

EQUITY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: A MANAGERIAL APPROACH BETWEEN DIPLOMACY AND NEGOTIATION

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Abstract

This article examines the principle of fairness in managerial decision-making, focusing on balancing organizational diplomacy and strategic negotiation. The aim of the research is to identify how fairness influences managerial decisions and to analyze its relationship with diplomatic and negotiating practices in contemporary organizations. Through a solid theoretical foundation, the paper explores relevant conceptual models, discussing correlations between fairness, participatory leadership, and ethical governance. Methodologically, the research employs a mixed-method design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture the complexity of organizational and decision-making interactions. Data were collected from various organizations, analyzing the perceptions of managers and employees regarding decisional fairness and the diplomatic or negotiating mechanisms involved. The results indicate that fairness plays an essential role in the perceived legitimacy of decisions and organizational climate stability, emphasizing the importance of participatory leadership. The study reveals that organizational diplomacy combined with transparent and fair strategic negotiation significantly contributes to improving organizational performance and fostering an ethical climate. In conclusion, the study provides practical managerial recommendations and suggests directions for organizational policies and future research, thereby contributing to academic literature by coherently integrating fairness, diplomacy, and negotiation within the modern managerial context.

Keywords: Decision-making fairness, Organizational diplomacy, Participative leadership, Organizational justice, Ethical governance.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24818/beman/2025.15.4-01>

1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In the context of contemporary organizations, the decision-making process can no longer be approached solely through the lens of efficiency and/or financial results. Equity has become a key criterion in evaluating the legitimacy of managerial decisions, being closely linked to employee perceptions, the internal ethical climate, and the long-term sustainability of the organization (Hollander-Blumoff, 2019, p. 381). At the same time, organizational diplomacy and strategic negotiation are two essential tools through which leaders can ensure a balance between the multiple interests of the actors involved in the decision-making process (Faizullaev, 2024).

Equity is often perceived as a moral concept, but in practice, it has a profound impact on the efficiency and stability of decisions within organizations (Druckman & Wagner, 2017, pp. 9–17). In both diplomatic and managerial negotiations, the perception of fairness influences the degree of compliance with outcomes and long-term cooperation (Kapstein, 2008, pp. 229–245). From this perspective, analyzing how fair managerial decisions are constructed becomes vital for leaders who seek participatory and sustainable governance.

In the specialized literature, the concepts of equity, negotiation, and diplomacy are often addressed separately, with few studies attempting to correlate them within an integrated organizational decision-making framework. The main issue explored in this article is: How can organizational leaders integrate equity into decision-making processes in a strategic and sustainable way, through diplomacy and negotiation?

The research questions associated with this issue aim to identify answers to:

- What are the perceptions of employees and leaders regarding decision-making fairness?
- To what extent can internal diplomacy and negotiation contribute to creating a fair organizational climate?
- How is equity correlated with the perceived performance of participatory leadership?

2. ARTICLE OBJECTIVES

This article sets out the following objectives:

1. To investigate the role of diplomacy and negotiation in the fair management of organizational conflicts and decisions;
2. To conceptualize equity within the organizational decision-making context;
3. To provide an analytical framework for correlating organizational equity with ethical leadership;

4. To offer leadership recommendations for fostering equity in strategic decision-making.

The originality of this article lies in its integrative approach to equity, diplomacy, and negotiation as converging dimensions within the organizational decision-making process. While most studies treat these concepts in isolation, this paper seeks to identify ways to interconnect them in a framework applicable to real-world organizational contexts, with a focus on ethical governance and participatory leadership (Meerts, 2022; Zeleznikow, 2005).

Equity in the organizational context refers to the perception that managerial decision-making processes and outcomes are fair, impartial, and transparent for all actors involved. It is closely tied to the concept of procedural justice, which significantly influences the level of acceptance and compliance with the decisions made (Hollander-Blumoff, 2019, p. 381). A lack of perceived equity in organizations may lead to demotivation, internal conflict, and a lack of organizational commitment (Welsh, 2004).

