Unfairness and resistance to change: hardship as mistreatment

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Abstract *Proposes that organizational fairness is a psychological mechanism that can mediate employee resistance to change. Focuses on resentment-based resistance as a subset of all possible resistance behaviors. Uses referent cognitions theory to explain why organizational change not only increases employees' sensitivity to fairness, but also why change is frequently perceived as a loss. Recent theoretical and empirical research is presented that suggests if researchers and managers focus on the effects of any one of these three types of justice (i.e. distributive, procedural or interactional justice), they might fail to address resistance adequately. Examines how the three forms of justice interact to predict resistance to change, and provides some implications of this interaction effect for change managers.*

Employee resistance can be a significant deterrent to effective organizational change (Cummings and Worley, 1997). Organizational change can generate skepticism and resistance in employees, making it sometimes difficult or impossible to implement organizational improvements. Although it was once accepted that everyone resists change, we now know that this is incorrect (Kirkpatrick, 1985). How people are treated and how the change is implemented can have considerable influence on employees' resistance to change (Cobb *et al.*, 1995).

Research in organizational justice has shown that when workers see themselves as being treated fairly, they develop attitudes and behaviors required for successful change – even under conditions of adversity and loss (Cobb *et al.*, 1995). In contrast, when organizational decisions and managerial actions are deemed unfair, the affected employees experience feelings of anger, outrage, and a desire for retribution (Bies and Tripp, 1996; Folger, 1993; Greenberg, 1990; Sheppard *et al.*, 1992). Homans (1961) proposed that when the individual is less powerful than the source of the perceived injustice (i.e. the boss or the corporation), attempts to restore justice will be largely indirect. Resisting change is one way for employees to exercise their power to restore the injustice within the existing power relationships (Jermier *et al.*, 1994).

In this article, we focus on resistance to change as a response to the treatment employees receive in the change process. This is not to say that other causes of resistance (e.g. fear of the unknown, low tolerance for uncertainty (Kyle, 1993)) do not matter, or that fairness predicts all types of resistance. For example, other authors (Reichers *et al.*, 1997) have discussed employees' cynicism about

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organizational change – the loss of faith in the leaders of change and a history of less-than-successful attempts at change. We propose instead that organizational fairness is a psychological mechanism that can mediate employee resistance to change. To that end we focus on resentment-based resistance as a subset of all possible resistance behaviors. Second, we use referent cognitions theory (Folger, 1993) to explain why organizational change not only increases employees' sensitivity to fairness, but also why change is frequently perceived as a loss. Third, we present recent theoretical and empirical research that suggests if researchers and managers focus on the effects of any one of three types of justice (i.e., distributive, procedural, or interactional justice), they might fail to address resistance adequately. We examine how the three forms of justice interact to predict resistance to change, and we provide some implications of this interaction effect for change managers.

Resentment-based workplace resistance

Workplace resistance has been a concern among managerial writers (Taylor, 1947) and organizational psychologists (e.g. Lewin, 1951; Plant, 1987) for over 50 years. Resistance has been defined as employee behavior that seeks to challenge, disrupt, or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations (Collinson, 1994). Scholars (e.g. Jermier *et al.*, 1994) have concluded, however, that resistance is a response to managerial control. Responses to unfairness appear to be particularly acute when organizations change (Cobb *et al.*, 1995; Novelli *et al.*, 1995). This is not surprising given that under conditions of threat, people tend to engage in hypervigilance, in which every social interaction becomes scrutinized for hidden meaning and sinister purpose (Janis, 1983). Baron *et al.* (1996) reported that organizational change (e.g. restructuring, reengineering) is related to a heightened sensitivity about fairness.

In this paper we focus on resentment-based resistance – reactions by disgruntled employees regarding the perceived unfairness of the change. When employees experience external change, they frequently feel as though it has been "done to them" (Kyle, 1993). Resentment-based resistance behaviors, which can range from subtle acts of noncooperation to industrial sabotage, are often seen by the perpetrators as subjectively justifiable – a way to "get even" for perceived mistreatment and a way for employees to exercise their power to restore perceived injustice (Jermier *et al.*, 1994). In restricting our focus to emphasize resentment-based resistance, we discuss resistance as a symptom of the fairness of the change process and perhaps the conditions preceding the change effort (see Shapiro and Kirkman, in press).

