

Procedural justice, transparent communication and change acceptance: An integrative review

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Dates:

Received: 06 Mar. 2026

Accepted: 02 June 2026

Published: 27 June 2026

How to cite this article:

Özdemir, H. (2026). Procedural justice, transparent communication and change acceptance: An integrative review. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 24(0), a3697. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v24i0.3697>

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Orientation: Organisational transformations routinely generated uncertainty, resistance and quiet withdrawal. Procedural justice and transparent communication were examined as governance mechanisms for stabilising change.

Research purpose: The study treated procedural justice and transparent communication as intertwined governance mechanisms in organisational change, with affective commitment and destructive behaviours as the focal outcomes.

Motivation for the study: An interdisciplinary synthesis was needed to explain how participation and structured feedback turned uncertainty into acceptance, providing a conceptual basis for later contextualisation in African human resource management (HRM) settings.

Research approach/design and method: An integrative review synthesised methodologically robust studies from OECD contexts in Q1 and Q2 journals, including longitudinal research and randomised field experiments, to derive a conceptual framework.

Main findings: Transparent communication and clear justification of managerial decisions reduced uncertainty and resistance, while authentic participation operated through psychological ownership. The synthesis identified four parallel mediating pathways, namely perceived organisational support, cognitive and affective trust, psychological ownership and leadership enactment, whose effect sizes varied across boundary conditions.

Practical/managerial implications: Organisations should institutionalise meaningful participation and professionally moderated feedback to reduce implementation frictions and participation fatigue, particularly where uncertainty was high, restructuring was contested and employee relations were complex.

Contribution/value-add: The study reframed procedural justice and transparent communication as both ethical principles and governance mechanisms that explain trust, commitment and implementation effectiveness, and identified research directions for African HRM contexts.

Keywords: procedural justice; change management; organisational communication; affective commitment; transformational leadership; employee voice; integrative review; organisational trust.

Introduction

Purpose of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine procedural justice and transparent communication as governance mechanisms shaping employee responses during organisational transformation. By integrating behavioural and human resource management (HRM) perspectives, the article identifies the mechanisms and boundary conditions through which procedural justice and transparent communication shape change acceptance. The literature suggests that perceptions of procedural fairness are analytically distinct from evaluations of final outcomes. For workforce acceptance, it is not necessarily the final distribution of resources that counts, but rather the perceived neutrality, consistency and transparency of the process leading to it (Pignata et al., 2016; Simcock, 2016; Yuan, 2021).

Current theoretical perspective

Procedural justice

To theoretically ground the conceptual foundations of this article, the analysis first requires a detailed examination of the current state of research. Procedural justice appears to significantly

determine workforce acceptance during organisational transformations. This construct refers to employees' evaluation of the fairness of decision-making procedures and their implementation, largely independent of the final resource distribution for the individual (Pignata et al., 2016; Simcock, 2016). This distinction shifts analytical attention from outcomes to the procedural conditions under which organisational decisions gain legitimacy. The architecture of this construct requires active opportunities for voice, procedural consistency, transparent information access, neutrality of leadership and genuine opportunities for influence among those affected (Simcock, 2016; Yuan, 2021). In HRM practice, this translates into consistent treatment, transparent rule application and demonstrable managerial impartiality. These architectural elements correspond directly to the procedural justice criteria originally established by Leventhal (1980) (consistency, bias suppression, accuracy, correctability, representativeness and ethicality) and subsequently extended by Lind and Tyler (1988) to include the relational dimensions of neutrality, trustworthiness and standing within the group. These foundational frameworks remain theoretically valid today and continue to anchor contemporary research on procedural fairness.