From an organizational theory perspective, equity is not only an ethical value but also a strategic governance tool that contributes to the stability and sustainability of organizational decisions. According to Druckman & Wagner (2017), equity is a key factor not only in decision-making processes but also in the implementation and maintenance of adopted agreements and policies (Druckman & Wagner, 2017, pp. 9–17).

The literature in this field highlights that equity, organizational diplomacy, and negotiation are complementary concepts with a direct impact on managerial decisions and decision-making. Recent studies have confirmed that procedural and distributive fairness are strong predictors of decision-making satisfaction and organizational performance (Druckman & Wagner, 2017; Bakotić & Bulog, 2021; Raineri, 2023). Organizational diplomacy facilitates consensus and cooperation, while transparent and participatory strategic negotiation enhances perceptions of procedural justice (Hollander-Blumoff, 2019; Jackson, 2024; Wong, 2025). This integrative approach is more relevant than approaching the concepts separately, a strategy used predominantly in the pre-existing classic literature.

The literature offers several theoretical models aimed at integrating equity into decision-making processes. Among the best-known models are:

- The organizational justice model, which includes Distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), Procedural justice (fairness of processes), Interactional justice (respect and transparency in interpersonal relations);
- The Equity Theory (Adams), which suggests that individuals compare their own input–reward ratio with that of others, and that perceptions of inequity trigger corrective behaviors;
- The adaptive model of fairness perception, which highlights that individuals adjust their expectations of fairness based on both prior experiences and power dynamics.

In negotiations, equity is rarely absolute. Hennig-Schmidt (2002) shows that involved actors often rely on their own norms of fairness, which leads to misaligned expectations and difficulties in reaching consensus (Hennig-Schmidt, 2002, pp. 185–210).

Organizational diplomacy involves tact, empathy, and a focus on mutually beneficial solutions, all within a framework of collaborative internal and external relations. In contrast, strategic negotiation focuses primarily on obtaining concrete advantages, often through maximizing one's own interests. However, recent studies show that these two approaches are not antagonistic, but rather complementary, especially in complex organizational environments (Faizullaev, 2024; Roeder & Simard, 2013, pp. 21–49).

In practice, internal diplomacy helps "smooth the ground" for effective negotiation, while strategic negotiation acts as a decision-making mechanism, where principles of fairness can be either integrated or ignored depending on the organizational culture and the leaders involved (Kapstein, 2008).

Participatory leadership involves the active engagement of organization members in decision-making processes, which by nature enhances the perception of fairness among participants. Procedural justice is a central pillar of this leadership style, as decisions are discussed, reasoned, and collectively assumed (Hollander-Blumoff, 2019).

Moreover, ethical governance implies establishing internal norms that regulate how decisions are made, not just the outcomes of those decisions. Organizations applying ethical principles in decision-making benefit from a strong reputation, high employee retention, and long-term superior performance.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research objectives included in the methodology are:

1. Investigating the relationship between the perception of fairness and decision-making satisfaction (Bakotić & Bulog, 2021)
2. Analyzing the role of organizational diplomacy on the perception of fairness
3. Assessing the influence of participatory leadership on internal organizational negotiations
4. Comparing the perceptions of human resources within organizations in the public and private sectors

The hypotheses formulated and tested in the article are as follows:

H1: There is a positive correlation between the perception of fairness and decision-making satisfaction (Bakotić & Bulog, 2021)

H2: Organizational diplomacy has a predictive effect on the perception of fairness

H3: Participatory leadership leads to a more frequent use of negotiation in decision-making processes

H4: Organizations with participatory decision-making report a higher level of perceived fairness among employees

H5: There are significant differences between the public and private sectors regarding decision-making typologies

To investigate the integration of equity into decision-making processes through the lens of diplomacy and negotiation, this study adopts a mixed-methods research paradigm. This choice is justified by the need to capture both the subjective and perceptual dimension of equity (through qualitative methods), as well as to test associations and patterns between variables (through quantitative methods) (Druckman & Wagner, 2017). The mixed paradigm provides an integrative approach to a complex issue such as equity in organizations, where individual perceptions must be correlated with formal structures and decision-making processes.

