

GREER.LET

Dear Professor Greer,

29 Sept 1987

re "Reactions to discipline".

During the sixties I was the editor of Human Relations. It was rare to get a paper based on such a beautiful set of data. The problem you have focussed on has been central to my past research into schools, prisons, work-places and, recently, the re-design of work for the firemen of the ACT (where I now live).

When I saw that you had published your matrix of correlations I simply had to analyse it to check on my own 'theories' about how punishment operates in such settings. I have long found that regression analysis (and ANOVA and factor analysis) is inadequate for detection of all but the crudest of relations in social science data. From the mid-sixties we gradually evolved from McQuitty's linkage analysis a method of deriving a strictly objective graphical representation of a matrix of correlations (Emery, Systems Thinking, Vol 1, 1981). This method avoids the subjective judgements of so-called path analysis but does what it purports to do with no theoretical limit on the number of variables. This is the method used here for the re-analysis of your matrix.

The enclosed two graphs give the results of the re-analysis. There are two graphs because graphs of this kind are subject to the principle of symmetry. When we graph the relations around "perceived appropriateness" then a reversal gives us the relations around 'perceived inappropriateness'.

What emerges from your data is that the central, determining variable is 'perceived appropriateness'. All that this says is that people have a powerful 'sense of injustice' and a very realistic awareness of when they have been 'fairly copped'. It is well worth saying it again, in hard facts.

You will notice from the graph that "justice being seen to be done" (perceived appropriateness) is bracketed between good past relations and subsequent preservation of that relation. This places institutional punishment in a transactional context as distinct from an interactional or tit-for-tat context. Punishment does not appear to disrupt existing social relations when that punishment is seen as just deserts. Your data show that when this is the case behaviour is actually changed and there is little emotional reaction (the individual copes with his feelings and does not project them into the community).

Further to this, your data show that justice is most likely to be done if the prior relations are good. Good relations appear to imply respect for the other; respect for the other seems to imply giving some reasons for dealing out punishment, and suggesting how the 'victim' might act differently in the future. The graph indicates that the effect of prior good relations can be amplified by giving reasons, and giving reasons is strengthened if alternative behaviours are suggested.

Privacy and timing (variables 5 & 12) seem to be simply by-products of respect for the other. Hence I have put them outside the box. Some institutional settings give a supervisor a choice in these matters and some do not. The subordinates usually understand these limitations on the supervisor.

Being pleasant about delivering punishment does not appear to be as central as you suggest in your summary. It would appear that its effect is simply to attenuate the felt seriousness of the punishment. It does not appear to have an effect on the other outcomes. The other side of this is that if the punishment is likely to be seen as appropriate then the supervisor does not have to be nasty about it.

If we turn to the Mirror-Image we get the dynamics of injustice. If the relations with the supervisor are bad and/or no reasons are given for the punishment then that punishment is likely to be seen as unjust. If reasons are given without indicating how one could have otherwise have acted they are less likely to be accepted as reasonable. If the verdict to punish is

delivered in the wrong place or at the wrong time it will confirm suspicions that the supervisor had it in for the recipient, did not like him/her.

If the punishment is seen as unjust then the supervisor's judgement is certainly suspect. If the supervisor delivers his judgement in a nasty, unpleasant manner then it is proof that he knows that it is unjust, and that multiplies the injury.

Outcomes? First, it confirms that the supervisor is a bastard. Second, there is no way that I will not try to get away with it again, so long as I cannot be detected. Third, I am bloody angry.

That, I think, is the story in your data. It was a pleasure to work on it.
Yours sincerely