



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Huong Le,
Central Queensland University, Australia

REVIEWED BY

Suyash Jolly,
University of Ostrava, Czechia
Filippo Ferrari,
University of Bologna, Italy

*CORRESPONDENCE

Ola Nordhall
✉ ola.nordhall@hig.se

RECEIVED 29 May 2025

ACCEPTED 22 September 2025

PUBLISHED 16 October 2025

CITATION

Nordhall O, Hörvallius J, Nedelius M and Knez I (2025) Uncertainty and justice experiences in the context of organizational change: a qualitative deductive study. *Front. Organ. Psychol.* 3:1637554. doi: 10.3389/forgp.2025.1637554

COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Nordhall, Hörvallius, Nedelius and Knez. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](#). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Uncertainty and justice experiences in the context of organizational change: a qualitative deductive study

Ola Nordhall*, Julia Hörvallius, Mathilda Nedelius and Igor Knez

University of Gävle, Gävle, Sweden

We investigated employees' experiences of uncertainty and procedural justice of organizational change by a theory-driven approach where the interview guide and analyses were based on theoretical, predetermined themes. The results showed mixed combinations of uncertainty and procedural justice experiences. Uncertainty experiences were combined with experiences of procedural justice and with a lack of procedural justice experiences of the organizational change. Participants who had experiences of uncertainty had no qualitatively different experiences of procedural justice compared to those who did not experience uncertainty. Theoretical implications and practical relevance of the results obtained in a context of an organizational change are discussed.

KEYWORDS

uncertainty, procedural justice, organizational change, interviews, theory-driven thematic analysis

1 Introduction

Organizational change may be an important strategy for organizations to maintain competitiveness in an ever-changing and dynamic world (Sendrea, 2017) and involves employees' partial or total adaptation to a concept, idea, or behavior within the organization (Liang et al., 2022; Odor, 2018; Oreg et al., 2013; Potosky and Azan, 2023). When organizational change is implemented in a top-down manner it may be met with resistance in that it may evoke *uncertainty* (Yin et al., 2024) about one's work role within the post-change organization as well as a lack of trustworthiness in the management system (Elovainio et al., 2005; Fugate et al., 2012; Khaw et al., 2022; Schulz-Knappe et al., 2019; van Dick et al., 2016). Organizational uncertainty is defined by Bordia et al. (2004a) as the individual's inability to accurately predict future events. Resistance to organizational change may also be shown by those who appraise the decision procedures of the change as unfair (Colquitt et al., 2006; Oreg and van Dam, 2009). Also, perceptions of organizational *justice* have been shown to be crucial in understanding employees' reaction to organizational change (Adamovic, 2023; Cho et al., 2017; Colquitt et al., 2023; Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Yin et al., 2024) and uncertainty and justice experiences have shown to be crucial predictors of organizational change attitudes and reactions (see Elovainio et al., 2005; Oreg and van Dam, 2009). When organizational change evokes uncertainty, the employee's justice perception may be stronger or more distinct/explicit in order to handle the discomfort of the uncertainty experiences (Elovainio et al., 2005; Yin et al., 2024).

In view of the above, the background of the present study is that a business area within a company manufacturing stainless steels will be separated from the remaining company group and form its own limited company. The organizational change will mean a new management system, a new market label and a new company name for the separated company. Accordingly, it is of relevance to investigate the combinations of employees' individual experiences of uncertainty and procedural justice regarding the organizational change. More precisely, it is of value to understand how employees who experience uncertainty/no uncertainty, respectively, of an organizational change also experience the procedural justice (yes/no) of the organizational change. Here, individual experiences of trustworthiness, valence and job role may give insights into the employee's experiences of uncertainty/no uncertainty in the context of organizational change (see Bordia et al., 2004a; Elovainio et al., 2005; Schulz-Knappe et al., 2019). Also, individual experiences of procedural control, decision control, and accuracy of information may give insights into the employees' experiences of procedural justice regarding the organizational change (see Colquitt, 2001; Leventhal, 1980; Thibaut and Walker, 1975).

Given this, the *aim of the present study* was to investigate combinations of employees' experiences of uncertainty and procedural justice in the context of organizational change. Accordingly, the research questions of the present study were: how do employees within a business of manufacturing stainless steels experience uncertainty (in terms of *trustworthiness*; *valence* of the organizational change; *job role*) in combination with procedural justice experiences (in terms of *procedural control*; *decision control*; *accuracy of information*) of an organizational change? This may clarify how the employees who experience uncertainty (yes) also experience procedural justice (yes/no) regarding the organizational change, and how employees who experience no uncertainty also experience procedural justice (yes/no).

To our knowledge, most studies investigating uncertainty and organizational justice during organizational change have used a quantitative approach (e.g., Bernerth et al., 2007; Bordia et al., 2004a,b; Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Hassard et al., 2017). Although experiences of these phenomena have been investigated by a qualitative approach, most of these studies have focused on only one of the phenomena (organizational uncertainty- or justice). Also, such studies have used an inductive, theory generating, approach (see Bordia et al., 2004a; Allen et al., 2007). In contrast, we used a deductive, theory-driven, approach where the interview guide and analyses were based on theoretical, predetermined themes, clearly defined within well-supported theoretical frameworks (see Azungah, 2018). In contrast to past quantitative studies the present study captures individual experiences narratively expressed, and in contrast to past inductive qualitative studies these individual experiences are studied within the framework of deductively pre-determined themes derived from a well-supported work- and organizational psychology theories of uncertainty and organizational justice. By the participants' individual accounts, these theoretically defined themes are thus given an experiential ideographic content. This in turn elaborates the understanding of employees' combined uncertainty and justice experiences of organizational change as well as the conceptualization of these organizational phenomena.

2 Theoretical background

In this section organizational change as perceived as a threat or a positive challenge will be described. Even though organizational change may be perceived as a threat, it may also be triggering general positive change orientations, such as a strong sense of confidence, eagerness, and hopefulness (see Fugate et al., 2012 for an overview) and thus be perceived as a positive challenge. Here, feelings of trust in the management system as well as perceptions of individual benefits may increase readiness for change (Mladenova, 2022) which for employers may facilitate the implementation of the organizational change (Foster, 2010; Khaw et al., 2022; Morgan and Zeffane, 2003). The employees may develop increased acceptance of the organizational change and its final outcome if they are included in a transparent decision process. If they do not feel that they have the opportunity to make their voice heard in such a process it may foster resistance to the organizational change (Foster, 2010; Schulz-Knappe et al., 2019, see also Ashiru et al., 2021 for other types of voice). Also, if the employee does not believe that he/she can influence the change process, feelings of uncertainty may arise resulting in stronger resistance (Bordia et al., 2004a). However, when the employee believes in his/her own ability to influence the organizational change in the desired direction, he/she will also experience greater control during the change process and accordingly a more positive attitude (Fugate et al., 2012; Khaw et al., 2022).

All this is of relevance to employers in planning, communicating and implementing organizational change and also in handling employees' uncertainty and justice/injustice experiences and reactions of organizational change (Foster, 2010; Khaw et al., 2022; Hvidsten et al., 2023; Morgan and Zeffane, 2003). Theoretical accounts of uncertainty and procedural justice are the conceptual frames of reference of the present study. In line with this, a theory driven deductive approach was implemented in formulating the interview guide and research questions and analyzing the qualitative data of the present study.

2.1 Uncertainty and organizational change

Here, uncertainty experiences will be described in relation to organizational change. In view of this, resistance to change is frequently based on a perceived uncertainty by the employees. Resistance to organizational change does not necessarily need to be linked to its outcome, but to the perception of decisions and implementation of change, that is, the organizational change procedure (Potosky and Azan, 2023; Yin et al., 2024). The employee may try to slow down or interrupt the change process due to organizational uncertainty experiences (Lines, 2004). The behaviors that employees develop as an expression of resistance tend to be based on feelings of resentment (Khaw et al., 2022). Folger and Skarlicki (1999) suggest that it may be anything from subtle acts, where the employee does not show willingness to cooperate, to engaging in industrial sabotage. Experiences of organizational uncertainty may occur as a consequence of poor information regarding the organizational change or information perceived by

employees as contradictory or ambiguous. Also, if the employees do not understand the aim of the change and how the change process will be carried out, it may facilitate experiences of uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004a; Khaw et al., 2022). More precisely, uncertainty may be conceptualized as;

- Strategic uncertainty (see Bordia et al., 2004a), concerning organizational level issues, such as reasons for the change. Here, *trustworthiness* regarding the management system, e.g., understanding the aim of the change, constitutes an opposing instance of strategic uncertainty. Strategic uncertainty may also be expressed in terms of negative *valence* of the organizational change (see Cui and Jiao, 2019; Elovainio et al., 2005).
- Job-related uncertainty, that is how the organizational change may affect the individual employee's work performance, that is, uncertainty regarding one's *job role* (Bordia et al., 2004a; Elovainio et al., 2005).