The research design is exploratory-descriptive. In the first stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted with organizational leaders and decision-makers to identify representations, practices of equity, diplomacy, and negotiation. This allowed the identification of emerging thematic patterns and managerially relevant constructs (Meerts, 2022). In the second stage, a standardized questionnaire (Annex – Research Questionnaire on Employees' Perceptions) was administered to a broader sample of employees from various organizations in order to identify correlations between perceptions of equity, leadership styles, and the use of diplomacy and/or negotiation in managerial decision-making (Yu, 2016).

Data collection instruments and techniques:

1. Semi-structured interviews

The interview guide included 10 open-ended questions addressing how leaders define a “fair decision” in their organizations, methods of incorporating equity into internal negotiations, and the balance between diplomacy and negotiation in exercising decision-making authority.

2. Quantitative questionnaire

Built on the Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001), the questionnaire was adapted to include items related to internal diplomacy and leadership style. Scores were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very large extent).

The study was conducted in three private sector organizations (technology, consulting, and manufacturing) and two public institutions (local administration and higher education).

The total sample included 15 leaders (for interviews), 128 employees, aged between 25 and 58, from various departments (for the questionnaire). This diversity in organizational context enabled a comparative understanding of practices and perceptions regarding equity across different organizations and hierarchical levels.

The sampling rationale aimed at including organizations with different structures and cultures (private and public sectors), in order to capture the diversity of decision-making practices and to reduce the risk of limiting generalizations. In addition, the quantitative instrument underwent a validation process: piloting the

questionnaire on a small group (n=20), verifying the internal consistency of the scale through the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (>0.70), and adapting the items to the diplomatic and negotiation-specific context of the study. These procedures enhance the transparency and reproducibility of the quantitative approach.

Several limitations of the study, however, must be acknowledged:

- Limited generalizability due to the relatively small number of organizations included;
- Subjectivity of perceptions regarding diplomacy and negotiation may be influenced by cultural and personal factors (Kapstein, 2008);
- The questionnaire, although partially validated, includes adapted items that require further reliability testing.

4. DISCUSSING THE RESULTS

The qualitative analysis was conducted through thematic coding of interviews using NVivo software.

Four major themes were identified:

- Perception of equity as a means of strengthening trust.
- Informal diplomacy as a mechanism for conflict prevention.
- Internal negotiation as a form of collective decision-making.
- The role of the leader as a "fair/equidistant mediator" within the organization.

The quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS, applying Pearson correlations and multiple regressions. Key findings include:

- A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between perception of equity and decision-making satisfaction.
- A predictive effect of organizational diplomacy on perceived equity ($\beta = 0.51$, $p < 0.01$).
- Participatory leadership has a significant positive effect on the use of negotiation as a decision-making method ($\beta = 0.43$, $p < 0.05$).

According to the interpretation of results, organizational diplomacy should not be regarded merely as elevated or elegant communication, but rather as a tool for balancing divergent interests—between the organization and its stakeholders—thereby creating the premises for managerial decisions perceived as fair by organizational members (Faizullaev, 2024; Roeder & Simard, 2013). Simultaneously, negotiation, when perceived as open, ethical, and participatory, contributes significantly to reinforcing the perception of procedural justice (Hollander-Blumoff, 2019; Welsh, 2004).

Based on the interpretation of the research data, three decision-making typologies emerged:

1. Authoritarian decision diplomatically justified – more frequent in the public sector.
2. Bilateral negotiated decision – typical in project teams or interdepartmental management.
3. Participatory decision facilitated by collaborative leadership – predominant in organizations with flexible cultures.