Emotional architecture

Four dominant core theories decode this emotional architecture and serve to map how employees evaluate institutional shifts. Fairness Heuristic Theory provides evidence that employees substitute complex strategies with resource-conserving cognitive heuristics to intuitively evaluate fairness under high uncertainty (Alkhadher et al., 2023; Hewett et al., 2019). When comprehensive information about the strategic direction is lacking, individuals rely on initial procedural cues as a proxy to determine whether the organisation can still be trusted, shaping their subsequent willingness to comply (Alkhadher et al., 2023). Following this, Uncertainty Management Theory indicates that fair procedures in existential restructuring may act as a psychological shield against the impending loss of control and compensate for cognitive load (Biggane et al., 2017; Hewett et al., 2019). According to this perspective, procedural justice becomes particularly critical in highly volatile environments. It appears to function as an emotional buffer that mitigates the anxiety associated with potential job loss or structural displacement (Biggane et al., 2017).

The Group Engagement Model further suggests that perceived procedural justice drives organisational identification and determines whether individuals actively engage or internally distance themselves (Bilotta et al., 2021). This model posits that when authorities treat employees with dignity and respect, it communicates a high level of status and belonging within the group, thereby increasing collaborative behaviours (Bilotta et al., 2021). Finally, Social Exchange Theory translates the logic of reciprocity into HRM. Authentic treatment

generates a mutual obligation, fosters affective commitment, and helps to minimise resistance (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Kim & Beehr, 2020).

Taken together, the perspectives synthesised from these four theories and models suggest that procedural justice operates through three analytically distinct pathways: uncertainty reduction, relational valuation and reciprocal exchange. This tripartite logic provides the theoretical basis for the framework developed in this review.

Problem statement and research objectives

Organisations operate in an environment of continuous transformation. This continuous change represents much more than merely structural adaptation. It can place considerable psychological demands on employees across hierarchical levels. Profound or controversial change processes frequently generate significant uncertainty and carry critical economic consequences (Simcock, 2016; Walker & Baxter, 2017). If employees experience these upheavals as lacking transparency or consistency, they rely on mental heuristics to intuitively evaluate the impending threat (Alkhadher et al., 2023; Hewett et al., 2019). Such perceptions may be associated with resistance, cynicism, withdrawal and reduced implementation support (Georgalis et al., 2015; Tse et al., 2018). These reactive dynamics manifest in direct opposition and in subtle withdrawal behaviours, decreased social integration, and a breakdown of communication, leading to friction losses (Tse et al., 2018). One potentially influential organisational lever is the deliberate design of procedurally fair change processes.

To measure this subjective perception, strategic human resource research utilises validated diagnostic instruments (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Pignata et al., 2016). The Organisational Justice Questionnaire measures consistency, bias suppression and voice. Additionally, the Colquitt Organisational Justice Scale differentiates between procedural, distributive and interactional justice (Ito et al., 2023; Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019). These instruments capture the degree to which rule application remains consistent, whether formal grievance mechanisms exist, and the extent to which decision-making logics are made transparent to the workforce (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that these dimensions are associated with job satisfaction, commitment and a range of change-relevant organisational outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 2019; Georgalis et al., 2015; Silva & Caetano, 2016).

Taken together, the theoretical foundations outlined above and the documented workforce reactions to organisational transformation indicate that procedural justice operates as a powerful but context-dependent mechanism. The four-theory architecture explains why fair procedures shape change responses; the transformation literature shows

when and where these effects become consequential. What remains absent, however, is an integrative framework that connects both strands. A universal blueprint for organisational justice does not exist, since the weighting of individual dimensions varies significantly depending on corporate culture, industry and the nature of the strategic upheaval (Silva & Caetano, 2016; Yuan, 2021). Furthermore, in existential crisis scenarios, procedural justice becomes intertwined with resource distribution, producing complex effects on emotional commitment (Ikeda et al., 2024). The objective of this study is therefore to synthesise the evidence on transparency, participation and procedural justice by connecting the theoretical architecture with the workforce-reaction literature in order to specify a mechanism-based framework of change acceptance, including its central mediators and key boundary conditions.