Although many resistance behaviors might show a similarity with intentionally harmful or dysfunctional workplace activities (e.g. workplace deviance (Robinson and Bennett, 1997), antisocial behavior (Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997), resentment-based resistance need not be given such a pejorative connotation. Deviant behavior, for example, presumes wrongful and inherently negative conduct on the part of the employee. Some managers and companies, however, might act unfairly toward employees during the change

process, which might make the resistance to change more legitimate than deviant. Moreover, Fiorelli and Margolis (1993) argued that some level of resistance to change can be to the organization's benefit. Not all interventions are appropriate as implemented – the organization might be changing the wrong thing or doing it wrong. Just as conflict can sometimes be used constructively for change, legitimate resistance under some circumstances might bring about additional needed organizational changes.

Also, contrary to the focus of much of the research to date, resentment-based resistance to change is not exclusively a blue-collar (i.e. shopfloor) phenomenon; managers and technocrats have sufficient motive to engage in oppositional practices. LaNuez and Jermier (1994) argued that managerial sabotage is on the rise, and that future saboteurs "may be able to do more damage with a keyboard than with a bomb" (p. 233). The changing nature of modern work has made the traditional power boundaries increasingly fuzzy (Cappelli *et al.*, 1997). Recent organizational forces (e.g. new technology, restructuring, reengineering) have eroded and redefined managerial power and privilege.

We propose that perceived unfairness is an important source of much – although not all – resistance to change. A fruitful line of inquiry is the study of the causes of resistance to change and, in particular, the psychological mechanisms that contribute to workplace resistance. The following section provides a brief overview of organizational justice concepts and their relationship with resentment-based resistance to change.

Organizational justice applied to organizational change

Equity theory (Adams, 1965) is one of the earliest approaches to understanding sources of perceived organizational injustice. Adams focussed on the causes and consequences of the absence of outcome equity in human exchange relationships, commonly labeled distributive justice. Adams conceptualized the experience of inequity as being similar to dissonance in motivational properties: an aversive experience occurs initially, but the motivation to reduce the aversiveness leads to a subsequent state of resolution. Adams noted that the aversiveness of perceived underpay might be resolved psychologically or behaviorally. The first approach refers to altering one's perception of work outcomes associated with the change, such as by adopting a different reference point. The second approach corresponds to anger, with behavioral reactions that include attacks on injustice to "right the wrong" (e.g. withdrawing effort as organizational change is imposed). Withdrawing effort is only one behavioral response to inequity. Other behaviors might include theft, sabotage and even violent revenge.

Procedural justice refers to the fairness of the procedures used to determine outcomes (Leventhal *et al.*, 1980; Thibaut and Walker, 1975). Leventhal *et al.* (1980) suggested that a company's procedures are fair to the degree that the decision-making processes demonstrate consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality. Fair procedures matter to people because they are seen as instrumental to achieving favorable

outcomes (Thibaut and Walker, 1975), and are symbolic of one's standing in relation to others, and thus have implications for a person's self-esteem (Lind and Tyler, 1988). In the presence of fair procedures, individuals are more likely to accept the change than if the procedures are unfair (Cobb *et al.*, 1995). If the procedures leading to the unwanted outcomes are considered unfair, however, individuals are more likely to manifest responses motivated by resentment (Cropanzano and Folger, 1989). The anger and resentment associated with perceptions of unfair treatment can energize individuals to engage in resistance.

Justice research has also focussed on the employees' perceptions of the quality of the interpersonal treatment received during the enactment of organizational procedures, commonly labeled interactional justice (Bies, 1986). It includes various actions displaying social sensitivity, such as when supervisors treat employees with respect and dignity (e.g. listening to a subordinate's concerns, providing adequate explanations for decisions, demonstrating empathy for the other person's plight). Mikula *et al.* (1990) reported that a considerable proportion of perceived injustices did not concern distributional or procedural issues in the narrow sense, but instead referred to the manner in which people were treated interpersonally during interactions and encounters. Bensimon (1994) reported that disgruntled workers who became violent in response to organizational downsizing did so not because they were demoted, fired, or laid off, but due to the dehumanizing way the action was carried out.