Employees from organizations with participatory decision-making reported a significantly higher perception of equity ($M = 4.3$) compared to those in strictly hierarchical structures ($M = 3.2$).

5. INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE

Although the research results confirm the hypothesis that organizational diplomacy and participatory negotiation strengthen perceptions of fairness, there are also relevant counterexamples. Some studies have shown that excessive diplomacy can lead to slow, compromised decisions that are perceived as inefficient (Kaptein, 2021). Moreover, competitive negotiation, even if it produces effective short-term results, can in the long run erode the trust capital enjoyed by leadership and may even exacerbate internal tensions (Raineri, 2023). In addition, from a cultural perspective, important nuances may arise: what is considered fair in one organizational context may be perceived as unjust or unethical in another, which limits the universality of conclusions (Shen et al., 2022). Thus, the analysis of decision-making fairness must be placed within a dynamic framework, in which the balance between diplomacy, negotiation, and efficiency remains fragile and context-dependent.

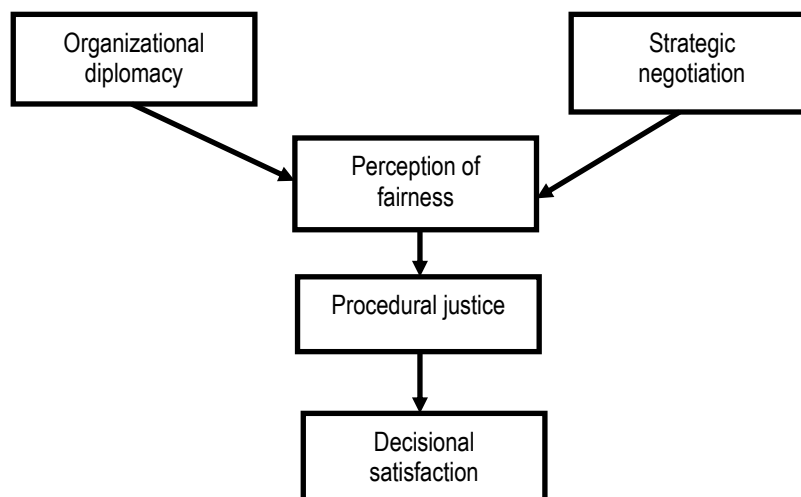


FIGURE 1. THE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN FAIRNESS, DIPLOMACY AND ORGANIZATIONAL NEGOTIATION
Source: Authors own conception

The findings confirm assumptions from the literature that procedural justice is a key predictor of the legitimacy of decisions, with a strong impact on organizational performance and the stability of internal relations (Druckman & Wagner, 2017; Kapstein, 2008). Furthermore, diplomacy and negotiation can no

longer be viewed solely as conflict-avoidance strategies; instead, they act as vectors of decision-making equity, particularly in dynamic organizational environments (Meerts, 2022).

This conceptual diagram illustrates the correlations between equity, diplomacy, and negotiation within the decision-making context:

- Organizational diplomacy contributes to the creation of a participatory and empathetic organizational climate, which enhances employees' perception of equity.
- Strategic negotiation, when conducted as a participatory and transparent organizational process, reinforces this perception by integrating diverse perspectives into decision-making.
- Perceived equity thus acts as a bridge between tactical mechanisms (diplomacy/negotiation) and deeper outcomes such as procedural justice and decision-making satisfaction.

This logical sequence reflects the idea that the process is just as important as the outcome, and that leaders can shape the legitimacy of decisions through the way they design and communicate them.

The practical recommendations derived from the identified typologies are:

1. Diplomatically Justified Authoritarian Decision – although it provides formal legitimacy, this model may generate low perceptions of fairness. A recommendation would be to establish minimal internal consultation mechanisms (advisory committees or rapid feedback sessions) in order to reduce perceptions of arbitrariness and increase acceptance of the decision.
2. Bilaterally Negotiated Decision – efficient in interdepartmental management, but exposed to the risk of being “captured” by groups with disproportionate influence within the organization. In this case, the recommendation is to train leaders in ethical negotiation skills and to introduce procedures/protocols that balance the representation of divergent interests.
3. Participatory Decision Facilitated by Ethical Leadership – this typology has the highest level of perceived fairness, but requires considerable resources and time. For sustainability, it is recommended to establish post-decision feedback mechanisms and periodic ethical audits to ensure coherence between the declared intent and its implementation/results.

