a really a ‘male’ and ‘female’ style of management? According to Wajcman’s careful studies, the answer is no. Perceptions of difference persist, for example in the area of ‘risk preferences’, and certainly some variation is to be expected, but assessments of managerial practices show that there are far more similarities between female and male managers than there are differences, particularly in the areas that are seen as the most definitive of the managerial.

Wajcman’s conclusions are not particularly hopeful, but there are some positive proposals in Meyerson and Fletcher’s ‘A modest manifesto for shattering the glass ceiling’. While Meyerson and Fletcher do not question the basic principles of the capitalist model, which may very well be an important source of this and many other forms of inequity, they nevertheless build on the type of argument Wajcman provides by seriously questioning both the efficacy of the current legislative structures and the reality behind the apparently increased ‘sensitivity’ of corporations.

Meyerson and Fletcher are particularly harsh critics of attempts merely to change attitudes. They prefer to change the very way work organizations operate, while arguing for an incremental approach of what they call ‘small wins’ within firms. In Canada, authors like Falkenberg and Boland offer a slightly different prescription. Their careful research of employment equity programmes in workplaces reveals that negative stereotypes are strongly persistent. They go on to show that employment equity programmes have probably created a significant backlash, which is led by males targeting, in particular, those women who have successfully overcome the barriers. For Falkenberg and Boland the solution is to be found not in regulation of the marketplace, but rather through government-led education programmes. A variety of other research calls these conclusions seriously into question, however.

There is also a very clear business case against gender inequity, and this makes the reasons for the persistence of discrimination even more complex. Several researchers highlight the tendency for team decision-making processes to be male dominated, and argue that it is highly ineffective for men to dominate team-based work. Others outline the negative effects of gender stereotypes on mixed-gender negotiations at the bargaining table. They draw on fascinating experimental work which builds on the general ‘stereotype threat’ theories.

An article by Ngo, Foley, Wong and Loi reports, among other things, on the way that such inequity leads to a decline in morale and performance levels, which...
ultimately erodes the capacity of firms to retain top women (and in some cases, top men too). On the surface, this would seem to be an issue in which the very principles of ‘market competition’ would bear progressive fruit, but this is not the case; that is, the market does not seem to be very effective at ‘weeding out’ weak firms on this basis. Ngo and colleagues provide a review of the literature, and also a case study which suggests that changes to organizational structures, not individual attitudes, are most important for addressing perceived inequities.

Although the glass-ceiling issue is clearly important, in many ways the greater problem of gender inequity – at least in terms of the pure number of workers affected – is experienced by women who are stuck to the ‘sticky floor’. They range from Chinese garment workers in the United States to women across the world who labour in sweatshops. Few surfaces are stickier than those to which domestic workers are fixed. A recent study by Parrenas sheds light on just why this is. Her focus is on Filipinas, labouring across more than 130 countries, who represent one of the largest and widest flows of female migrant labourers on the contemporary scene. She shows the incredible difficulties these particular women face. They appear to be unable to take advantage of what legislation there is to prevent discrimination.

In many ways, Parrenas’s study highlights the difficulties in separating out different types of discrimination. Gender, race, disability and class issues are generally highly interwoven in an interactive complex of effects. How, we might ask, can we approach the issue of gender inequities and work in such a way as to encompass the fantastically diverse experiences of both those on the floor and those pushing against the ceiling?

Race and ethnicity

In autumn 1998, a fascinating article in the Guardian newspaper in the United Kingdom reported a pronounced pessimism about the future of race relations. It outlined how most young people in the United Kingdom (in this context, those aged 18 to 24) felt that race relations would worsen rather than improve over the coming years. Excellent historical texts add depth to our understanding of the landscape of ethno-racial inequities and work. Since there seems to be an incredible persistence in a wide range of ethno-racial injustices in the context of work, it is appropriate to ask ourselves several important questions to begin with. What are we to make of this suggestion that young people in the United Kingdom see a growing, not narrowing, schism between ethno-racial groups? Is this pessimism well-founded? And, how does it involve the workplace?

General research over the last three decades has confirmed that while some progress has been made in achieving greater equity for ethno-racial minority groups, it is relatively minor and the results are mixed internationally. In 2002, for example, Blacks and Hispanics in the United States held just 13 per cent of all managerial and professional positions. In a parallel with women’s experience, studies of hiring practices in the United States have found that Blacks are more likely to be employed in firms that are owned or managed by other Blacks.