The three forms of justice provide a framework for researchers to understand organizational change issues and to guide managers and consultants in their approaches to change. Novelli *et al.* (1995), however, posed a relevant question: if this is so simple, why do managers seem to struggle so much? We propose that one reason managers might struggle with fairness in organizational change is because the relationship between fairness and resistance behaviors is not as straightforward as was earlier believed.

Recent advances in justice theory

Organizational justice research (e.g. Alexander and Ruderman, 1987) has investigated which of three forms of justice accounts for greater variance in organizational outcomes. This line of research, however, might be misguided. Recent theory and research suggest that rather than identifying what form of injustice leads to resistance to change, it is relevant to examine how these forms of justice interact to predict such behaviors.

In formulating referent cognitions theory (RCT), Folger (1993) stated that people refer to cognitive standards for evaluating certain levels of treatment or rewards based on past events, referent others, and various other sources that can include implicit and explicit promises. These standards determine a person's degree of dissatisfaction with a given outcome. When the outcome falls short of the cognitive standard, people can experience a sense of deprivation or aversiveness. These cognitive standards provide insight into why employees might see organizational change as a loss. Consider the following situations that illustrate this process.

Many change initiatives ask employees to do something different than, and perhaps more than, they did in the past (Cummings and Worley, 1997). Davidson (1994) described the responses to change by employees in a British utility company in which staff were asked to do more for less: "employees resented being asked to work more intensively and across functions without any financial reward for so doing" (p. 75). This quotation also reveals the potential predicament frequently prescribed by change management models: inviting staff to participate in the change in addition to being required to do their regular work. In terms of both equity theory and referent cognitions theory, people are asked to provide greater input for the same (and sometimes lesser) reward, relative to their previous working conditions. Previous working conditions provide a salient cognitive standard by which employees assess the fairness of the change.

Morris and Raben (1995) proposed that employees resist change based on rational arguments of whether the current state is more appropriate. Since the status quo is more familiar to them, and because it came to be for certain reasons, it is often considered to be in some sense legitimate. The past serves as a referent for current expectations. In contrast, suggested changes are usually not completely understood or developed. Employees prefer a sense of security, familiarity, and continuity. Moreover, if change involves technological advancement, employees will fear that their skills might be obsolete. Even when training is made available, employees might feel that they are replaceable (Armentrout, 1996). Change sometimes requires employees to work together in teams, which is frequently met with resistance (Kirkman *et al.*, 1996). Thus, another cognitive standard for comparison can be the relative certainty and clarity of the status quo versus the uncertainty associated with change.

Following current models of organizational improvement (e.g. Beer *et al.*, 1990), change managers are guided to take steps to create consensus for a common vision. In getting people on board with the changes, however, managers can be tempted to be overly optimistic and can oversell the potential benefits while overlooking potential undesirable aspects of the change (Schweiger and DeNisi, 1991). Employees, however, might use the company communication as an anchor for their expectations. If actual outcomes of change fall short of the expected outcome, including the possibility that change can take longer than expected, employees can experience a sense of violation.

The notion that cognitive anchors play an important role in determining whether expectations were met is consistent with findings of research on psychological contract violations (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Rousseau, 1996). Psychological contracts are based on what the employee believes he or she owes the organization, and what the organization owes the employee. Amid the overwhelming increase in organizational change observed recently, the psychological contract is often unilaterally changed (Rousseau, 1996). Whether the contract is explicit or implicit, violations occur when there is a perception

that one party has not lived up to its bargain (Morrison and Robinson, 1997). Resisting organizational change is one response to a psychological contract violation.

These examples illustrate that, based on a comparison of a person's actual experience of change to his or her cognitive anchors, organizational change can be seen as a loss in outcomes. If an employee believes that a change under consideration can hurt his or her current position or power, the employee can be prone to resistance to that change. After all, what rational person would choose to cooperate with an initiative in which they stand to lose something they value?