By grounding these recommendations directly in empirical findings, they not only strengthen the practical relevance of the research but also provide an adaptable framework for different decision-making styles.

6. MANAGERIAL INVOLVEMENT AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings highlight that the perception of equity in decision-making is directly influenced by how organizational leaders practice internal diplomacy and negotiate divergent stakeholder interests. In

this context, managerial involvement plays a crucial role in shaping the decision-making climate and in promoting an organizational culture rooted in fairness, transparency, and participation.

A first recommendation derived from the analysis is the institutionalization of clear mechanisms for consulting employees in decision-making processes that directly affect them. This may include advisory committees, structured feedback sessions, or digital platforms for opinion sharing. Such practices not only increase the perceived level of fairness but also contribute to reducing resistance to change.

Secondly, managers should adopt a proactive and reflective approach to organizational diplomacy, treating conflicts and differences of opinion not as obstacles, but as opportunities for consensus-building. When applied with integrity, internal diplomacy facilitates constructive negotiation frameworks and reduces decision-making polarization.

Furthermore, it is recommended that leaders receive training in ethical negotiation skills, with a focus on balancing organizational interests with those of individual and collective employees. Leadership development programs should include components on organizational justice, empathetic communication, and participatory governance.

Lastly, organizations should review their decision-making policies, ensuring that they reflect clear standards of procedural and distributive fairness. Codes of ethics and governance norms should be aligned with the values of equity in order to create a stable and coherent framework for decision-making.

7. MANAGERIAL PRACTICES ENSURING EQUITY

Based on the empirical results, organizational leaders can adopt deliberate practices to promote equity in decision-making within their organizations, such as:

1. Creating formal and informal consultation spaces like working groups, internal focus groups, or active listening sessions that encourage open expression of differing viewpoints before final decisions are made.
2. Ensuring transparency in decision criteria by clearly communicating the norms, reasons, and values behind managerial decisions to help with acceptance, even among those who may feel disadvantaged (Welsh, 2004).
3. Inviting participatory feedback after decisions are implemented to allow reflection and organizational adjustment.

Implementing these practices has been linked to increased trust and a stronger perception of fairness among employees (Yu, 2016).

The role of leaders in cultivating an ethical decision-making climate involves modeling ethical and empathetic behavior, not just formal participation. Leaders who act as mediators between the interests of

different groups tend to generate decisions that employees perceive as more legitimate and sustainable (Hollander-Blumoff, 2019; Faizullaev, 2024).

Leaders should develop skills such as active listening, empathetic communication, and distributive negotiation to balance efficiency, outcomes, and fairness in decision-making.

Recommendations for organizational policies include:

1. Defining ethics codes that are applied throughout all phases of decision-making (analysis, consultation, choice, implementation) rather than existing only as formal documents.
2. Implementing professional training programs focused on negotiation, ethics, and diplomacy, especially for middle management, who operate at the intersection of strategic and operational decisions.
3. Introducing internal audit systems to monitor the impact of decisions on perceived fairness, acting as an “ethical barometer” for the organization (Kapstein, 2008).

Based on the interpretation of the research results, three main decision-making typologies were identified, reflecting the degree of participation, transparency, and involvement of organizational actors in decision-making: authoritarian decision justified diplomatically; bilaterally negotiated decision; participative decision facilitated by ethical leadership.

This classification helps to understand how decision-making style influences perceptions of fairness and can guide leaders in choosing communication and engagement strategies appropriate to the organizational context. It also provides a framework for evaluating decision fairness in internal audits or comparative studies.