In the United Kingdom, Labour Force Surveys show that during the 1980s and 1990s there was some upward mobility among ethno-racial minorities. Figure 10.1 compares the levels of income enjoyed by different ethno-racial groups in the United Kingdom, again in the 1990s.
According to some researchers, in the workplaces of the United Kingdom ethno-racial minorities are greatly under-represented in the highest positions and over-represented in the lowest ones. Modood notes how there are also significant differences between minority ethno-racial groups. For example, in the United Kingdom the earnings of Chinese men are on par with those of white men, while Caribbean and South-East Asian immigrants are the worst off. According to the most recent UK Labour Force Survey, in 2001 the unemployment rate for people of Bangladeshi origin was 24.6 per cent and for Pakistanis it was 16 per cent, compared with 5.4 per cent for white people. Since these latter groups have been in the UK in significant numbers for generations now, this too suggests that if conditions are changing, they are changing very slowly indeed.

As we have begun to suggest, there are differences in the experiences of different non-white groups, and there are also systematic distinctions between groups with the same skin colour. Phillips and Lloyd, for example, have shown how there is not always a clear match between race and ethnicity, and attitudes, opinion and values. They go on to show that diversity in general seems to promote more effective decision making, and in particular encourages the voicing of dissent in organizations.

In general, any exploration of different ethno-racial work experiences needs to bear in mind the cultural background. This includes both the history and culture of a group’s country of origin, and the relationship between that country and the country where the group is now resident. We need to consider the effects of colonialism and imperialism, and how these continue to impact migrants from formerly colonized countries. Different groups have different varieties of diaspora (patterns of dispersion of émigré communities), and different cultural and material resources available to them. These same issues help to illuminate the processes by which stereotypes are produced, for example of African-Americans, Caribbean-Canadians and South Asian British.

Another leading researcher on these types of question, Robinson, brings into play a range of other possible factors with the potential to deeply inform the types of inequities that occur in and through specific forms of organizational behaviour. For example, we can look at the degree of general social integration or marginalization of specific ethno-racial minority communities, and at their ‘desire for social mobility’. We need to consider whether these groups are excluded generally from all forms of mobility, or whether they are ‘segmented’ into and isolated in specific industries, where they may experience some partial upward mobility. Often, the difference pivots on groups’ differential success in schooling and their English language skills, but economic isolation is a factor not explained completely by these factors alone.

Modood goes beyond the concepts of exclusion and segmentation to explore how ethno-racial groups experience work differently. She looks at aspects of communities such as how ‘tightly knit’ they are, the degree of hierarchy in communities and between families, and the strength of connections to the country of origin, which have grown immensely with advanced telecommunications. All this makes it clear that we cannot ignore the background of home and community life when we try to assess equity in the context of work.

Much empirical research provides us with details of practices within organizations. There are obvious inequities associated with segmentation, exclusion, promotion and earnings, but there is also recent evidence explaining the processes that reproduce inequity across virtually every element of the workplace experience, from hiring practices to the labour process. There are some fascinating and highly
Throughout the world there are many ethno-racial organizations, advocacy groups and so on doing important and interesting work. www.ir.org.uk/employment/ gives a sense of the activity in the United Kingdom. To further expand our ability to understand the linkages between racism and economic life explore this lecture available on the web which provides an historical and international overview: http://mp3.lpi.org.uk/resistancemp3/marxism-and-race.mp3. Explore these and other relevant sites, and report back to your class on what you find.

The World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health website (www3.who.int/icf/photo_gallery/index.htm) features a photo contest entitled ‘Images of health and disability’. Go to the website and examine the images you find there. There are several entries that deal with work. What kinds of questions do they raise for you? How does this relate to issues of equity? Now consider the disability attitudes quiz at www.equalopportunity.on.ca, as well as an important paper by one of the leaders in the field of disability studies named Mike Oliver found at http://www.independentliving.org/docs4/oliver.html.

Disability and work: an emerging focus for research?

It is vital to assess gender and ethno-racial issues in the workplace in order to generate a broad and critical view of organizational behaviour and its context in contemporary society. Later we look at one of the major sources of difficulty that is so pervasive as to have become invisible (social class), but first we explore an important, under-studied, though perhaps emerging area of equity in the workplace: disability.