RCT, however, offers researchers and managers a framework for clarifying the nature of this dilemma and hence some potential avenues for resolving it. Unfavorable outcomes that trigger aversive arousal are one element in this two-component theory (see Cropanzano and Folger, 1989). The second component of RCT is process-related, with a focus on the illegitimacy of another person's conduct. Folger (1993) proposed that when considering reactions to perceived mistreatment at work, two factors predict when people will respond most negatively to unfavorable outcomes:

(1) the severity of the loss; and

(2) the inappropriateness of the conduct by a supervisor or agent of authority.

Moreover, Folger suggested that inappropriate conduct can involve either procedural injustice (e.g. not allowing voice) or interactional injustice (e.g. not providing an explanation for a decision, not communicating sensitively to affirm the individual's dignity).

The predictions of RCT have been confirmed in over 40 studies from both laboratory and field research (for a review, see Brockner and Wiesenfeld, 1996). For example, in a study of self-managing work teams, Shapiro and Kirkman (in press) found that the relationship between employees' anticipation of distributive justice and resistance to change was moderated by employees' perceptions of procedural justice.

Guidelines for the statistical analysis of interactions hold that lower-order effects cannot be interpreted in the presence of higher-order effects (Aiken and West, 1991). A main effect, for example, can be partially or fully qualified by a statistically significant interaction. Similarly, higher-order interactions (e.g. three-way interactions) constrain the interpretations that can be made of lower-order interactions (e.g. the subsidiary two-way interactions). Stated differently, the effect of one variable (e.g. distributive justice) on another (e.g. resistance to change) can depend on the level of other variables (e.g. procedural or interactional justice). Thus, it might be incomplete to consider only the main effects of justice when studying or planning change.

Skarlicki and Folger (1997) investigated the relationship between organizational justice and organizational retaliation behavior – adverse reactions to perceived unfairness by disgruntled employees toward their

employer – in a sample of 240 manufacturing employees. They found that the three-way interaction among distributive, procedural, and interactional justice predicted peer-reported organizational retaliation behavior. Specifically, the two-way interaction of distributive and procedural justice was observed only at a low level of interactional justice, and the two-way interaction of distributive and interactional justice was observed only at a low level of procedural justice.

These findings suggest that procedural and interactional justice are capable of functioning as substitutes for one another. Reasonably fair procedures appear to moderate an individual's retaliatory tendencies that would otherwise be maximized by the combination of having low levels of both distributive and interactional justice. Similarly, when supervisors show adequate sensitivity and concern toward employees, treating them with dignity and respect, those employees seem somewhat willing to tolerate the combination of an unfair outcome distribution and unfair procedures that would otherwise maximally contribute to retaliatory tendencies. These results provide evidence that when change models focus only on main effects, they might be incomplete and insufficient to address adequately resentment-based resistance to change.

In summary, RCT provides a framework for predicting when resentment-based resistance is most likely. Specifically, employees can experience a sense of outcome loss during organizational change and, based on their cognitive standards of comparison, they might experience some level of dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for people to resist the change. Dissatisfaction with change can be transformed into resentment-based resistance by the unfair conduct of another person. Such conduct can involve inappropriate procedures or insensitive actions.

Managerial responsibility during change

Most change interventions are associated with uncertainty. Workers feel confused about the changed roles they must play, for example, and supervisors feel confused about how to evaluate their subordinates' performance and contributions within these roles. Colby (1981) proposed that organizational members often have an exaggerated perception of conspiracy – a tendency to view the actions of others in the organization as more tightly connected or coupled than they actually are. Thus, employees might tend to believe they are being purposefully kept in the dark, as though part of a conspiracy, by upper management. Kramer (1994) proposed that individuals tend to make overly personalistic attributions about the behavior of other members, particularly those who occupy higher status roles or positions of power. These overly personalistic attributions can motivate revenge (Baron, 1988; Bies and Tripp, 1996). Thus, providing an explanation to employees regarding the rationale and details of the change can mitigate misperceptions regarding change, provide alternative cognitive anchors, and potentially lessen employees' resistance to change. We advocate explanations as a managerial responsibility, however, for another reason.