Rationale or value-add of the study

A successful change design precludes standardised templates and demands precise customisation, wherein the fairness architecture is exactly tailored to the reality of the organisation. Interdisciplinary economic research intensively investigates how authentic participatory formats, genuine opportunities for voice, and structured feedback loops transform initial anxiety into measurable affective commitment (González-Cánovas et al., 2024; Palmer et al., 2019; Sarkies et al., 2023). Although the included studies span multiple sectors, they converge on comparable employee-level mechanisms of uncertainty appraisal, fairness evaluation and relational trust. This relational trust is treated in the framework as a central mediating mechanism linking procedural justice,

transparent communication and leadership enactment to change acceptance. This review, therefore, treats sectoral heterogeneity not as noise, but as a basis for identifying portable HRM-relevant mechanisms. The analytical focus centres on the hierarchical position of those affected, the magnitude of the organisational disruption, and the historically developed corporate culture (Eib et al., 2021; Walker & Baxter, 2017). Properly calibrated, this institutional design functions as a catalyst that rebuilds trust and stabilises performance during crises. In Figure 1, trust is specified as one of the four parallel mediating pathways. Establishing this robust baseline from mature OECD markets provides a theoretical foundation that can subsequently be contextualised for dynamic labour markets, such as those in South Africa and the broader African continent. The value-add of this review lies not only in evidence integration but in theory refinement: it develops a mechanism-based framework showing how procedural justice operates through uncertainty reduction, relational valuation, and reciprocal exchange, how trust functions as a mediating mechanism, which mediators are central, and where its effects are likely to vary across contexts.

Research design

Research approach

An integrative literature review was selected because the phenomenon spans multiple disciplinary traditions and research designs, requiring synthesis rather than single-method aggregation. It aggregates research designs with high causal explanatory power to generate new theoretical perspectives and advance theory building (Eisenberger et al., 2019; Georgalis et al., 2015; Wu & Paluck, 2020).