TABLE 1. DECISIONAL TYPOLOGIES AND PERCEIVED LEVELS OF FAIRNESS

Decision-making typology	Organizational examples	Perceived level of fairness (average)	Specificity
Diplomatically justified authoritarian decision	Public institutions	3.2	Formal legitimacy
Bilaterally negotiated decision	Large private companies	3.8	Contextual efficiency
Participatory decision with ethical leadership	Start-ups, Non-governmental organizations NGOs	4.3	Innovation and cohesion

Source: Authors own conception

It is observed that authoritarian structures, even when including diplomacy, have the lowest levels of fairness; bilateral negotiation brings a better balance between parties, while participative decisions, accompanied by ethical leadership, achieve the highest fairness scores. This suggests that the decision-making style significantly influences employees' perceptions of the legitimacy and fairness of decisions.

8. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the conducted research highlights that the perception of fairness is strongly associated with decision-making satisfaction (Bakotić & Bulog, 2021), while organizational diplomacy plays a significant predictive role in strengthening this perception. Participatory leadership facilitates the use of negotiation, which reinforces the sense of procedural justice. The identified decision-making typologies (authoritarian-diplomatic, bilaterally negotiated, participatory-collaborative) demonstrate that the level of perceived fairness increases with greater participation and transparency in decision-making. Thus, this study confirms the importance of diplomacy and ethical negotiation as strategic tools for building a fair and sustainable organizational climate. The major contribution of the research lies in emphasizing that fairness is not merely an abstract value, but a practical and indispensable mechanism for decision-making legitimacy and organizational performance.

This research investigated how the principle of fairness can be integrated into the managerial decision-making process through the conscious use of organizational diplomacy and strategic negotiation. Starting from the finding that fairness is more than an ethical ideal, the results showed that it functions as a mechanism for legitimizing managerial decisions, strengthening trust, cohesion, and the involvement of organizational members. The research also confirmed that perceptions of fairness are positively influenced by participative leadership styles, transparency, and leaders' ability to mediate multiple interests through diplomacy and negotiation.

At a theoretical level, the article aimed to conceptually integrate three essential dimensions: decision-making fairness, organizational diplomacy, and negotiation as an organizational process. Through this approach, the paper complements the specialized literature on organizational justice and contributes to a more complex understanding of ethical leadership in various decision-making contexts. Additionally, an original decision-making typology was proposed, providing a comparative analytical framework between different managerial practices.

From a practical perspective, the research can offer leaders and management practitioners a set of concrete tools and recommendations for cultivating fairness within organizations: genuine consultation, decision-making transparency, training in internal diplomacy, and ethical auditing. These measures can have direct effects on performance, employee loyalty, and organizational resilience.

Limitations and directions for future research

Although the mixed methodology allowed for rigorous exploration, the generalization of results is limited by cultural context and sample size. Future research could expand the proposed model by applying it in:

- Other cultural or industrial environments.
- Longitudinal studies tracking the impact of fair decisions over time.

- Exploring the role of leaders' social and emotional intelligence in maintaining an ethical decision-making climate.

In an economic environment where organizations are called upon to be not only efficient but also sustainable and fair, this article supports the idea that fairness is not just a coincidental outcome but the product of a conscious, ongoing decision-making process guided by diplomacy, negotiation, and ethical leadership.

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Appendix – Research Questionnaire on Employees' Perceptions

Instructions: Please respond to the items below using the Likert scale (1 – to a very small extent ... 5 – to a very large extent).

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Managerial decisions are explained clearly and transparently	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The reasoning behind decisions is communicated accurately	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have the opportunity to express my opinion before decisions are made	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am treated with respect and impartiality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders use diplomacy to manage differences of opinion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Diplomatic communication helps prevent conflicts	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Negotiation is used in decision-making processes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Negotiated decisions are fairer than unilateral ones	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders encourage employee participation in decision-making	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The leadership style is more participatory than authoritarian	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