A central tenet of RCT concerns the moral responsibility that organizations and their leaders have toward employees. Folger (1993) argued that in the context of employment, the agent's (i.e. the manager's) moral obligations toward the employee entail more than fair treatment with respect to the wages and benefits given in exchange for labor, and more than fair treatment with respect to the implementation of policies and procedures that determine those levels of compensation. In addition, a moral obligation exists to treat the employee with sufficient dignity as a person, and doing so entails numerous aspects of the agent's conduct. A manager's conduct carries with it implicit messages about whether the manager views the employee as someone worthy of that minimal level of respect to which all individuals should be entitled.

Management fulfills a moral obligation by providing adequate explanations and articulating clearly the reasons for its actions. Workers might argue that companies which cause harm (i.e. create a perceived loss associated with the change) ought to explain why the harm was done. Employees who indicate that management provided an adequate explanation might also believe that providing the explanation fulfills some important moral obligations – not to add insult to injury. Providing the most perfunctory of explanations – or none at all – implies that an individual is insignificant and unworthy of respect. People feel obligated to explain their actions to those from whom they desire respect, those whose opinions matter, and those whose feelings they care about; with those so insignificant that we do not mind what they think, no such obligation exists.

In summary, providing explanations to employees, in a sensitive and complete manner, has been shown to contribute to employees' perceptions of interactional justice. A growing body of evidence shows that interactional justice contributes to employees' attitudes and behaviors required for successful change – even under conditions of adversity and loss (Cobb *et al.*, 1995). Explanations and accounts work because the individual who is affected by the change feels treated with dignity and respect.

Practical implications for organizational change

Justice research has much to offer managers who are undertaking the challenge of organizational change. In particular, fairness principles provide an opportunity to mitigate some of the adverse organizational consequences from individuals' resentment-based resistance to change (see also Cobb *et al.*, 1995; Shapiro *et al.*, 1995). RCT predicts, however, that the relationship between fairness and resistance is not a straightforward one, and that managers can benefit from an understanding of how the three forms of fairness interact to predict resistance to change. The following illustrates the practical implications of recent research for organizational change.

First, we propose that employees resist change because they feel threatened, particularly when they see the change as imposing hardship or loss. RCT predicts that an employee is likely to be dissatisfied, and perhaps unfairly treated, depending on his or her reference points. In fact, at least some initial

sense of inequity seems to be a logical result from having to work harder – adjusting to changing conditions – without necessarily receiving additional rewards (e.g. no immediate pay increase). One approach to reducing the sense of inequity is for managers to address the interactional justice components of change such as providing employees with alternative anchors. Research on social accounts (Bies, 1987; for additional discussion, see Cobb *et al.*, 1995) provides a number of avenues in this regard. For example, an ideological account provides anchors related to the bigger picture (i.e. superordinate goals). Referential accounts change the frame of reference by providing different points of comparisons in terms of negative (e.g. "things could be worse") and positive (e.g. "things will get better") anchors. Each of these accounts has been shown to be related to perceptions of fairness (for a review, see Greenberg, 1990).

Second, managers might be tempted to oversell the positive and understate the negative potential effects of the change on employees. As the change unfolds, actual results can compare unfavorably with those described by the manager. Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) investigated the use of a realistic merger preview – an explanation of both the positive and negative outcomes of a merger – on the employees' reaction to organizational change. They found that a complete, adequate, and sincere explanation for the change reduced employees' uncertainty about the change, and their ability to cope with the changes. Consistent with RCT, they proposed that even people who are unhappy about an outcome will have less dissatisfaction than they might otherwise if they understand the process.

Often, however, top management does not often know exactly what will happen, so realistic information might not be possible. Management might prefer communicating nothing to communicating information that later turns out to be incorrect. Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) also proposed that managers communicate what they know, and assure employees that they will never be intentionally deceived. Managers can offer to answer questions and explain why some questions cannot be answered (Ivancevich *et al.*, 1987). Moreover, Cobb *et al.* (1995) argued that laying out penitential accounts early on (e.g. "we are doing our best; we make mistakes") can help acknowledge that things can and do go wrong, and can address the "fall out" associated with unmet expectations. Doing so communicates to the employees that the organization cares about them and can be trusted (Meglino *et al.*, 1988).