The category of disability is broad and diverse. By convention it is divided into five sub-groupings: sensory disability (such as blindness), physical disability, mental and psychiatric problems (such as depression), intellectual and developmental problems (like those experienced by individuals with Down's syndrome), and learning difficulties (such as dyslexia). Beyond these categories, in a recent committee session of the United Nations on disability, Kevin McLaughlin put forth this definition for consideration:

Impairment + Disenabling factor = Disability

Disability is defined differently across countries, but available statistics confirm that in general terms, a large number of people experience from some form of disability, and that many of these experience difficulty in obtaining and retaining paid work. In the United States, for example (where the American Disability Act (ADA) is a key piece of legislation), according to some researchers an estimated 31 per cent of non-institutionalized citizens (aged between 18 and 64) who are considered to have a disability are employed. In other words, there is a 69 per cent unemployment rate amongst people with disabilities. In the United Kingdom (where the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is in force), according to the Labour Force Survey longitudinal database in 2003, the unemployment rate amongst disabled people was 58 per cent. There were more than 2.4 million people in the UK who were disabled, out of work, and wanting to work.
How much do you know about disability and employment? To test your knowledge why not check out the following website: www.wage.eu.com/glasgow/quiz.html

Recent research suggests that people who are disabled have difficulty finding work in which they can effectively apply their skills and talents. They also find difficulty in keeping paid employment. Research suggests that this is largely because of stereotyping and discrimination. Once employed, workers with disabilities report a range of other difficulties, including issues of getting to and from work, movement within the workplace, lack of adaptations of work stations, flexibility in work arrangements, lack of job coaches, and lack of Braille or other forms of text translation assistance. Bruyere has done further research into employer work practices, and reports that the most important challenges disabled workers faced involved the attitudes of supervisors and employees in the firms sampled (see Table 10.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty in making workplace change</th>
<th>Private sector %</th>
<th>Public sector %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changing co-workers'/supervisors’ attitudes</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying return to work policy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating flexibility in performance management system</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in leave policy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting medical policies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring equal pay and benefits</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bruyere (2000).

Importantly, these statistics point toward a view of disability that moves away from the (unfortunately still prevalent) view that ‘disability’ is a problem an individual *has* (that is, he or she is a ‘disabled person’), and towards the view that disability is a problem that individuals *face in society*. In other words, it is a problem of how we organize society, including workplaces. This is exemplified by a statement by the Society for Disability Studies in 1993, that its field ‘examines the policies and practices of all societies to understand the social, rather than the physical or psychological, determinants of the experience of disability.’ This is a crucial shift in how people, including academic researchers, can best understand the phenomenon of disability.

There are various overviews available of international disability policies, including comparative employment policies. The journal *Disability and Society* is perhaps the most accessible English-language source of information on research in this area. However, its discussions of work and employment tend to focus on policy issues. The issue that is of greatest interest in an OB context is the dynamics of behaviour towards those with disabilities, but there is comparatively little literature on this. MacGillivray, Fineman and Goden provide a look at managerial perspectives and practice on discrimination claims, including a comparative look at the United States and the United Kingdom, although they do not focus on disability alone. An article by Premeau published in 2001 provides a provocative discussion of the hiring process for applicants with disabilities (in particular, mental disabilities). An important determinant of equitable access to jobs and promotion is access to training, and Tharenou’s 1997 article on organizational development reported significant barriers in this context. An interesting case that raises complex questions for organizations can be found in the recent work of Reed, who looks at litigation under the ADA over the last 30 years in the United States, and notes that the consideration of personal risk through employment is something that can now legitimately be taken into account. However well intentioned this legislation, in effect it provides grounds for discrimination. The duty to provide a safe work environment opens the door for important questions for human resources departments. Reed asks, should employer ‘paternalism’ take
Do you think that disability is more about a disabling environment than physical impairment? Why have employers largely ignored the legislation aimed at securing equal employment rights for disabled people? A leading activist in Canada (David Lepofsky) frames these issues in terms of challenging our ideas about the meaning of legitimate workplace ‘accommodation’: (as a lawyer who is blind) he remarks, ‘lights are an accommodation for people who see.’ (see also http://atwestern.typepad.com/convocation_addresses/2006/10/ october_19_pm_d.html).

Social class

Should issues of social class be included in a discussion of equity and organizational behaviour? Should we bother to resuscitate the term ‘class society’ from the apparently bygone industrial era? And (even if our answer is ‘yes’ and ‘yes’), what is the relationship of social class to other dimensions of equity, and why would we position it at the end of a chapter?

We would suggest that class is indeed highly relevant. In fact, we position this section at the end of the chapter to emphasize that while each of the dimensions we discuss above involve substantial proportions of the population, relationships of social class underpin the most damaging effects of each of them.