Experiences of uncertainty in organizational changes create great challenges for employers (Khaw et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2024). Adequate cognitive framing (design thinking), communication and change strategies are of importance to reduce the perceived uncertainty of the employees (Hvidsten et al., 2023; Løhre and Halvor Teigen, 2024; Yin et al., 2024). Bordia et al. (2004a) emphasize that management can reduce employees' experiences of insecurity through adequate communication work before, during and after the change process. The employees who believe that the motives for organizational changes have been clarified and that the results are favorable to themselves tend to accept the changes to a greater extent (Løhre and Halvor Teigen, 2024; Schulz-Knappe et al., 2019).

In case of defective internal communication of information that is also characterized by ambiguity, there is a risk of rumors among the employees, which may facilitate negative emotions, uncertainty and resistance to organizational change (Bordia and Difonzo, 2013; Bordia et al., 2004a,b; Brashers, 2001).

2.2 Justice and organizational change

Below, justice experiences will be described in relation to organizational change. Here, employees' perceptions of organizational change may be affected by whether the change is considered fair/just or not (see Arnéguy et al., 2022; Colquitt et al., 2023; Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Oreg and van Dam, 2009 for overviews). Organizational justice may refer to processes of perceived fairness within the organization, i.e., whether employees perceive that they have been treated fairly in their workplace (Cachón-Alonso and Elovainio, 2022; Colquitt et al., 2023; Greenberg, 2011; Greenberg and Colquitt, 2005). Employees may evaluate the organizational change in several ways (Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Oreg and van Dam, 2009). For example, the employees may evaluate the fairness of the outcomes of the organizational change, that is, distributive justice, involving perceptions of fairness related to the distribution of outcomes like rewards, time and money (Colquitt et al., 2005, 2023; Greenberg, 2011). The employees may also evaluate the amount and quality of the information provided by the employer regarding the organizational change. That is, informative justice, meaning

that there should be regular opportunities to receive relevant and adequate explanations of management decisions (Bobocel and Zdaniuk, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2023; Oreg and van Dam, 2009). Also, employees may evaluate how they were treated during the change procedure. This concerns interpersonal justice, involving perceptions of the supervisor's conduct, in terms of being courteous (Colquitt et al., 2023; Greenberg, 1990, 1993). If employees feel that they have been treated fairly during the decision-making and change process, they feel social supported and tend to develop joy and enthusiasm for the change. Such attitudes create more optimal conditions for the change to be successful (Arnéguy et al., 2022; Colquitt et al., 2023; Ford et al., 2008).

Finally, and of certain importance for the present study is that employees may also evaluate how the organizational change was planned and implemented, and to what extent their opinions were taken into account, that is, procedural justice (Colquitt et al., 2005; Greenberg, 2011; Reiss et al., 2019). Here, procedural justice accounts for perceived justice during the decision-making process and to what extent employees have had the opportunity to be involved in, and influence, that process. Therefore, procedural justice is a key part of organizational change (Cobb et al., 1995; Rodell and Colquitt, 2009). It is crucial for employees' experience of change processes as fair that the following criteria, i.e., rules of procedural justice, have been met (see Colquitt, 2001 for an overview of procedural justice rules);

- *Procedural control*, i.e., voice opportunity, refers to the opportunity of making one's voice heard during the decision process, that is, to express one's opinions and concerns regarding, e.g., a change process (Colquitt, 2001; Thibaut and Walker, 1975).
- *Decision control* refers to the opportunity of influencing the outcome of, e.g., a change process in a desired direction (Colquitt, 2001; Thibaut and Walker, 1975).
- *Accuracy of information* means that decisions in, e.g., change processes are based on correct and accurate information from organizational management (Colquitt, 2001; Leventhal, 1980).

Accordingly, in order to maintain employees' experiences of procedural justice, the management of organizational change should integrate the views of those concerned regarding the decision-making processes and give them influence (Roald and Edgren, 2001). Employees are more likely to accept organizational change if they perceive the procedures as fair vs. unfair. If employees experience injustice in the change process, it may generate feelings of resentment and revenge. This in turn may reduce willingness to cooperate. Resentment and anger due to perceptions of unfair procedures during organizational change may motivate employees to engage in resistance (Bernerth et al., 2007; Foster, 2010; Sverke et al., 2008). Employees' type and degree of participation in an organizational change process may also imbue the employees with certain moral perceptions and emotions, which in turn might affect their reactions (Bruhn et al., 2001).

Additionally, justice perceptions have been shown to relate to a wide range of outcomes (Adamovic, 2023), such as: work performance (Wang et al., 2015), job satisfaction (Greenberg, 2011), organizational commitment (Ho, 2025; López-Cabarcos et al., 2015), counterproductive behavior (De Cremer, 2006), turnover intention (Aryee et al., 2002; Zhao et al., 2024), organizational citizenship behavior (Blader and Tyler, 2009),

health-related factors like sick leave, stress-related problems, cardiovascular problems, burnout and emotional exhaustion (Cachón-Alonso and Elovainio, 2022; Greenberg, 2010; Ndjaboué et al., 2012; Robbins et al., 2012; Piccoli and De Witte, 2015), and anxiety and depression (Spell and Arnold, 2007). For an overview, see Cachón-Alonso and Elovainio (2022). In view of this, organizations have strong incentives to make sure that employees perceive both processes and outcomes of organizational change as fair (Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Oreg and van Dam, 2009).

2.3 Uncertainty and justice during organizational change

Here, justice as related to uncertainty during organizational change will be described in terms of theoretical frameworks regarding these phenomena. In view of this, and according to Fairness' Heuristic Theory employees' experience of uncertainty during an organizational change may be due to lack of information about the trustworthiness of the authorities implementing it (Lind, 2001; Lind and Earley, 1992; Van den Bos, 2001; Van den Bos et al., 1998). When individuals experience this type of uncertainty or doubt in a situation, they tend to look for, and make use of, justice judgements (Elovainio et al., 2005; Yin et al., 2024). According to the Uncertainty Management Model, which builds on Fairness Heuristic Theory, individuals' assessment of justice is an effective method of dealing with uncertain or unpredictable situations they face. If employees experience uncertainty during organizational change, issues of justice in the change process tend to become more important. Employees then form more distinct judgements of justice as a way of dealing with the uncertainty of the change (Elovainio et al., 2005; Yin et al., 2024). If the employees' justice judgements are solid and clear, uncertainty tends to decrease. This also reinforces stronger employee acceptance of organizational change decisions (Oreg and van Dam, 2009). If the employee does not experience a noticeable uncertainty during organizational change, the need for distinct justice judgments will be weaker (Elovainio et al., 2005). Thus, individuals may care about procedural justice in situations where they strive to achieve control, e.g., in organizational change, in order to reduce potential uncertainty associated with these situations (Sagie and Koslowsky, 1996; Yin et al., 2024)). In line with this, procedural justice is important to employees because it makes them feel valued and respected by the management. Employees' belonging- and identity needs are also satisfied by being treated procedurally fair. This in turn may increase employees' experiences of management trustworthiness and decrease feelings of uncertainty associated with, e.g., organizational change (Colquitt et al., 2006; De Cremer and Blader, 2006).

3 Research method

The present study is part of a research project on work-identity, uncertainty and justice during organizational change. Accordingly, the Research method section is consonant with a previous paper

within this project (see Nordhall et al., 2025). However, the data used- and the results obtained in the present study do not overlap with the previous paper within this project.

In the present study, the current organizational change is in the preparation phase, meaning that a leadership vision has been worked out and communicated to the employees (see Hubbart, 2023). Given that the change will be implemented in a near future, the present study involves the phenomena of *pre-change* organizational uncertainty and procedural justice (e.g., Gleibs et al., 2008; van Dijk and van Dick, 2009; van Dick et al., 2018). Thus, the study reflects anticipatory perceptions, not lived experiences during or after change.