Third, an implementation plan and a mental model for change is a necessary but not sufficient aspect of effective organizational change. Although change agents might have the bigger picture if the change is to unfold, they are not always in a position or aware of all the potential ways that individual employees can contribute to effective change. We propose that for change to be effective, it is necessary for employees to look for discretionary ways to "go beyond the call of duty" in the change process (e.g. volunteer for extra assignments, encourage others to do the same) – labeled organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) (Organ, 1988). Many of the change processes are

difficult to mandate and reward (see Cobb *et al.*, 1995). Thus, OCB is a desired behavior required for successful change. Studies have shown that perceptions of fairness positively impact employees' OCB. Skarlicki and Latham (1996; 1997) found that training leaders in organizational justice principles increased the perceptions of fairness among the organizational members, and resulted in increases in organizational citizenship behavior. Thus, managerial training to increase perceptions of fairness of change can also serve to decrease resistance to change. This proposition warrants testing.

Fourth, many organizations have not recognized the systematic nature of change. Too often, they believe that focussing on one aspect of the organization will be sufficient to ameliorate the problems (Cummings and Worley, 1997). Addressing perceptions of fairness is also a systematic process. Managers can benefit from the knowledge derived from recent theory and research showing that the three forms of fairness interact to predict perceptions of fairness. Based on RCT, we propose that companies that attend to all three forms of justice (rather than one) can achieve success in reducing resistance to change. Evidence supporting this proposition comes from a study of ABB Vetco Gray, Inc., a global organization that had undergone multiple layoffs (Kilbourne *et al.*, 1997). The layoffs were implemented in such a way as to emphasize the three forms of justice. The reward system (i.e. distributive justice) and human resource programs (i.e. procedural justice) were made consistent throughout the company, and a program of "overcommunicating" the company's vision, strategy, goals, and the planned changes (i.e. interactional justice) was used throughout the layoff. Based on four panels of data, the results showed that despite the layoffs and restructuring, employee satisfaction and performance increased.

Finally, Porras and Robertson (1992) argued that planned change activities should be guided by information about:

- the organizational features that can be changed;
- the intended outcomes of those changes;
- the causal mechanism by which those changes are achieved; and
- the contingencies on which successful change depends.

The last point is particularly relevant: successful change depends on perceptions of fairness. Managerial behaviors (i.e. how they treat employees) become the key to effective managerial change because they predict employees' perceptions of fairness, and often can be changed because they are under the discretionary control of the manager. Resistance is a force at the point of production to which management can respond in a number of ways. If managers understand the psychological mechanism underlying resentment-based resistance, they can have a better opportunity to respond.

These practical suggestions are consistent with previous writers (Beer *et al.*, 1990; Cobb *et al.*, 1995; Novelli *et al.*, 1995) except for a key point: we posit that if managers attempt to create a fair workplace by focussing only on one form of

justice, their success at reducing resentment-based resistance may be limited. This is because fairness of one form of justice can be offset and futile in the presence of unfairness in another form. Managers can derive benefit in terms of lower levels of resentment-based resistance from attending to all three forms of justice.

Finally, RCT (Folger, 1993) proposes that fair treatment is a valued organizational outcome along with such things as pay and recognition. As organizations in globally competitive markets are less able to offer traditional rewards (lifelong employment, promotions, long-term compensation), one of the only means they have for inducing employees to stay is an environment that communicates that it values the employees. Thus fairness is seen by some as a competitive advantage (Pfeffer, 1994). As organizations continue to change, and as psychological contracts are changed, we think that people will judge the changes according to implications for human dignity.

Links of this research to postmodernism

Critical theorists and postmodernist readers of this journal might find some or all of what we have written to be objectionable, especially to the extent that the theory and research on organizational justice derive from a traditional scientific approach. We cannot begin to address alternative perspectives in any degree of detail. Rather, we acknowledge the richness of alternative approaches to the study of resistance to change. Avelsson and Deetz (1996) emphasized "the critical edge of postmodernism ... as part of a broader critical tradition which challenges the status quo and supports silenced or marginalized voices" (p. 193). In what respect is our analysis consistent with the aims of challenging the status quo and supporting silenced or marginalized voices?