Class can be defined in a variety of ways. It can be understood in terms of culture (such as a bourgeois or working-class culture), status (seeing people as a ‘wage earner’ or ‘owner/manager’, for example), or through highly segmented classifications based on occupational and socioeconomic status (with categories such as professional, unskilled, upper-middle class and underclass). These definitions emerge respectively from cultural studies theory, from Marxist theory and from theories of class inspired by the sociologist Max Weber and others. There is an excellent, concise and accessible discussion in Milner’s *Class.* In all cases, however, class involves hierarchy, the means of generation of this hierarchy, and the resulting precedence over the rights of a person with disability, as established under the ADA? A related question is how the kind of social definition of disability offered by the Society for Disability Studies relates to these legal structures, but Reed does not specifically consider this.
different experiences, different levels of power, control, resources, sensibilities, behaviours and forms of practices.

Differences in class are generated by the full range of activities in the world (such as consumption, politics and education), but they are typically thought to be rooted in economic and employment experiences. In this chapter our focus is on those who find themselves at a disadvantage (such as women in our discussions of gender, minorities in our discussions of race and ethnicity), so here we deal primarily with those who are subordinated by class processes – that is, the working classes. It should be emphasized that class issues interrelate with other issues of discrimination, so those at a disadvantage because of their gender, disability, race or ethnic origin find themselves doubly (triply, quadruply) so if they are waged workers.

We can introduce our discussion of how class hierarchies work under a capitalist system by looking at the pay rates of corporate CEOs and the average workers in the same firms. According the *New York Times*, in 2002 the average CEO of a major corporation in the United States received US$10.8 million in total compensation. That was 400 times as much as the average worker in those corporations: a proportion that has grown from a relatively modest 42 times in 1980. The available statistics suggest that the ratio is tighter in most other countries, but this is still evidence of considerable and growing differentials rooted in the world of work (see Table 10.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ratio of average CEO earnings to earnings of manual workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>7.8 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>10.2 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>15.5 to 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>25.8 to 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Streek (1996)*

If we look at the major international journals on organizational behaviour, human resource development and organizational studies, or at most major textbooks in each of these fields, we discover something interesting, as we mentioned in Chapter 1: there is little mention in them of social class as such. Why is this? As we suggested earlier, perhaps it is because class relationships are so fundamental to the institution of work under capitalism that they have effectively become invisible. However, class is discussed in a wide range of indirect ways – perhaps most prevalently, in discussing the role of trade unions. Why should this be the case?

Trade unions can be seen as an institutional expression of the class interests of subordinate groups. They operate on the principle that workers need to act collectively to balance the playing field of negotiation with employers. They are certainly not perfect. It is hardly controversial to acknowledge that trade unions, like society more broadly, show fairly consistent patterns of inequity and hierarchy, in relation to gender, race and ethnicity, and disability although these organizations have in the recent past shown an enormous capacity to face up to these challenges.65 It can be said, then, that unions pursue generalized class interests, but until recently they have not been very effective vehicles for supporting the interests of specific disadvantaged groups. In this sense (to return to a theme introduced at the start of the chapter), we might say that unions pursue the problem of ‘vertical’ tensions and conflicts, but tend to leave issues related to more ‘horizontal’ tensions and conflicts to fester. For all their inadequacies, however, for the average worker unions remain perhaps the only consistent vehicles for bettering conditions and increasing their say, or ‘democracy’, in the realm of work. As such, they are valuable institutions for addressing inequities in the context of organizational life.
In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s many women, ethno-racial minorities and progressives held out great hopes that equity and anti-discrimination legislation would improve equity in the workplace. (This was similar to the struggle that has moved on to advocates for those with disabilities today.) As the statistics bear out, their hopes have only been marginally satisfied, however. Although small shifts have taken place, minorities continue to experience widespread and multiple forms of discrimination, and the fortunes of women are not much different. For both groups, it has become increasingly clear that labour unions are an important means of helping women and people of colour overcome barriers in the workplace. Indeed, perhaps soon disability advocates will realize this too.

While racism and sexism are seen in labour unions, increasingly unions have actively addressed these issues, for both the sake of social justice and their own survival. Some have done so with considerable success. In general, we believe that unions are vital for alleviating some of the major difficulties that it seems neither legislation nor corporate anti-discrimination programmes can adequately address. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, unions continue to play the most significant role in closing the gender wage gap. Unionized women earn an average of 31 per cent more than non-unionized women. Wage inequality in Canada is much lower than in the United States, but in Canada, according to the national statistics service, in 2002 unionized women earned 38 per cent more than non-unionized women. When race and ethnicity are factored in, the ‘union advantage’ drops only marginally, to 34 per cent.