Based on semi-structured interviews, a thematic, theory-driven deductive method investigated combinations of organizational uncertainty and justice. This analysis was based on theoretical accounts of organizational uncertainty (see Bordia et al., 2004a; Elovainio et al., 2005), procedural justice (see Colquitt et al., 2005; Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Oreg and van Dam, 2009), as well as the Uncertainty Management Model (see Elovainio et al., 2005; Wolfe et al., 2018). Based on these theoretical accounts, three pre-determined main themes of organizational uncertainty were applied (see Bordia et al., 2004a; Elovainio et al., 2005) and three pre-determined main themes of organizational procedural justice were applied (see Colquitt, 2001 for an overview). Each main theme was reformulated into questions, defining the semi-structured interview; see section Materials for detailed descriptions.

No pre-registration was made for the present study since no hypothesis testing was done. Data of the present study, in the form of transcripts of interviews, can be made available upon reasonable request by the corresponding author.

3.1 Participants

Seven employees participated in the present study. We obtained richness of information by this number of participants, in that the participants were of different ages and genders and had different organizational positions and employment times, see below. This may justify sufficiency of the sample. The content of the answers for the 6th and 7th interview were similar to the other participants' answers in some respects. Accordingly, saturation was obtained by the interviews of the present study (see Hennick et al., 2017, for a critical account of number of participants as a measure of saturation, see also O'Reilly and Parker, 2013; Thorne, 2020).

Three blue- and four-white collar workers participated in the present study. The blue-collar workers were operative industrial workers (system and production operators) and the white-collar workers were desk officials (market service managers, flow managers, system technician). The participants were employees in the business area of the company that in the near future was to undergo an organizational change and they were working within a manufacturing business of stainless steel in the middle of Sweden. Three of the participants were women and four men. Mean age was 51 years ($SD = 9.12$), range 39–61 years. Mean employment time within the organization was 20 years ($SD = 9.80$), range 5–39 years.

3.2 Materials

The six predetermined themes were investigated by main and follow-up questions. The interview guide was made in relation to the background information, about the imminent organizational change and its implications (see [Appendix 1](#) for the interview guide). The background information was given to all participants at the start of each interview (see Procedure section below). Hence, the participants' experiences of uncertainty and procedural justice were expressed in the context of an imminent organizational change.

The interview questions about uncertainty in the context of organizational change were based on theoretical accounts by [Bordia et al. \(2004a\)](#), [Schulz-Knappe et al. \(2019\)](#) and the Uncertainty Management Model ([Elovainio et al., 2005](#)). The questions in the interview guide captured experiences of the following phenomena (which constitute the three main themes of uncertainty of organizational change); *trustworthiness* of the organizational management and change in terms of necessity and aim of the organizational change; *valence* of the organizational change in terms of positive vs. negative attitudes about it; *job role* in terms of if, and how, it will affect one's job role.

The interview questions about procedural justice in the context of organizational change were based on theoretical accounts by [Colquitt \(2001\)](#), [Thibaut and Walker \(1975\)](#) and [Leventhal \(1980\)](#). The questions in the interview guide captured experiences of the following phenomena (which constitute the three main themes of procedural justice of organizational change); *procedural control* in terms of opportunity of making one's voice heard during the process; *decision control* in terms of opportunity of influencing the organizational change process in a desired direction; *accuracy of information* in terms of correct and accurate information from organizational management regarding the change.

3.3 Procedure

An HR manager of the organization was contacted in order to ask employees to participate in the present study. The manager emailed us contact information of those eight employees who agreed to participate. The employees were then sent a covering letter about participation in the study. All these employees gave their final agreement to participate in the study during February–March 2020. Restrictions regarding external visitors to the organization were implemented at this time due to the COVID-19 situation. The planned face-to-face interviews were therefore conducted by telephone. All participants were informed about- and approved this. One of the participants refrained from participating due to changes in workload.

At the time of the interviews, which were conducted during March–April 2020, the participants were informed verbally about the aim and ethical considerations of the study as well as the estimated duration of the interview. Participants received the same information about the change and its implications at the start of the interviews. This was done to ensure that all respondents' answers were based on the same basic knowledge about the imminent organizational change. Participants were given an opportunity to

ask questions about the study's content and structure, were also asked if they consented to the interview being recorded. Prior to each interview, the participant gave her/his informed consent to participate. They were also informed that completion of the interview was taken as an indication of their informed consent to participate in the present study. During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked in relation to the main questions when needed. The participants were also given the opportunity to ask for clarifications if they found some of the questions hard to comprehend and they were asked if there was something they wanted to add in relation to the answers given to each question.

Two of the authors conducted the interviews. At each interview these authors were both present, one conducting the interviews and the other taking notes. One semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant, that is seven interviews in total. All interviews were recorded with an Ipad and a cellphone and the interviews were conducted on speakerphone. In order to reduce the risk of disturbances we conducted the interviews in a separate room. The duration of the interviews varied between 22 and 46 min.

3.4 Data analysis

We conducted a deductive, theory-driven, thematic analysis in line with the [Hayes model \(1997, see also Hayes, 2021\)](#), involving four steps (for a similar approach, see [Azungah, 2018](#)). First, we formulated the theoretical predetermined main- and sub-themes of the study. Second, we designed the interview guide based on the main- and sub-themes, we conducted the interviews which all were transcribed in their entirety and we prepared the data in the form of transcripts. Third, each theme was analyzed separately, and we determined which data belonged to each theme. Two of the present authors coded the transcripts independently of each other by identifying key concepts as initial coding categories in accordance with the theoretical accounts of uncertainty and procedural justice (see Materials). Then the codes were compared and discussed reflectively. To ensure that all relevant data were properly coded and sorted under the correct theme the process was repeated once again. Fourth, we read the text for each theme separately to check that the respondents' answers were properly analyzed. All descriptions were summarized under each theme, regardless of who said what, and we selected representative quotes from the transcripts that were considered to adequately reflect the summaries for each theme.

3.5 Research ethics

No formal ethical approval was needed for the type of research conducted in the present study according to Swedish juridical restrictions of research ethics (see [Etikprövningsmyndigheten/The Ethics Review Authority, n.d.](#)), since no sensitive personal data were collected, such as the health of the participants. The present study, however, followed the research ethic principles of the APA ([American Psychological Association, 2020](#)) and the Declaration of Helsinki (see [World Medical Association, n.d.](#)) regarding informed consent from the participants, treatment of participants

and handling of research data and results. All participants gave their informed verbal consent to participate at the time of the interviews to the two of the authors of the present study who conducted the interviews. Participation was voluntary and the participants had the right to cancel their participation at any time, preferably during the course of the study with regard to the consent requirement, and they were anonymous with reference to confidentiality requirements. All participants were informed that their individual answers could not be linked to a specific individual in the final report and that only the authors of the present study had access to their individual answers that could identify individual participants. Finally, all participants were asked if they agreed to the interviews being recorded, and they also received information about the purpose of the recordings.

3.6 Trustworthiness in the present study

Trustworthiness criteria have been met in the present study by credibility, dependability, and transferability (see Graneheim, 2004; Rapp et al., 2021) in the following ways.

Credibility: Desk officials and operative industrial workers may experience organizational change in different ways. By including both white- and blue-collar workers we collected different experiences and work role perspectives. By this, we obtained a wealth of information about uncertainty and procedural justice in the context of organizational change (see Bernerth et al., 2007; Morgan and Zeffane, 2003; Rashid et al., 2004; Rodell and Colquitt, 2009). Also, participants of different genders, ages and employment times within the present organization were included in the present study. This further contributed to a greater variation in experiences of the current phenomena, thereby strengthening the credibility of the present study.

Dependability was obtained by asking all participants the same interview questions and the high level of agreement between the researchers of the present study concerning all steps of the data analysis. Furthermore, an open and reflective dialogue between the researchers contributed to consistent judgements and interpretations during the data collection and analyses (see also Data analysis section).

Transferability was obtained by consistently applying two well-supported theoretical frameworks of organizational uncertainty and procedural justice. Also, transferability was facilitated by providing detailed descriptions of the pre-determined themes, quotes from respondents for each theme and by the background for organizational change and its implications. In addition, clear descriptions of the characteristics and selection of participants, and of data collection and the process of analysis contributed to transferability. Hereby, the results of the present study might to some extent be applied to other organizations, foremost private companies, where the structure, management, communication, task assignments and type of organizational change are similar to the present organization.