Guidelines for studying and dealing with resistance to change can be seen as collateral with the study of efforts to challenge the status quo. This is true in two respects. First, change – by definition – stands in opposition to the status quo of "as is" existence. Second, to the extent that the change is sponsored by a powerful élite identified with positions at or near the top of the existing hierarchy of control in the organization, resistance by those below constitutes a challenge to the status quo of authority. We focus in this section on that latter point in particular. At the very least, resistance displayed toward management by workers lower in the hierarchy constitutes a source of frustration to those at the top, even if it does not effectively challenge the security of their status and power in more fundamental ways such as those sometimes emphasized in postmodernist writings.

A brief focus on postmodernism also gives us a chance to address important issues otherwise overlooked were it not for a deliberate effort to support "silenced or marginalized voices" – that is, the voices of those whom organizational forms of hierarchical control tend to displace from positions of power and to coerce even so far as limiting their self-determination in demeaning ways. Indeed, resistance as a response to demeaning treatment has been a central theme in the analysis we have proposed. To the extent that

assuring treatment with dignity and respect is consistent with supporting silenced or marginalized voices, then our discussion seems at least supplementary to a critical postmodernism.

Most importantly, we speak about a problem of genuine concern: the attempt to con employees by impression-management tactics. One danger, in particular, is that a power-hungry authority might try to impose undue change on an unwilling set of employees. Reading an article such as this one, that Machiavellian powermonger might see a way to be coercive with impunity; that is, to "get away with murder" when cloaked in the guise of fairness. We remain convinced, however, that employees see right through the manipulative attempts to apply fair, humane and sensitive treatment – conduct that vouchsafes each person's dignity, treating no one merely as means but always as ends also – as a mere ruse for disguising ulterior motives. Explanations and expressions of concern or remorse can diminish hostility if they are sincere and genuine; they typically fail in that attempt if used as underhanded tactics. If anything, employees might have at least some tendency to be suspicious of management motives in the first place. Moreover, management is not the only source of social accounts that affects a person's referents. Employees also tend to hear the voices of, for example, coworkers, family, and unions when determining managerial fairness. Only climates of mutual trust and respect, built up over time and earned "the hard way", will more readily foster an acceptance of human fallibility and, hence, forgiveness for "good faith efforts" whose well-meaning intention is consistent with overall conduct. Duplicity undercuts all such fairness effects as we have described in this article.

Rather than fearing that we might have acted as "servants of power", we more optimistically hope that those who attempt to misuse the appearance of fairness in a deceitful manner will meet either of two fates. The first, which we have just finished noting, is that it will backfire when employees catch on – perhaps then resisting with renewed vigor. The second perhaps borders on rationalization (or, depending on the reader's skepticism, "even more rationalization"). Specifically, we suggest a not-unrelated process of dissonance-based rationalization (whereby post-behavioral attitudes adjust to accommodate the prior behavior). The process we envision involves managers who act in a fair manner only for appearance's sake at first, but who then become somewhat more fair as a result. Perhaps, for example, an authority allows a question-and-answer session about the change efforts, but does so only because it seems like a useful impression-management tactic that creates the appearance of fairness. During such a session, this manager is confronted with questions the answers to which demand a further explanation about the rationale behind the changes planned (or already implemented). The audience refuses to accept glib explanations, and the manager is forced to be more accountable and forthcoming with information relevant to those affected by decisions. Indeed, we think that being held accountable and being "put on the

spot" in that manner represent precisely the costly consequences that many managers try to avoid by not acting with fairness and concern for employee interests (see Folger and Skarlicki, 1998; in press).

Both of the fates described for the unscrupulous impression-manager, it should be noted, offer some grounds for reassuring those whose voices would otherwise be silenced or marginalized when they attempt to challenge the status quo. For that reason we see our analysis as supplementing perspectives from critical theory and postmodernism. Mutual respect and fairness certainly seem consistent with the spirit of those movements as we read them. All people, we hope, would support in principle the value of mutual respect and treating others with dignity. To the extent that those values are affirmed, the language of discourse or the method of analysis fades in relative importance.

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