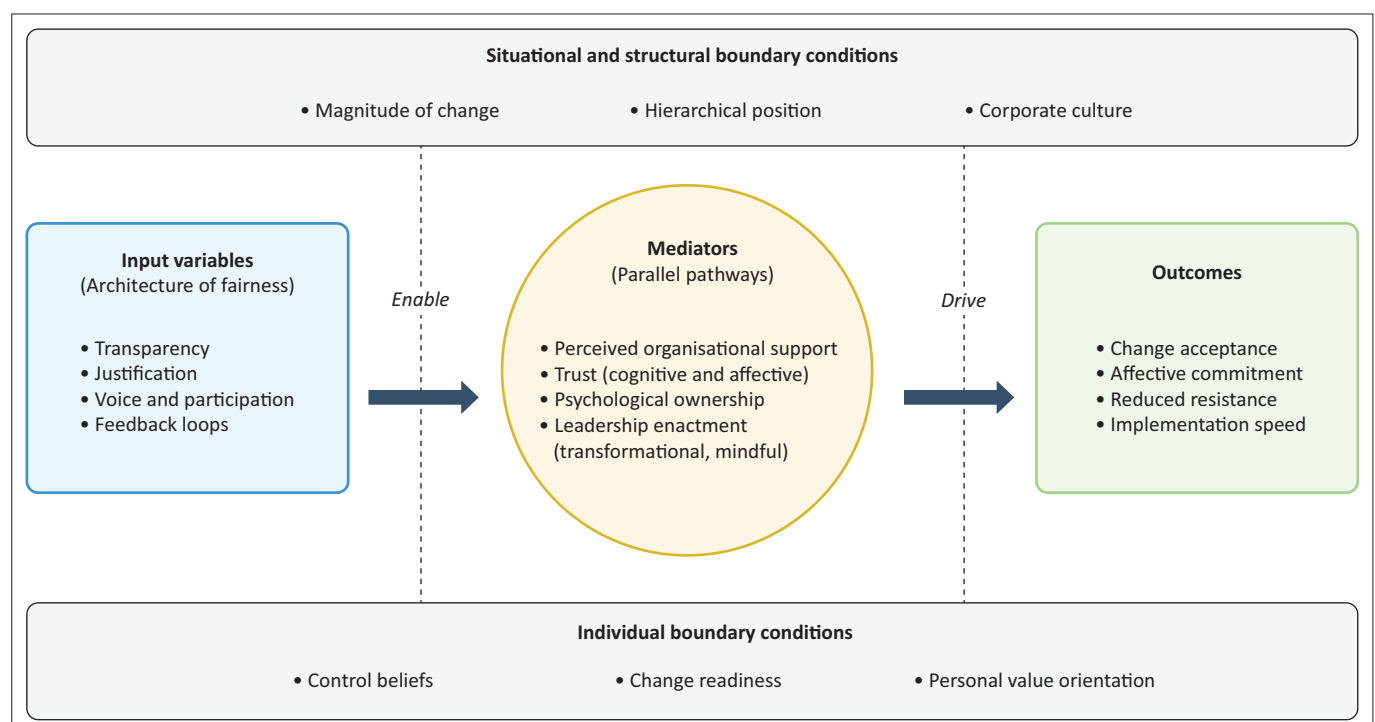


FIGURE 1: Conceptual framework model on the impact of procedural justice in organisational transformations. Leadership enactment captures leadership practices that translate formal fairness structures into credible day-to-day experiences.

Research method

Targeted body of literature

To comprehensively capture the current state of research, the central object of investigation was operationalised into distinct research streams. These streams were methodologically aggregated into four overarching thematic clusters. The first cluster analyses the fundamental theories and psychological mechanisms of fairness perception. The second cluster focuses on the communicative architecture, specifically the transparency of information policy and the measurable effect of justifying decisions. The third cluster investigates the structural anchoring of fairness through participatory formats and workforce voice. The fourth cluster evaluates interacting moderators such as the magnitude of change, culture and leadership behaviour.

Gathering the data

Searches were conducted across major academic literature databases up to 31 January 2025. The searched sources included the indexing services Semantic Scholar and PubMed, which together aggregate peer-reviewed publications across psychology, management and the health sciences. To achieve precision in identifying the core literature, advanced bibliographic databases were utilised to process scientific publications against defined Boolean strings. The search strategy combined core constructs and outcomes, for example: ('procedural justice' OR 'organisational justice') AND ('organisational change' OR 'change management' OR 'transformation') AND ('affective commitment' OR 'change acceptance' OR resistance OR trust OR voice).

Analysis of the data

A rigorous multi-stage screening process was applied to the identified datasets. The selection logic is documented in a structured screening procedure. For instance, concerning the analysis of psychological mechanisms, the initial search identified 950 papers. Following manual de-duplication and the removal of entries with missing abstracts, 601 studies were screened. After eliminating 427 papers because of low semantic relevance to the specific organisational context, 174 eligible studies remained. From this pool, the 20 methodologically strongest publications were selected for final synthesis based on predefined quality metrics. A consistent filtering logic was applied to the other clusters. The analysis of affective commitment initially yielded 942 hits, which were reduced to a final inclusion of 49 high-quality studies. The communication cluster resulted in 20 included papers from an initial 949 identifications. Final inclusion numbers differed across clusters because retention was determined by conceptual centrality, methodological robustness and redundancy across the evidence base rather than by a fixed numerical quota. Accordingly, the review did not aim for numerical symmetry across clusters, but for analytical saturation regarding mechanisms, mediators and boundary conditions. The inclusion criteria required the use of validated measurement instruments where applicable, clear reporting of methods, and sufficient analytical transparency (Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019; Pignata et al., 2016).