4 Results

The results below are presented as combinations of the respondents' answers regarding the three themes of uncertainty

(yes = respondent/s who experienced uncertainty; no = respondent/s who did not experience uncertainty regarding the organizational change), and the respondents' answers of the three themes of procedural justice (yes = respondent/s who experienced procedural justice; no = respondent/who did not experience procedural justice regarding the organizational change). This clarifies how respondents who experience uncertainty (yes) also experience procedural justice (yes/no) regarding the organizational change, and how respondents who experience no uncertainty (no) also experience procedural justice (yes/no), see Table 1 for an overview. To maintain the participants' anonymity, the respondents are referred to as R1-7. The name of the company has been replaced by "the main company" and name of the business area has been replaced by "the business area".

4.1 Uncertainty experiences (yes) in combination with justice experiences (yes/no)

Only a few respondents experienced uncertainty due to the organizational change. One respondent was ambivalent and reported some aspects of uncertainty but others of no uncertainty.

Regarding *trustworthiness*, the respondents neither experienced the change as necessary or had trust in it. As R2 put it: "No, I do not think it is necessary, I also think that it can even be a bit dangerous. [] That is, that it becomes productively narrow and more vulnerable in that way".

Regarding *valence*, it was reported that the separated business area, as perceived as the solid base for the main company, would be disconnected from the main group and that this would mean a great loss for the main company. This was considered a negative aspect of the organizational change. As one of the respondents put it: "In some way it's like you sell out the soul or the heart if you separate from the main group" (R2).

Regarding *job role*, it was reported that an organizational change would entail a change of the Internet system that would in turn affect employees' individual job-role in a non-predictable way: "Changing the IT system will probably mean a change in the work role [], my role may change because of it" (R7).

Justice experiences (Yes/No): Among those respondents who experienced organizational uncertainty there were experiences of both procedural justice and also lack of procedural justice.

Regarding *procedural control* (i.e., voice opportunity), it was reported that there had been opportunities to get in touch with the management group and present one's point of view. As R2 put it: "I could probably quite easily get in touch with those a little higher up in the organization and ask some questions, and say what I think, absolutely" (R2). However, one respondent did not experience procedural control and said: "We have discussed it in the department and so on, but it has not been something that I know that has been brought up in the organization" (R7).

When it comes to *decision control*, experiences of procedural justice were reported, i.e., there had been opportunities to influence the decision making: "Of course I might have been able to contribute if I had done it. [] Yes, it works both via Intranet, and it is quite open and transparent in the company, so opportunity does exist, absolutely." (R2). However, another respondent thought that

TABLE 1 Concerning the organizational change, concepts that emerged in answers, experiences related to deductive themes (*italics*) of uncertainty in combination with procedural justice. Uncertainty YES was for some respondents combined with justice YES and for some combined with justice NO (lack of justice experiences). Uncertainty NO (lack of uncertainty experience) was for some respondents combined with justice YES and for some combined with justice NO.

Justice experience (YES/NO)	Uncertainty experiences YES	Uncertainty experiences NO
	<i>Trustworthiness:</i> - the change not necessary - no trust in the change <i>Valence:</i> - the organizational change as negative, especially from a company identity perspective - a great loss for the main company <i>Job role:</i> - the Internet system will change which will affect the individual work-tasks in a non-predictable way	<i>Trustworthiness:</i> - the change may increase the economic value and the independence of the business area <i>Valence:</i> - the organizational change as positive, especially in economic terms <i>Job role:</i> - the digital systems might change but this will not affect the work tasks
Justice experiences YES	<i>Procedural control:</i> - may get in touch with the management group and present his/her point of view <i>Decision control:</i> - has had opportunity to influence the decision process of the change by the Intranet <i>Accuracy of Information:</i> - quite adequate information about the change process by Intranet and e-mail	<i>Procedural control:</i> - opportunity to express points of view or concerns or put questions to the line manager at meetings or at the Intranet <i>Decision control:</i> - some type of influence due to the Webinars, where the employees could express their concerns to the main group manager <i>Accuracy of Information:</i> - change process and the time plan as satisfactorily described in relevant terms
Justice experiences NO	<i>Procedural control:</i> - points of view not delivered to the organizational management <i>Decision control:</i> - no influence over the decision process of the change <i>Accuracy of Information:</i> - information from sources other than the main company - information from the main company has been irrelevant	<i>Procedural control:</i> - not been able to express thoughts and feelings regarding the change - nothing one talks about <i>Decision control:</i> - no real type of influence over the decision process of the change - nothing that one can influence <i>Accuracy of Information:</i> - information was lacking, both in terms of quantity and quality - find information about the organizational change yourself

he/she had not had any influence over the decision-making process of the change.

Regarding *accuracy of information*, experiences of procedural justice were reported in that there had been adequate information about the change process by the Intranet and e-mail. As R2 put it: “But I think it has been, quite good. [] And they have described the process quite well, what will need to be done and eh, even the timing, that is how the schedule has looked like, with the different steps and so” (R2). Another respondent, however, thought that most of the information had come from sources other than the main company, as he/she put it: “It feels like that you get the information from the wrong source as well” (R7). Also, R7 thought that the information from the main group of the company had been irrelevant.

4.2 Uncertainty experiences (no) in combination with justice experiences (yes/no)

Several respondents reported no experiences of uncertainty regarding the organizational change. As reported above, one respondent had been ambivalent and reported both aspects of uncertainty and of no uncertainty.

Several of the respondents experienced *trustworthiness* in terms of economic benefits. Respondents thought that the change was motivated because it would likely increase the economic value of the business area. One respondent explained: “Yes, absolutely,

if one lists the business area, we will get money. Money that we do not have today to develop” (R1). Also, the change was thought to increase the independence of the business area and, therefore was thought to be trustworthy. As one respondent put it: “That they become independent, self-governing. Yes, maybe it’s for survival” (R4).

Regarding *valence* of the organizational change, and in line with the *trustworthiness* experiences, several of the participants experienced it as positive, especially in economic terms. A separation of the business area from the main company would imply new ownership and investments, which probably would be of value to the business area and the employees. One of the respondents expressed this: “After all, the new owners have money for investments. Has improved things in many companies, if it gets the right owner” (R3). Another respondent said: “Those who are interested in the shares and the company will buy more, I can only see that as positive” (R5). Also, the opportunity for self-determination would increase, which would be positive. As R4 put it:

“No, I do not experience any uncertainty, I think that a separation would be good. [] That you should be able to decide for yourself, the business area may then decide how it wants to proceed, now it is the main company that decides a lot”. (R4)

Concerning *job role*, most of the respondents did not feel any uncertainty but instead experienced control. Some of the respondents thought that the digital systems might change but that this would not affect the work tasks. As one respondent put it: “We will have business as usual as well” (R1). Another respondent

explained that: “Of course, there was a lot of talk about it from the beginning when you thought about what it was, but it has settled down” (R5).

Justice experiences (Yes/No): Several of the respondents without experiences of uncertainty reported experiences of procedural justice, while others did not experience any kind of procedural justice regarding the organizational change. Some respondents were ambivalent regarding procedural justice and thought that the change was procedural just in some respects but not in others.

Regarding *procedural control* (i.e., voice opportunity), several respondents thought that they had had the opportunity to express their point of view or concerns or put questions to the line manager at meetings or via Intranet. As one respondent put it: “Yes, you have got the opportunity to write, it’s good with the Intranet that you can ask questions directly” (R6). However, a few respondents thought that they had not been able to express their thoughts and feelings regarding the change. As R4 put it: “Because we never talk about it, it becomes nothing”.

Regarding *decision control*, several of the respondents thought that it was more of voice opportunity than any real type of influence over the decision process of the organizational change. As R5 put it: “I have got that [voice opportunity] but not to anybody that has any right to decide. I have been able to talk to my immediate supervisor, but he/she is far from the organizational management”. Another respondent said: “It will be as it will be, but you can’t do anything about it yourself” (R4). R3 said: “No, it is not anything that I can influence”.

However, one respondent thought that he/she had some degree of influence due to the Webinars, where the employees could express their concerns to the main company manager. R6 said: “Yes I think so, I could even talk to him directly”.

When it comes to *accuracy of information*, several of the respondents thought that they had received adequate and relevant information regarding the organizational change. They thought that the change process and the time plan were described satisfactorily. Some thought that the information via Intranet and at group meetings was of value in understanding the change process. Here, R6 said: “Overall, the company is informative because you have an Intranet, and everything comes out there straight away. [] So yes, I would say that there are such opportunities. But I feel satisfied with the information”.

