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Organizational Justice, Optimism And Commitment To Change

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Abstract

Literature stressed that, although change is often essential for organizational success, employees usually find it rather difficult to change. Justice has been shown to be predictive of many organizational dynamics related to change and optimism can also be instrumental to help in dealing with different kinds of job stress, like organizational change. Moving ahead from that, the main aim of the present research was to explore the mediating role of optimism between global justice and continuance commitment to change. Data was collected using a questionnaire. The previously validated measures used included the Perceived Overall Justice Scale – POJ, the Life Orientation Test-Revised LOT-R and the Continuance Commitment to Change subscale. The sample includes 122 employees of Italian companies from different sectors. Data analyses showed high correlations among the considered variables ($p < .001$) and they confirmed the possibility to test the mediation. Results reveal that organizational justice effect decrease when the mediator was introduced. Namely, optimism have a mediation role between overall perceived justice and commitment to change. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

1. Introduction

Commitment is considered one of the most important factors involved in employees' support for change initiatives (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999; Conner, 1992; Klein & Sorra, 1996). Despite organizational change has become a topic of management literature, still many of the efforts of organizational change fail (Gravenhorst, Werkman & Boonstra, 1999). Especially the difficulties associated with understanding change have contributed to

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many failed change efforts that can cost organizations a great loss of time, money, and other resources (Kotter, 1995). Successfully implementing changes inevitably requires encouraging individuals to enact new behaviors so that the desired changes are achieved (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). This research focused on individual responses to organizational change by exploring the predicting role of organizational justice (Colquitt, 2001), optimism (Luthans, Youssef & Avolio, 2007) on commitment to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Commitment to change can be defined as "a force (mind-set) that binds an individual to a course of action deemed necessary for the successful implementation of a change initiative" (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). According to Herscovitch and Meyer this mind-set is made up of affective commitment to change, continuance commitment to change, and normative commitment to change. Specifically for the aim of the present study, continuance commitment to change is recognition that there are costs associated with failure to provide support for the change. Meyer & Allen, (1997) pointed out that individuals with strong organizational continuance commitment are unlikely to leave an organization. This characteristic bears resemblance to Oreg's (2003) cognitive rigidity, routine seeking, and short-term thinking because they each involve a desire to maintain the current situation. Past studies of commitment have focused primarily on outcomes of commitment to an organization, such as organizational performance, job performance, organizational citizenship behaviors, willingness to share knowledge, absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover (Becker et al., 1996; Cunningham, 2006; Maertz, Mosley & Alford, 2002; Meyer & Allen, 1991, 1997); this study examined the role of organizational justice and optimism as antecedents of commitment to change. Organizational justice can be defined as a combination of the fairness of the procedures used by leaders to determine outcome distributions or allocations, and the fairness of outcome distributions or allocations (Colquitt et al., 2001). It has been shown to be strongly related to many dynamics related to change, such as openness to change, acceptance of change, cooperation with change, satisfaction with change (Blader & Tyler, 2005; Wanberg & Banas, 2000) and individual response to change (Greenberg, 2001), in addition to be considered as an antecedent of commitment to change (Foster, 2010; Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012). For all those reasons it is reasonable to consider that individuals would demonstrate less perceived costs associated with failure to provide support for the change when they are treated fairly:

- *H1. Overall perceived justice will be negatively related to continuance commitment to change*

Existing literature also shows psychological capital influences commitment of followers (Luthans et al., 2007). Especially optimism showed to play a key role in predicting commitment to change (Kool & van Dierendonck, 2012).

Optimism can be described as making a positive attribution about succeeding in the present and in the future (Luthans et al., 2007). As stated by Reuter and Schwarzer (2009), optimism is a requirement for coping with all kinds of job stress, like organizational change. Positive relation was found between optimism of employees and their performance, happiness and satisfaction (Youssef & Luthans, 2007). These three constructs - performance, happiness, and satisfaction - were found to influence commitment of followers (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

As such, we expect:

- *H2. Organizational overall justice is positively related to optimism;*
- *H3. Optimism is negatively related to continuance commitment to change;*
- *H4. Optimism will partially mediate the relationship between overall justice and continuance commitment to change.*

We suggest partial mediation because, as mentioned above, justice is not linked to commitment to change only through optimism.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

122 employees of Italian small, medium and large organizations belonging to manufacturing and health care sectors were involved. Of the whole sample 59% were male, 64% had an age between 26 and 45 years, 50% had an educational level from 9 to 13 years of school and 72% had a permanent contract.