In general terms, in the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada, where there is greater working-class representation (through unions) there is a less ethno-racial and gender pay inequity. According to an OECD report in 1996, in the social democratic countries of Scandinavia, in countries with related ‘social market’ policies such as Germany and the Netherlands, and in France and Italy, where union coverage is very high (50–90 per cent), the same basic correlation holds true. However, we can usefully ask how exactly class representation, equity in the workplace and economic activity are related in broader terms.

Most mainstream economists see unions as almost exclusively concerned with raising the wages of their members. This, we are told, is a bad thing which ‘distorts’ the ‘proper’ functioning of labour markets and the economy. In this mainstream approach, the gains of unionized workers come at the expense of other workers, and perhaps even of society as a whole. In fact, however, this mainstream view does not hold water. While there are any number of ways of alleviating class inequities, the most developed economic literature recognizes that unions may in fact increase overall wage levels (across all workers, unionized and non-unionized) without detrimental effects on the economy. At the same time unions provide a host of other mechanisms for challenging ethno-racial and gender inequities, giving a greater democratic say to employees, and providing a portion of human dignity at work.

It is sometimes claimed that unionization is detrimental to economic success, but this too is not borne out by the facts. For example, a large-scale study by the World Bank (itself no union partisan) showed no relationship between levels of unionization and the economic or employment performance of a country. Likewise, in 1996 the OECD (looking at the 1980s and 1990s) found no valid statistical proof that unionization is related to the greater or poorer economic/employment performance of industrialized countries. The International Labor Organization similarly demonstrated in 2001 that high unionization is quite compatible with good economic and employment performance.

Equity is as compatible with a flourishing economy as it is for a fair and just society, and this is true in class terms as well as for ethno-racial minorities, women and the disabled.
Chapter summary

- We began this chapter with the claim that understanding issues of equity across the major social divisions of society is vital for a full understanding of organizational behaviour. We explored the general and specific tensions in organizations that make the issues of equity, inequity and justice a relevant topic for learning and research. Vertical and horizontal conflicts were shown to help us understand the complex forms of power that play out across organizations.

- Some suggest that the institution of work, including practices in work organizations, divisions in pay, and related issues such as access to training and employment, has become fundamentally more equitable over the years. We argue that this is only partially correct. There is still lots to be done.

- Women, people from ethno-racial minorities, people who are disabled, and the working class (and all the combinations of these categories) continue to face major difficulties in gaining just and equitable treatment in relation to paid work. Students and scholars of organizational behaviour will benefit from a broader appreciation of these dynamics to inform the direction of future learning and research. Taken together, the vast majority of people in our society are subject to some forms of discrimination. This begs the question, why is it so difficult to realize significant, positive change? Some of the answers to this question lie within the realm of existing OB research, but, many others have not yet been addressed. To address these questions of equity it is necessary to take a fundamental look at how work and society is organized. Through some of the inter-disciplinary dimensions of this chapter, we hope readers will start on that journey of further exploration.

Key concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>institutional racism</th>
<th>sexual division of labour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ethnicity</td>
<td>labour market segmentation</td>
<td>sexuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>femininities/masculinities</td>
<td>Patriarchy</td>
<td>social class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>race</td>
<td>social exclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter review questions

1. What the meaning and value of ‘equitable practices’ in organizations?
2. What is the relationship between the different dimensions of organizational justice and the specific social differences we explored in this chapter?
3. What do the terms ‘sticky floors’ and ‘glass ceiling’ have to do with gender, as well as other forms of social difference?
4. How do these forms of social difference relate to one another to intensify or reduce inequities in organizations?

Further reading


Chapter case study: The Glass Ceiling Commission

In 1991, the US Department of Labor created a 'Federal Glass Ceiling Commission' (FGCC) to identify obstacles to the advancement of visible minorities in business. The FGCC defined the glass ceiling as 'those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions'. Its mandate was to study the barriers to the advancement of minorities and women in corporate hierarchies, to issue a report on its findings and conclusions, and to make recommendations on ways to dismantle the glass ceiling. We will look at the issues defined in and through the terms of reference of the commission, but we also focus here on the notions of equality versus equity in terms of opportunities as well as outcomes.