However, some of the respondents thought that there was a lack of adequate information, both in terms of quantity and quality. They thought that they had to find information about the organizational change by themselves. As R4 put it: “No, in the morning when you drink coffee, you usually say “did you read what was written in the newspaper”? It just becomes like that”. One of the respondents (R3) called for more informative group meetings: “You could have called like a factory meeting then [] so that those who were interested could have received a little more information”.

In sum, uncertainty was combined with justice as well as with lack of justice for each of the deductive themes (*italics*). Lack of uncertainty was combined with justice as well as with lack of justice for each of the deductive themes (*italics*). See Table 1 for details.

5 Discussion

In order to understand employees’ reactions to organizational change it is of value for e.g. employers and practitioners to have knowledge of employees’ uncertainty and justice experiences of the change process (Rodell and Colquitt, 2009; Yin et al., 2024). This especially concerns procedural justice perception, which may explicitly denote employees’ perceived fairness of the organizational change process (Baka, 2018; Khaw et al., 2022). As far as we know, a vast majority of previous studies have used a quantitative approach when investigating relationships between organizational change, uncertainty and justice (see; Adamovic, 2023; Bordia et al., 2004a; Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Hassard et al., 2017; Yin et al., 2024). Although experiences of these phenomena have been investigated by qualitative approaches, most such studies have used an inductive, theory-generating, approach (see e.g., Bordia et al., 2004a; Allen et al., 2007). In contrast, we investigated the combinations of employees’ experiences of uncertainty and procedural justice concerning an organizational change, using a deductive, theory-driven approach. The three predetermined themes of uncertainty were: *trustworthiness*; *valence* and *job role*. The three predetermined themes of procedural justice were: *procedural control*, *decision control* and *accuracy of information*.

The results of the present study (see Table 1) showed mixed combinations of uncertainty and procedural justice experiences. Experiences of uncertainty were combined with experiences of procedural justice as well with a lack of procedural justice experiences of organizational change. Also, experiences of no uncertainty were combined with experiences of procedural justice as well with a lack of procedural justice experiences of organizational change.

5.1 Implications of the results

Strategical uncertainty, in terms of negative *valence* and lack of *trustworthiness* (Bordia et al., 2004a; Elovainio et al., 2005), has been shown to be prevalent during early stages of organizational change (Allen et al., 2007). This is in line with the present study, which investigated uncertainty of organizational change prior to implementation of the change, i.e., a pre-change uncertainty. Here, trust in the management system during organizational change is fundamental to gain support from the employees, i.e., a positive *valence* of the change (Cui and Jiao, 2019; Khaw et al., 2022). Trustworthiness and positive *valence* of the change may be facilitated by direct dialogue between employees and higher management (Lohre and Halvor Teigen, 2024; Morgan and Zeffane, 2003). This is in line with some results in the present study, where several of those participants who experienced the organizational change as necessary and positive (in terms of economic value), also thought that the information from the main company was of value and relevance. However, some of the participants who expressed no uncertainty experiences thought that information was lacking, both in terms of quantity and quality.

Also, employees may not understand the reason for change, i.e., expression of strategical uncertainty, due to lack of relevant

information, that information is being communicated at an inappropriate time to the employees or that it has come from the wrong source. Due to this, the change may be negatively valued (Allen et al., 2007; Bordia et al., 2004a; Khaw et al., 2022). This might also be in line with the present study, where some employees who experienced uncertainty also expressed lack of procedural justice in terms of information that had come from sources other than the main company. Also, that information provided by the main company was irrelevant. Some of the participants described that they had to find information about the organizational change by themselves. However, transparent communication and including employees in the information process have been shown to facilitate positive attitudes toward the change (Löhre and Halvor Teigen, 2024; Schulz-Knappe et al., 2019). Also, perceived justice and social support of organizational change may reduce uncertainty (see Colquitt et al., 2006; Kebede and Wang, 2022; Yin et al., 2024). In the present study, this was expressed by those respondents who described that they had been accurately informed and involved in the change procedure and who also expressed a positive valence and trustworthiness of the organizational change.

Moreover, job-related uncertainty has been shown to be widely prevalent during organizational change and has typically been experienced early in the implementation procedure (Allen et al., 2007; Bordia et al., 2004a). In the present study, lack of control regarding *job role* was experienced prior to the implementation of the change, that is, during times of information and rumors from different sources, which also might have heightened this type of uncertainty. By this, experiences of lack of control and psychological distress may increase during the change process (Khaw et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2024, see Bordia and Difonzo, 2013 for an overview). However, distinct and clear leadership behavior and cognitive framing (thinking and communicating) of the change may mitigate employees' fear and by that facilitate implementation of the change (Hvidsten et al., 2023; Potosky and Azan, 2023).

Furthermore, previous studies have shown participation in decision-making, i.e., procedural justice experiences by decision control, to be negatively related to both strategic and job-related uncertainty (Bordia et al., 2004a). Also, stronger decision control and procedural control have been shown to correlate with organizational change commitment in general (see Cobb et al., 1995; Oreg and van Dam, 2009; Reiss et al., 2019). In the present study, however, experiences of uncertainty were combined with experiences of procedural control and decision control in some cases, as well as experiences of no procedural control and no decision control in other cases. This indicates that whether uncertainty experience of organizational change is combined with experiences of- or lack of process control and decision control experiences may vary between different employees. Even though this concerns some cases, these results may challenge previous findings and theoretical accounts of the relation between uncertainty and procedural justice where this relationship is described as linear (see e.g., De Cremer and Blader, 2006; Elovainio et al., 2005; Lind, 2001; Oreg and van Dam, 2009).

Uncertainty experiences (yes/no) in the present study may be the effect of procedural justice (yes/no), i.e., *procedural control*, *decision control* and *accuracy of information* (yes/no) may have triggered experiences of uncertainty (yes/no). This is in line

with some previous studies, where e.g. stronger perceptions of procedural justice have indirectly been shown to predict affective commitment to change, that is employees help in the implementation of the change (Kayani et al., 2022), via relational contract. Here, change commitment indicates weaker uncertainty perceptions (Bernerth et al., 2007; Cho et al., 2017). However, some of the respondents in the present study who had experiences of procedural justice also had experiences of uncertainty, and some who had experiences of no procedural justice had experiences of uncertainty regarding the organizational change. This mixed combination of uncertainty and justice experiences (yes/no) contrasts with theoretical and empirical accounts of the Uncertainty Management Model (Elovainio et al., 2005) asserting that justice perceptions may be stronger during organizational uncertainty. According to this model, employees' assessment of justice is an effective way of dealing with uncertainty, for example, during organizational change (Bordia et al., 2004a). That is, justice perceptions are triggered by uncertainty experiences. Also, uncertainty perceptions have been shown to moderate the effects of organizational justice on, e.g., job satisfaction (Wolfe et al., 2018), and uncertainty has been shown to moderate the relationship between anticipatory justice and experienced justice (Rodell and Colquitt, 2009). The results of the present study where uncertainty (yes/no) and justice experiences (yes/no) were not clearly matching each other for some cases may be due to the time context of the organizational change. The present interviews were prior to the full implementation of the organizational change. Due to this, the participants may not have developed clear uncertainty and justice experiences of the organizational change and by that some of them described a mixed experience of these phenomena. Experiences of uncertainty and justice are to a great extent a combination of work-related emotions and cognitions (Beugré, 2009; Colquitt et al., 2023; Cropanzano et al., 2017; Hillebrandt and Barclay, 2013; Howell and Sweeny, 2020) which may be dependent on time in order to be clearly developed (see Knez, 2014, 2016).

A few respondents had experiences that were in line with the Uncertainty Management Model because they reported experiences of uncertainty in combination with distinct experiences of procedural justice (yes/no). By their procedural justice judgements, these respondents may have reduced the unpleasant feeling of uncertainty. Hence, when they found themselves in unclear or unpredictable situations, their "firmly constructed fairness judgments either removed uncertainty or alleviated much of the discomfort that uncertainty would otherwise generate" (Elovainio et al., 2005, p. 2502).

