

Organizational Justice in Human Resource Management:

Preventing Change Resistance and Promoting Organizational Commitment

Employee resistance to change comprises an especially urgent human resource management (HRM) issue because organisations need the full commitment of their workforce to adapt successfully and achieve lasting change. Findings from recent studies indicate one root problem responsible for triggering change resistance could be a perceived lack of fairness among employees toward the firm (Xu et al., 2016). Left unchecked and without intervention, workers are unlikely to support change initiatives wholeheartedly or may resist it outright if they surmise that an unjust employer-employee relationship exists (Boohene & Williams, 2012). As such, it behoves HR decision-makers to scan the organisational environment to ascertain steps their firms can take to cultivate perceived fairness throughout the workforce. This paper will investigate the concept of organisational justice as a potential framework HRM professionals can employ to prevent change resistance and nurture organisational commitment among employees.

Deciphering Perceived Fairness

Before delving into a detailed discussion about the potential usefulness of organisational justice as a viable HRM strategy for preventing and mitigating employee resistance to change, it is first necessary to expound on the nature of perceived fairness. According to Sia, Bhardwaj and Sahoo (2013), the formation of perceived fairness among individuals and groups in organisations stems from the existence of psychological contracts between workers and the organisations that employ them. Just as firms maintain expectations of their employees, so do employees of the organisations they represent. Compatibility between these demands is crucial because it signifies both parties are capable of providing value in accordance with each other's expectations (Harrington & Lee, 2015). While the notion of compatible expectations between organisations and employees seems relatively straightforward, psychological contracts become more complex to anticipate and conceptualise when distinguishing between explicit and implicit expectations. Expectations of an explicit nature are unambiguous and clear, whereas implicit expectations are often unspoken and tend to be more assumptive.

As an example, it is customary for organisations to provide a detailed description about the roles, responsibilities, and duties of positions throughout the enterprise, so current and prospective employees are explicitly clear on what their organisation expects from them. Contrarily, the level of respect management bestows upon its workers or degree to which it provides employees with resources to perform their jobs are examples of implicit expectations. Both types of expectations impact psychological contracts significantly but do so in different ways (Sia et al., 2013). Organizational violations involving employees' explicit expectations are liable to damage their psychological contracts and erode organisational commitment without a reasonable justification. If decision-makers fail to address the problem or commit subsequent violations, employees may begin to engage in passive and active forms of resistance as their perceived fairness ratings of the organisation grow worse (Hassan, Abdul-rahman & Basit, 2017). Breaching implicit employee expectations can also deteriorate psychological contracts and reduce organisational

commitment, although they can be tougher for HRM experts to identify and troubleshoot because of their variability and unobvious nature.

How Perceived Fairness Affects Change in Organizations

Regardless of how transparent and truthful firms are about what they expect from employees at any given time, forces of influence are bound to emerge at some point that warrants organisational changes. Quite a few studies throughout the extant literature indicate firms that refuse to face legitimate needs for change run the risk of becoming irrelevant or obsolete (Perry, 2015). Consequently, legitimate organisational changes are not only in the best interests of the enterprise but are also in the best interest of their employees. Nonetheless, substantive change events within organisations often require the front lines of the organisation to make adjustments that are uncomfortable and unrewarding in the short-term. Workforces that describe their employers as having a low level of perceived fairness are less likely to entrust the organisation will keep their best interests in mind both during and after the change event (Georgalis et al., 2015). Breaches of this nature to employee psychological contracts can cripple an organisation's ability to manage organisational changes efficiently (Smissen, Schalk & Freese, 2013). Under these conditions, an organisational state can ensue where front-line employees and supervisors focus solely on meeting minimal expectations to avoid management, instead of investing themselves fully and collaborating with management to support the change initiative (Aldulaimi & Sailan, 2018). Alas, the challenge facing HRM experts encompasses how to protect and nurture solid psychological contracts between the organisation and its employees, so that perceived fairness ratings remain high, thus leading to a workforce that is both supportive of and committed to important change initiatives.

Conclusion

The ability to change rapidly is noteworthy because timing is critical in a global business environment where risks and opportunities surface and dissipate unexpectedly. When executed inefficiently or without support from the frontlines of the organisation, change initiatives can weaken or even cripple organisations by wasting resources, frustrating employees, or overlooking potential in other areas. Organizational justice calls for people in management positions to practice fairness when it comes to the systems and procedures they develop, but to also demonstrate a willingness to receive employees' concerns constructively. Efforts of this nature embolden employees' psychological contracts and bolster perceived fairness, but they also grant workers an opportunity to understand change and appreciate why their commitment and role are so important to it. By leveraging the dimensions of organisational justice throughout the HRM domain of the firm, leaders should be able to reduce change resistance among employees considerably while also augmenting organisational commitment.