As part of the background to the case it is important to recognize that despite civil rights movements and advances in civil rights, there is still plenty of evidence of a glass ceiling preventing women and members of minorities from achieving business leadership at senior management levels. In the United States, at the new millennium African-Americans comprised 12.9 per cent of the population, but only 2.5 per cent of senior managers in the private sector. The FGCC obtained information from white and non-white business leaders, as well as human resource professionals whom it considered to be leading voices in the area of equity and career development.

The final report of the FGCC is available on [http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key_workplace/120/](http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/key_workplace/120/). Take a look at it, then read the comments below (published in CIO magazine, [http://www.cio.com/resources](http://www.cio.com/resources)):

‘My biggest challenge has been overcoming initial impressions because I have worked in traditional industries that have had few African Americans,’ says George Williams, a senior sales executive in the supply chain solutions group at TRW Inc. in Cleveland and former president of Black Data Processing Associates (BDPA). In a previous job, Williams sold software in the materials handling industry. ‘I used to feel that being an African American played against me as a sales rep, so when it came down to a comparison, it was not a competitive edge for me. I think it was more of a discomfort on my part knowing I was in a competitive situation and had to be better – much better – than my [white] competition.’

And as much as white executives might be reluctant to admit it, stereotypes often come into play. ‘An African American male of large stature with a deep voice might be viewed negatively by a white person,’ explains Carl Williams, senior vice president and CIO of Principal Financial Group in Des Moines, Iowa. ‘The [white] person might be intimidated – people are threatened [by that sort of thing].’

‘All people have perceptions of what people should look like, be like, to fill senior-level roles,’ says R. Steve Edmonson, CIO and vice president of pharmaceutical manufacturer R.P. Scherer Corp. in Basking Ridge, N.J. Carl Williams adds, ‘It’s very simple: Some people are comfortable only when they are bringing people into the environment that look like them, think like them, act like them. A lot of the perception is that “I’m going to have a very difficult time dealing with that individual because I’m not comfortable with the person.” Some people can’t get past that.’

Task

It is important to think about the implications of equality and equity principles applied to treatment and outcomes. That is, typically equality refers to treatment of people and outcomes which are the same, whereas equity refers to either similar or differential treatment of people in order to produce equality of outcomes. Then consider these questions:

1. How do the recommendations of the FGCC relate to this distinctions?
2. In light of the difficulty in removing the glass ceiling, how might an OB professional respond to this ongoing issue?
Sources of additional information


www.un.org/womenwatch/ UN website offers a variety of different weblinks and documents related to the current situation of women in the world.

Note

This case study was written by Peter Sawchuck, University of Toronto, Canada.

OB in films

In Dirty Pretty Things (2002) we get a glimpse into the intersection of race, ethnicity, immigration, gender and class, as characters Okwe and Senay, who have both recently emigrated to England, must cope with various inequities, injustice and violence. While the examples represented in the film are extreme, nevertheless we see a modern portrayal of multiple forms of inequity and social difference in relation to the ‘lower-tier’ service economy that is growing in all G8 countries.

Notes

2 Godard (2005).
4 Colquitt et al. (2001).
5 Leventhal, Karuza and Fry (1980).
6 Colquitt et al. (2006), and Roberson (2006).
7 See for example McFarlin and Sweeney (1992).
8 See for example Tyler (1990).
9 See for example Folger and Cropanzano (1998).
10 See for example Ball, Trevino and Sims (1993).
12 See for example, Masterson et al. (2000).
14 See for example Masterson et al. (2000).
15 Brief et al. (2000).
16 Yodder and Berendsen (2001).
18 Hartmann (2003).
19 See for example Carrington and Troske (1998).
20 Glomb et al. (1997).
22 Rubenstein (2003).
23 Moss (2002).
27 See for example Yodder (2002) on ‘gender tokenism’.
28 Siegrist, Cvetkovich and Gutscher (2002).
31  Meyerson and Fletcher (2000).
33  Meyerson and Fletcher (2000).
34  Falkenberg and Boland (1997)
35  See for example Wajcman (1998) and Meyerson and Fletcher (2000).
36  See for example Lepine et al. (2002).
37  Kray, Galinsky and Thompson (2002).
38  Ngo et al. (2002)
40  See for example Brooks (2002).
47  Modood (1997).
50  Modood (1997).
52  Brief et al. (2000).
53  Yodder and Berendsen (2001).
54  VandenHeuvel and Wooden (1997).
55  See for example Houtenville (2003).
56  Loprest and Maag (2001).
57  Bruyere (2000).
58  Thornton and Lunt (1997).
63  Reed (2003).
64  Milner (1999).
65  Burke et al. (2003).
67  Aidt and Tzannatos (2003).