Our results contribute to understanding employees' uncertainty and justice experiences of organizational change and the combined experiences of these, as complex phenomena. Employees with uncertainty experiences in combination with procedural injustice experiences may report stronger resistance to organizational change (see Allen et al., 2007; Bordia et al., 2004a,b; Folger and Skarlicki, 1999), while employees with no uncertainty experiences in combination with procedural justice experiences may not only accept, but also promote implementation of organizational change (see Colquitt et al., 2006; Dhensa-Kahlon and Coyle-Shapiro, 2013; Elovainio et al., 2005). Additionally, there may be employees with uncertainty experiences in combination with procedural justice

experiences, and also employees with no uncertainty experiences in combination with procedural injustice experiences. These individuals may have an ambivalent attitude, with mixed reactions, to organizational change (see Allen et al., 2007; Bordia et al., 2004a,b; Colquitt et al., 2006).

Accordingly, the present study suggests the importance for employers and HRM practitioners to take employees' individual uncertainty and justice experiences, and not least the combination of these, prior to organizational changes into account. To do this they may handle and reform change reactions such as ambivalence and resistance more constructively. By unambiguous information about the organizational change and its' consequences the employer may reduce the spreading of rumors that in turn may entail uncertainty and injustice experiences. If the employer and/or HRM practitioners succeed in creating a sense of trust and justice for the employees, the organizational change may be more successfully implemented with less negative implications such as hostility, disappointment and revenge taking. This in turn may have beneficial consequences for the organization as well as the employees' wellbeing and health (see Cachón-Alonso and Elovainio, 2022; De Cremer, 2006; Knez, 2016).

6 Conclusions and limitations

By using a deductive, theory-driven qualitative approach, we reported results that have not been previously shown by quantitative studies and/or inductive qualitative.

In the present study, mixed combinations of uncertainty and procedural justice experiences of organizational change were reported. In other words, experiences of uncertainty and of no uncertainty were combined with experiences of procedural justice, also with a lack of procedural justice experiences, regarding the organizational change. In addition, participants who had experiences of uncertainty had no qualitatively different experiences of procedural justice (yes/no) compared to those participants who did not experience uncertainty.

This indicates that uncertainty and procedural justice experiences of organizational change and the combination of these experiences are complex phenomena, to some extent related to the employee's personal attitudes, which might be challenging for scholars and practitioners to fully relate to and handle. This is important for e.g., employers, and HRM practitioners to consider before and during the implementation of an organizational change.

Finally, we should mention some limitations of the present study: First, the possibilities to generalize the results to a wider population are constrained by the qualitative approach of the present study with seven participants. Therefore, the phenomena of the present study need to be quantitatively investigated using a randomized sample technique and a sample big enough to provide sufficient power to the study. Also, in order to draw more elaborate conclusions based on qualitative data such as the present study one may use a bigger sample. Second, the generalizability of the results obtained is limited by only interviewing one sample from one company. It would be of value to interview participants from different organizations regarding their uncertainty and justice experiences in the light of similar organizational changes. Third, by interviewing the participants prior to the organizational change,

we only captured their pre-change experiences of uncertainty and procedural justice. Therefore, to interview the same individuals before, during and after the implementation of the organizational change would have been of value.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical review and approval was not required for the study on human participants in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Verbal informed consent was obtained from the participants.

Author contributions

ON: Supervision, Conceptualization, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis. JH: Investigation, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Project administration. MN: Project administration, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. IK: Methodology, Conceptualization, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Any alternative text (alt text) provided alongside figures in this article has been generated by Frontiers with the support of artificial intelligence and reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, including review by the authors wherever possible. If you identify any issues, please contact us.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated

organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or

claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

- Adamovic, M. (2023). Organizational justice research: a review, synthesis, and research agenda. *Eur. Manag. Rev.* 20, 762–782. doi: 10.1111/emre.12564
- Allen, J., Jimmieson, N. L., Bordia, P., and Irmer, B. E. (2007). Uncertainty during organizational change: managing perceptions through communication. *J. Change Manage.* 7, 187–210. doi: 10.1080/14697010701563379
- American Psychological Association (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association (7th Edn.)*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Arnéguy, E., Ohana, M., and Stinglhamber, F. (2022). Readiness for change: which source of justice and support really matters? *Employ. Relat.* 44, 210–228. doi: 10.1108/ER-05-2020-0225
- Aryee, S., Budhwar, P. S., and Chen, Z. X. (2002). Trust as a mediator of the relationship between organizational justice and work outcomes: test of a social exchange model. *J. Organ. Behav.* 23, 267–286. doi: 10.1002/job.138
- Ashiru, J. A., Erdil, G. E., and Oluwajana, D. (2021). The linkage between high performance work systems on organizational performance, employee voice and employee innovation. *J. Organ. Change Manage.* 35, 1–17. doi: 10.1108/JOCM-02-2021-0039
- Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qual. Res. J.* 18, 383–400. doi: 10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035
- Baka, L. (2018). Development and validation of the Polish version of Colquitt's Organizational Justice Measure. *Int. J. Occup. Med. Environ. Health* 31, 415–427. doi: 10.13075/ijomhe.1896.01187
- Bernerth, J. B., Armenakis, A. A., Feild, H. S., and Walker, H. J. (2007). Justice, cynicism, and commitment: a study of important organizational change variables. *J. Appl. Behav. Sci.* 43, 303–326. doi: 10.1177/0021886306296602
- Beugré, C. D. (2009). Exploring the neural basis of fairness: a model of neuro-organizational justice. *Organ. Behav. Hum. Decis. Process.* 110, 129–139. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2009.06.005
- Blader, S. L., and Tyler, T. R. (2009). Testing and extending the group engagement model: linkages between social identity, procedural justice, economic outcomes and extra role behavior. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 94, 445–464. doi: 10.1037/a0013935
- Bobocel, D. R., and Zdaniuk, A. (2005). "How can explanations be used to foster organizational justice?" in *Handbook of Organizational Justice*, eds. J. Greenberg, and J. A. Colquitt (Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers), 469–497.
- Bordia, P., and Difonzo, N. (2013). "Rumors during organizational change: a motivational analysis," in *The Psychology of Organizational Change: Viewing Change from the Employee's Perspective*, eds. S. Oreg, A. Michel and R.T. By (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 32–252.
- Bordia, P., Hobman, E., Jones, E., Gallois, C., and Callan, V. J. (2004a). Uncertainty during organizational change: types, consequences, and management strategies. *J. Bus. Psychol.* 18, 507–532. doi: 10.1023/B:JOBU.0000028449.99127.f7
- Bordia, P., Hunt, E., Paulsen, N., Tourish, D., and DiFonzo, N. (2004b). Uncertainty during organizational change: is it all about control? *Eur. J. Work Organ. Psychol.* 13, 345–365. doi: 10.1080/13594320444000128
- Brashers, D. E. (2001). Communication and uncertainty management. *J. Commun.* 51, 477–497. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2001.tb02892.x
- Bruhn, J. G., Zajac, G., and Al-Kazemi, A. A. (2001). Ethical perspectives on employee participation in planned organizational change: a survey of two state public welfare agencies. *Public Perform. Manag. Rev.* 25, 208–228. doi: 10.1080/15309576.2001.11643655
- Cachón-Alonso, L., and Elovainio, M. (2022). Organizational justice and health: reviewing two decades of studies. *J. Theor. Soc. Psychol.* 2022:3218883. doi: 10.1155/2022/3218883
- Cho, I., Park, H., and Dahlgard-Park, S. M. (2017). The impacts of organizational justice and psychological resilience on employee commitment to change in an Manda context. *Total Qual. Manag. Bus. Excell.* 28, 989–1002. doi: 10.1080/14783363.2017.1303890
- Cobb, A. T., Folger, R., and Wooten, K. (1995). The Role Justice Plays in Organizational Change. *Public Adminis. Q.* 19, 135–151.
- Colquitt, J. A. (2001). On the dimensionality of organizational justice: a construct validation of a measure. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 86, 386–400. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.386
- Colquitt, J. A., Greenberg, J., and Zapata-Phelan, C. P. (2005). "What is organizational justice? A historical overview," in *Handbook of Organizational Justice*, eds. J. Greenberg, and J. A. Colquitt (Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers), 3–56.
- Colquitt, J. A., Hill, E. T., and De Cremer, D. (2023). Forever focused on fairness: 75 years of organizational justice in personnel psychology. *Pers. Psychol.* 76, 413–435. doi: 10.1111/peps.12556
- Colquitt, J. A., Scott, B. A., Judge, T. A., and Shaw, J. C. (2006). Justice and personality: using integrative theories to derive moderators of justice effects. *Organ. Behav. Hum. Decis. Process.* 100, 110–127. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2005.09.001
- Cropanzano, R. S., Massaro, S., and Becker, W. J. (2017). Deontic justice and organizational neuroscience. *J. Bus. Ethics* 144, 733–754. doi: 10.1007/s10551-016-3056-3
- Cui, Y., and Jiao, H. (2019). Organizational justice and management trustworthiness during organizational change: interactions of benevolence, integrity, and managerial approaches. *Inf. Process. Manage.* 56, 1526–1542. doi: 10.1016/j.ipm.2018.10.008
- De Cremer, D. (2006). Unfair treatment and revenge taking: the roles of collective identification and feelings of disappointment. *Group Dyn. Theor. Res. Pract.* 3, 220–232. doi: 10.1037/1089-2699.10.3.220
- De Cremer, D., and Blader, S. L. (2006). Why do people care about procedural fairness? The importance of belongingness in responding and attending to procedures. *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* 36, 211–228. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.290
- Dhensa-Kahlon, R. K., and Coyle-Shapiro, J. A. M. (2013). "Anticipatory (in)justice and organizational change: understanding employee reactions to change," in *The Psychology of Organizational Change: Viewing Change from the Employee's Perspective*, eds. S. Oreg, A. Michel and R.T. By (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 173–194.
- Elovainio, M., van den Bos, K., Linna, A., Kivimäki, M., Ala-Mursula, L., Pentti, J., et al. (2005). Combined effects of uncertainty and organizational justice on employee health: testing the uncertainty management model of fairness judgments among Finnish public sector employees. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 61, 2501–2512. doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.04.046
- Etikprövningsmyndigheten/The Ethics Review Authority (n.d.). *Vad säger lagen?/What does the law say?* Available online at: <https://etikprovningmyndigheten.se/for-forskare/vad-sager-lagen> (Retrieved October 6, 2025).
- Folger, R., and Skarlicki, D. P. (1999). Unfairness and resistance to change: hardship as mistreatment. *J. Organ. Change Manage.* 12, 35–50. doi: 10.1108/09534819910255306
- Ford, J. D., Ford, L. W., and D'Amelio, A. (2008). Resistance to change: the rest of the story. *Acad. Manage. Rev.* 33, 362–377. doi: 10.5465/amr.2008.31193235
- Foster, R. D. (2010). Resistance, justice, and commitment to change. *Hum. Resour. Dev. Q.* 21, 3–39. doi: 10.1002/hrdq.20035
- Fugate, M., Prussia, G. E., and Kinicki, A. J. (2012). Managing employee withdrawal during organizational change: the role of threat appraisal. *J. Manage.* 38, 890–914. doi: 10.1177/0149206309352881
- Gleibs, I. H., Mummendey, A., and Noack, P. (2008). Predictors of change in postmerger identification during a merger process: a longitudinal study. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 95, 1095–1112. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.95.5.1095
- Graneheim, U. H. (2004). Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures and measures to achieve trustworthiness. *Nurse Educ. Today* 24, 105–112. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2003.10.001
- Greenberg, J. (1990). Organizational Justice: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. *J. Manage.* 16, 399–432. doi: 10.1177/014920639001600208
- Greenberg, J. (1993). "The social side of fairness: interpersonal and informational classes of organizational justice," in *Justice in the Workplace: Approaching Fairness in Human Resource Management*, ed. R. Cropanzano (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum), 79–103.
- Greenberg, J. (2010). Organizational injustice as an Occupational Health Risk. *Acad. Manage. Ann.* 4, 205–243. doi: 10.5465/19416520.2010.481174
- Greenberg, J. (2011). "Organizational justice: the dynamics of fairness in the workplace," in *APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Vol 3: Maintaining, Expanding, and Contracting the Organization*, eds. S. Zedeck, and S. Zedeck (Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association), 271–327.
- Greenberg, J., and Colquitt, J. A. (2005). *Handbook of Organizational Justice*. Mahwah, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Hassard, J., Teoh, K., and Cox, T. (2017). Organizational uncertainty and stress among teachers in Hong Kong: work characteristics and