The methodological stringency consisted of limiting the inclusion strictly to peer-reviewed articles published in high-ranking Q1 and Q2 journals. Inclusion was deliberately focused on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member states and European Economic Area (EEA) countries to derive a baseline of comparatively similar institutional and labour-governance conditions. South Africa, which holds OECD Key Partner status but is not a full member, therefore falls outside this baseline. This restriction is treated as a methodological boundary rather than as a claim of universal generalisability. Across clusters, inclusion decisions were guided by a common logic: conceptual relevance to organisational change, methodological robustness, use of validated instruments where applicable, and analytical value for the development of the framework.

The content synthesis followed the integrative review methodology established by Whitemore and Knafl (2005) and the procedural framework for organisational research proposed by Torraco (2005). Each included study was coded along three analytical dimensions: (1) theoretical anchoring, (2) mediating mechanism and (3) boundary condition. The analytical strategy combined deductive and inductive elements. Deductively, the four governing theories (Fairness Heuristic Theory, Uncertainty Management Theory, Group Engagement Model and Social Exchange Theory) provided the conceptual scaffolding within which evidence was located. Inductively, mediators (perceived organisational support, trust, psychological ownership and leadership enactment) and boundary conditions emerged from iterative comparison across studies until analytical saturation was reached. Where studies offered conflicting interpretations of a mechanism, the discrepancy was retained as evidence of contextual variability rather than resolved through majority weighting. Redundant findings within a cluster were collapsed into representative exemplar studies. The resulting framework (Figure 1) reflects this hybrid analytical logic.

Presentation of the data

Alongside publication quality, the methodological transparency of the primary studies served as a final selection criterion. The integrative analysis relied on methodologically robust designs. These primarily include large-scale longitudinal studies, field experiments with randomised assignment and quasi-experimental designs. This empirical foundation was supplemented by theory-driven review articles to establish a robust scientific basis for the conceptual interpretation. An overview of all 53 included studies, organised by their dominant analytical contribution to the four thematic clusters introduced above, is provided in Table 1.

Ethical considerations

This article involved no human participants or animals and relied exclusively on published literature. No primary data were collected, and no ethical clearance was therefore required.

Results

The synthesis presented in this section progressively constructs the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1. The structural inputs of the fairness architecture are developed first (transparent information policy, justification, participatory formats and feedback loops), followed by the four parallel mediating pathways (perceived organisational support, cognitive and affective trust, psychological ownership, and leadership enactment), the outcomes (change acceptance, affective commitment, reduced resistance and implementation speed), and finally the boundary conditions that systematically calibrate the strength of the main causal path. Table 1 provides the empirical basis for this synthesis by showing how the included studies contribute to the four analytical clusters and to the framework logic. The section thereby shows how the framework emerges from the synthesised evidence.

In the academic literature, organisational information policy is identified as a primary, directly controllable lever for establishing procedural justice within the change design. Open and comprehensible communication was consistently associated with lower perceived uncertainty and higher perceived control (Li et al., 2021). The concept of transparency does not operate uni-dimensionally but is determined by specific communication characteristics. Early timing of information dissemination is an initial predictor of acceptance, while consistent communication across various channels secures the fundamental credibility of management (Ellis et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2021). These transparency dimensions constitute the first input element of the framework in Figure 1.

An essential mechanism within this communicative architecture is the detailed and comprehensible justification of management decisions. When strategic shifts are communicated with full disclosure of the underlying logics, perceived procedural and informational justice increase, largely independent of the final outcome for the individual (Georgalis et al., 2015; Gori et al., 2020; Hewett et al., 2019). This dimension requires management to transparently elucidate the economic or strategic imperatives that necessitated the disruption. Transparent justification appeared to buffer negative affect and reduce resistance, particularly where unfavourable decisions required explanation (Pérez-Arechaederra et al., 2025). Strict boundary conditions for these information strategies exist. An excess of open transparency when conveying highly negative news can paradoxically diminish the workforce's distributive fairness perception. If management confronts the workforce with unfiltered details about severe job cuts without offering constructive perspectives, the cognitive load may overwhelm the employees, resulting in defensive withdrawal (Babin et al., 2021; Biggane et al., 2017). Comprehensible justification of managerial decisions thereby represents a second input element of Figure 1, while transparency excess marks an early boundary condition of the communicative architecture.