2.2 Measure instruments and procedure

A questionnaire was used to collect data on the three constructs under investigation in this study: organizational justice, optimism and commitment to change. All survey items were adopted from existing multi-item scales used in past research and were unchanged from the originals.
Organizational justice was measured using the Perceived Overall Justice Scale – POJ (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009), which assess individuals' personal justice experiences (e.g., "Overall, I'm treated fairly by my organization") and the fairness of the organization generally (e.g., "Usually, the way things work in this organization are not fair"). Individuals reported their agreement for each of the six items on a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). Cronbach alpha was .88.
Optimism was measured using the Life Orientation Test-Revised LOT-R (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994), which assess generalized expectancies for positive versus negative outcomes through 8 items (plus four filler items) on a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). Cronbach alpha was .75.
Then a subscale from Herscovitch and Meyer (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). commitment to change scale was used to measure continuance commitment to change. It was made of 6 items evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"). Cronbach alpha was .75.

2.3 Data analyses

For instance correlations among the considered variables were tested. Their high values confirmed the possibility to test the mediation. The recommended analyses follow the same procedure as the classic Baron and Kenny (1986) approach. Thus, our first step was to test the model where organizational justice predicts the outcome of interest (continuance commitment to change). The next step was to test the model where organizational justice predicts the mediator (optimism). Finally, a model was tested where both the predictor (organizational justice) and the mediatior (optimism) predict the outcomes of interest.
Then as in standard regression testing, a Sobel test was conducted using regression coefficients and their standard errors.

3. Results

Table 1 reports mean values, standard deviations and intercorrelations of the variables included in the current study. In the first step continuance commitment to change was regressed onto upward organizational justice. The β for upward overall justice was significant (Step 1, $\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. In the second step, optimism was regressed onto upward organizational justice. The β for upward overall justice was significant (Step 2, $\beta = .25$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. For the final step, continuance commitment to change was regressed onto upward organizational justice and optimism. The β for upward overall justice was still significant ($\beta = -22$, $p < .05$), but lower than the β from Step 1 (Table 2), with $\Delta R^2 = .04$ ($p < .05$). Thus, the results suggest that optimism partially mediates the relationship between organizational justice and continuance commitment to change, providing support for Hypothesis 3 and 4 (see table 2).

Table 1. Descriptive and intercorrelations (* p <.001)

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Overall Justice	4.15	1.08			
2. Optimism	3.41	0.73	.25*		
3. Continuance Commitment to Change	4.13	1.21	-.27*	-.26*	

Table 2. Stepwise regression model using a 3-step procedure derived from Baron and Kenny (1986); optimism as mediator of justice and continuance commitment to change relationships (* p <.001; ** p <.05)

Variable	Dependent	Mediator
Step1 Justice – Continuance CTC R^2 = .07	β -.27*	β
Step2 Justice – Optimism R^2 = .06	.25*	
Step3 Justice – Optimism – Continuance CTC R^2 = .11	-.22**	-.21*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was designed to examine employee responses to organizational change with the aim of contributing to a better understanding of how organizations can make change implementations more successful. Specifically we studied the role of organizational justice and dispositional optimism in predicting continuance commitment to change. Previous research already acknowledged the key role played by justice for successful organizational change (Blader & Tyler, 2005; Greenberg, 2001; Foster, 2010; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Our study adds to these previous articles by providing a deeper insight into how optimism may play a crucial role in this process, focusing on a specific aspect of commitment to change, that is continuance commitment to change, or in other words the perception of the cost of leaving the organization. Our findings shows that perceived justice within an organization is a determinant of optimism and both are related to continuance commitment to change. Specifically optimism partially mediates the relationship between organizational justice and continuance commitment to change.

As argued by Allen & Meyer (1996) employees who want to remain (affective commitment) are likely to attend work regularly, performing at the best of their ability; employees who remain for a sense of obligation (normative commitment) may do likewise only if they feel the obligation to reciprocate for benefits received. Then, in contrast, employees who remain primarily to avoid costs (continuance commitment) may do little more than is required to maintain employment. For that reason perceiving to be treated in a fairly way can encourage a sense of optimism among the people working there, and both justice and optimism can lead to a perception of less costs in not providing support for the changes, such that they are less afraid of the consequences related to that. So an important contribution of this study to the literature was in exploring for the first time a negative relationship between justice, optimism and continuance commitment to change. Another important contribution was in examining overall justice judgments (instead of specific types of justice) which is particularly useful in considering questions related to organizational commitment (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). The results of this study should be also considered in light of its limitations. The main limitation is that data were collected using self-report measures. So, there is no way to be sure that the independent variables caused the dependent variable or the other way around.

Moreover further researches are needed to try to replicate the same results but considering also some work outcomes, to explore whether and how the influence of organizational justice and optimism on continuance commitment to change may have any consequence on work performance and other related variables.

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