- organizational justice. *Health Promot. Int.* 32, 860–870. doi: 10.1093/heapro/daw018
- Hayes, N. (1997). “Theory-led thematic analysis: social identification in small companies,” in *Doing Qualitative Analysis in Psychology*, ed. N. Hayes (Psychology Press/Erlbaum (UK) Taylor and Francis), 93–114.
- Hayes, N. (2021). *Doing Psychological Research: Gathering and Analyzing Data (2nd Edn.)*. London: Open University Press.
- Hennick, M. M., Kaiser, B. N., and Marconi, V. C. (2017). Code saturation versus meaning saturation: how many interviews are enough? *Qual. Health Res.* 27, 591–608. doi: 10.1177/1049732316665344
- Hillebrandt, A., and Barclay, L. J. (2013). Integrating organizational justice and affect: new insights, challenges, and opportunities. *Soc. Justice Res.* 26, 513–531. doi: 10.1007/s11211-013-0193-z
- Ho, H. C. (2025). A one-year prospective study of organizational justice and work attitudes: an extended job demands-resources model. *J. Manag. Psychol.* 40, 21–36. doi: 10.1108/JMP-02-2024-0113
- Howell, J. L., and Sweeny, K. (2020). Health behavior during periods of stressful uncertainty: associations with emotions, cognitions, and expectation management. *Psychol. Health* 35, 1163–1183. doi: 10.1080/08870446.2020.1713323
- Hubbart, J. A. (2023). Organizational change: considering truth and buy-in. *Adm. Sci.* (2076-3387), 13:3. doi: 10.3390/admsci13010003
- Hvidsten, A., Rai, R. S., and By, R. T. (2023). Design(erly) thinking: supporting organizational change and leadership. *J. Change Manage.* 23, 1–11. doi: 10.1080/14697017.2023.2172762
- Kayani, M. B., Ali, M., and Javed, H. (2022). What literature has to say about commitment to change: philosophy of commitment to change. *J. Organ. Change Manage.* 35, 792–801–801. doi: 10.1108/JOCM-10-2021-0296
- Kebede, S., and Wang, A. (2022). Organizational justice and employee readiness for change: the mediating role of perceived organizational support. *Front. Psychol.* 13:806109. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.806109
- Khaw, K. W., Alnoor, A., AL-Abrow, H., Tiberius, V., Ganesan, Y., and Atshan, N. A. (2022). Reactions towards organizational change: A systematic literature review. *Curr. Psychol.* 42, 19137–19160. doi: 10.1007/s12144-022-03070-6
- Knez, I. (2014). Place and the self: an autobiographical memory synthesis. *Philos. Psychol.* 27, 164–192. doi: 10.1080/09515089.2012.728124
- Knez, I. (2016). Toward a model of work-related self: a narrative review. *Front. Psychol.* 7, 1–14. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00331
- Leventhal, G. S. (1980). “What should be done with equity theory? New approaches to the study of fairness in social relationships,” in *Social Exchange: Advances in Theory and Research*, eds. K. Gergen, M. Greenberg, and R. Wallis (New York, NY: Plenum Press), 27–55.
- Liang, S., Lupina-Wegener, A., Ullrich, J., and van Dick, R. (2022). ‘Change is our continuity’: Chinese managers’ construction of post-merger identification after an acquisition in Europe. *J. Change Manage.* 22, 59–78. doi: 10.1080/14697017.2021.1951812
- Lind, E. A. (2001). “Fairness heuristic theory: justice judgments as pivotal cognitions in organizational relations,” in *Adv. Organ. Behav.*, eds. J. Greenberg, and R. Cropanzano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 56–88.
- Lind, E. A., and Earley, P. C. (1992). Procedural justice and culture. *Int. J. Psychol.* 27:227. doi: 10.1080/00207599208246877
- Lines, R. (2004). Influence of participation in strategic change: resistance, organizational commitment and change goal achievement. *J. Change Manage.* 4, 193–215. doi: 10.1080/1469701042000221696
- Løhre, E., and Halvor Teigen, K. (2024). When leaders disclose uncertainty: effects of expressing internal and external uncertainty about a decision. *Q. J. Exp. Psychol.* 77, 1221–1237. doi: 10.1177/17470218231204350
- López-Cabarcos, M. Á., Machado-Lopes-Sampaio-de Pinho, A. I., and Vázquez-Rodríguez, P. (2015). The influence of organizational justice and job satisfaction on organizational commitment in Portugal’s hotel industry. *Cornell Hosp. Q.* 56, 258–272. doi: 10.1177/1938965514545680
- Mladenova, I. (2022). Relation between organizational capacity for change and readiness for change. *Adminis. Sci.* 12:135. doi: 10.3390/admsci12040135
- Morgan, D. E., and Zeffane, R. (2003). Employee involvement, organizational change and trust in management. *Int. J. Human Resour. Manage.* 14, 55–75. doi: 10.1080/09585190210158510
- Ndjaboué, R., Brisson, C., and Vézina, M. (2012). Organizational justice and mental health: a systematic review of prospective studies. *Occup. Environ. Med.* 69, 694–700. doi: 10.1136/oemed-2011-100595
- Nordhall, O., Hörvallius, J., Nedelius, M., and Knez, I. (2025). Employees’ experiences of personal and collective work-identity in the context of an organizational change. *Front. Psychol.* 16:1382271 doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1382271
- Odor, H. (2018). Organizational change and development. *Eur. J. Bus. Manage.* 10, 58–66.
- Oreg, S., Michel, A., and By, T. R. (2013). *The Psychology of Organizational Change: Viewing Change from the Employee’s Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Oreg, S., and van Dam, K. (2009). Organizational justice in the context of organizational change. *Neth. J. Psychol.* 65, 127–135. doi: 10.1007/BF03080135
- O’Reilly, M., and Parker, N. (2013). Unsatisfactory saturation: a critical exploration of the notion of saturated sample sizes in qualitative research. *Qual. Res.* 13, 190–197. doi: 10.1177/1468794112446106
- Piccoli, B., and De Witte, H. (2015). Job insecurity and emotional exhaustion: testing psychological contract breach versus distributive injustice as indicators of lack of reciprocity. *Work Stress* 29, 246–263. doi: 10.1080/02678373.2015.1075624
- Potosky, D., and Azan, W. (2023). Leadership behaviors and human agency in the valley of despair: a meta-framework for organizational change implementation. *Hum. Resour. Manage. Rev.* 33, 1–16. doi: 10.1016/j.hrmr.2022.100927
- Rapp, D. J., Hughey, J. M., and Kreiner, G. E. (2021). Boundary work as a buffer against burnout: evidence from healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 106, 1169–1187. doi: 10.1037/apl000951
- Rashid, Z. A., Sambasivan, M., and Rahman, A. A. (2004). The influence of organizational culture on attitudes toward organizational change. *Leader. Organ. Dev. J.* 25, 161–179. doi: 10.1108/01437730410521831
- Reiss, S., Prentice, L., Schulte-Cloos, C., and Jonas, E. (2019). Organizational change as threat—from implicit anxiety to approach through procedural justice. *Zeitschrift Für Angewandte Organisationspsychologie (GIO)* 50, 145–161. doi: 10.1007/s11612-019-00469-x
- Roald, J., and Edgren, L. (2001). Employee experience of structural change in two Norwegian hospitals. *Int. J. Health Plann. Manage.* 16, 311–324. doi: 10.1002/hpm.643
- Robbins, J. M., Ford, M. T., and Tetrick, L. E. (2012). Perceived unfairness and employee health: a meta-analytic integration. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 97, 235–272. doi: 10.1037/a0025408
- Rodell, J. B., and Colquitt, J. A. (2009). Looking ahead in times of uncertainty: the role of anticipatory justice in an organizational change context. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 94, 989–1002. doi: 10.1037/a0015351
- Sagie, A., and Koslowsky, M. (1996). Decision type, organizational control, and acceptance of change: an integrative approach to participative decision making. *Appl. Psychol. Int. Rev.* 45, 85–92. doi: 10.1111/j.1464-0597.1996.tb00850.x
- Schulz-Knappe, C., Koch, T., and Beckert, J. (2019). The importance of communicating change: identifying predictors for support and resistance toward organizational change processes. *Corp. Commun. Int. J.* 24, 670–685. doi: 10.1108/CCIJ-04-2019-0039
- Sendrea, M. (2017). Drivers of organizational changes. *Economica* 2, 16–23.
- Spell, C. S., and Arnold, T. J. (2007). A multi-level analysis of organizational justice climate, structure, and employee mental health. *J. Manage.* 33, 724–751. doi: 10.1177/0149206307305560
- Sverke, M., Hellgren, J., Näswall, K., Göransson, S., and Öhrming, J. (2008). Employee participation in organizational change: investigating the effects of proactive vs. reactive implementation of downsizing in Swedish hospitals. *German J. Res. Hum. Resour. Manage. [Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung]* 22, 111–129. German. doi: 10.1177/239700220802200202
- Thibaut, J. W., and Walker, L. (1975). *Procedural Justice: A Psychological Analysis*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Thorne, S. (2020). The great saturation debate: what the “s word” means and doesn’t mean in qualitative research reporting. *Can. J. Nurs. Res. [Revue Canadienne de Recherche En Sciences Infirmières]* 52, 3–5. French. doi: 10.1177/0844562119898554
- Van den Bos, K. (2001). Uncertainty management: the influence of uncertainty salience on reactions to perceived procedural fairness. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 80, 931–941. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.80.6.931
- Van den Bos, K., Wilke, H. A. M., and Lind, E. A. (1998). When do we need procedural fairness? The role of trust in authority. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 75, 1449–1458. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.75.6.1449
- van Dick, R., Ciampa, V., and Liang, S. (2018). Shared identity in organizational stress and change. *Curr. Opin. Psychol.* 23, 20–25. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.11.005
- van Dick, R., Drzensky, F., and Heinz, M. (2016). Goodbye or identify: detrimental effects of downsizing on identification and survivor performance. *Front. Psychol.* 7:771. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00771
- van Dijk, R., and van Dick, R. (2009). Navigating organizational change: change leaders, employee resistance and work-based identities. *J. Change Manage.* 9, 143–163. doi: 10.1080/14697010902879087

- Wang, H., Lu, C., and Siu, O. (2015). Job insecurity and job performance: the moderating role of organizational justice and the mediating role of work engagement. *J. Appl. Psychol.* 100, 1249–1258. doi: 10.1037/a0038330
- Wolfe, S. E., Rojek, J., Manjarrez, J. V. M., and Rojek, A. (2018). Why does organizational justice matter? Uncertainty management among law enforcement officers. *J. Crim. Just.* 54, 20–29. doi: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2017.11.003
- World Medical Association (n.d.). *WMA Declaration of Helsinki - Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects*. Available online at: <https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-declaration-of-helsinki-ethical-principles-for-medical-research-involving-human-subjects/> (Retrieved October 6, 2025).
- Yin, Y., Mueller, J., and Waksak, C. (2024). Understanding how people react to change: a domain of uncertainty approach. *Acad. Manage. Ann.* 18, 712–754. doi: 10.5465/annals.2022.0033
- Zhao, S., Ma, Z., Li, H., Wang, Z., Wang, Y., Ma, H., et al. (2024). The impact of organizational justice on turnover intention among primary healthcare workers: the mediating role of work motivation. *Risk Manage. Healthcare Policy* 17, 3017–3028. doi: 10.2147/RMHP.S486535

Appendix 1.

Interview guide

Background questions

- Can you tell us about yourself?
- How old are you?
- Have you worked all your life at [name of the organization]?
- For how long have you been working in the production?
- What is your position? What are your duties at work?
- How long have you worked at the organization? How did you get here?

Background information about the organizational change

The context of the present study implies that a business area will be separated from the remaining company group and form its own limited company, including new: management system, market label, and company name.

Uncertainty

Trustworthiness: Do you think that the organizational change is necessary? Why do you/do you not think that?

Valence: What is your opinion of the organizational change? Do you think the organizational change is positive or negative? How/why?

Job role: What do you think that the organizational change would mean for you in your job role?

Do you experience any uncertainty regarding your job role in such an organizational change? Why/why not?

Do you feel that the organizational change has already affected you in your job role? Why/why not?

Procedural Justice

Procedural control: Do you think that you have had the opportunity to express your thoughts and feelings regarding the organizational change? Why do you/do you not think that?

Decision control: Do you think that you have had the opportunity to influence the decision-making process regarding the organizational change? Why do you/do you not think that?

Accuracy of information: What is your opinion of the organization's communication and information regarding the decision to separate the business area?

Do you think that you have received sufficient relevant information during the change process? In what way have you/have you not received relevant information? Do you think this was ethically appropriate? Why/why not?