The communicative level must be accompanied by structural participation formats to operate as a holistic architecture of fairness. Employee participation is established as voice and represents a central predictor of justice perception, provided it extends beyond purely formal structures (Gallie et al., 2021; Wu & Paluck, 2020). Field experiments indicate that formal voice structures without genuine psychological safety and without actual opportunities for employee influence do not generate positive effects (Knoll & Redman, 2016). When real empowerment and a sense of ownership emerge, the perception of fairness increases significantly (Palmer et al., 2019; Wu & Paluck, 2020). Authentic employee voice therefore forms a further structural input of the framework, while psychological ownership marks the mediating mechanism through which participation becomes behaviourally consequential.

To embed this participation, organisations utilise participatory co-design processes and structured feedback loops (Brehaut et al., 2016; Lennon et al., 2019; Sarkies et al., 2023). These interactive formats shift the paradigm from top-down mandates to a dialogue-oriented integration. However, the sustainability of these instruments depends critically on their institutionalisation. Without firm anchoring in organisational routines, a destructive participation fatigue may emerge (Holifield & Williams, 2019). An excess of unstructured feedback can lead to feedback fatigue, which may slow or complicate the change process (Brehaut et al., 2016). Professional moderation is required to neutralise existing power asymmetries and ensure equality of all voices (De Vente et al., 2016). The transferability of these formats encounters methodological limits in purely digital settings, as relationship quality and immediate reciprocity are structurally impeded (Hafferty et al., 2024; Netto et al., 2025). Participatory co-design processes and iterative feedback loops therefore complete the participatory input architecture of the framework, while participation fatigue, power asymmetries and digital transferability constraints define relevant boundary conditions.

The effects of transparency and voice did not appear to be direct. Rather, they were mediated by employees' interpretations of organisational support, trust and empowerment (Arnéguy et al., 2018, 2020; Eib et al., 2021). Employees tended to interpret fair procedures as evidence that the organisation valued their needs and well-being. This perception leads to a gain in control and increased self-efficacy, thereby cognitively mitigating the threat level (Eib et al., 2021). Perceived organisational support, therefore, forms a central mediating mechanism within the framework, linking procedural fairness and transparent communication to employee readiness for change.

Another central mediator is organisational trust in management. Procedural justice systematically builds trust, which in turn determines openness to change and active engagement (Erat et al., 2020; Men et al., 2020; Yue et al., 2019). The literature differentiates between cognitive and affective trust, both of which mediate the relationship

TABLE 1: Characteristics and analytical contribution of included studies.

Analytical cluster	Study	Context	Research design	Main construct and synthesised contribution
C1	Alkhadher et al. (2023)	Kuwait	Cross-sectional survey	Emotions shape procedural justice perceptions under uncertainty (FHT pathway)
C1	Arnéguy et al. (2018)	France	Cross-sectional survey	Perceived organisational support and identification mediate the relationship between justice perceptions and readiness for change
C1	Arnéguy et al. (2020)	France	Cross-sectional survey	Organisational competence moderates the justice–support–readiness pathway
C1	Biggane et al. (2017)	Conceptual/theoretical	Theoretical review	Cognitive appraisal mediates the relationship between organisational shocks and turnover intentions (UMT pathway)
C1	Bilotta et al. (2021)	Multi-country healthcare context	Multilevel, multi-source study	Procedural justice is linked to well-being through organisational identification (GEM pathway)
C1	Einwiller et al. (2021)	Austria	Cross-sectional survey	Crisis communication supports employee commitment during organisational disruption
C1	Eisenberger et al. (2019)	Meta-analytic evidence	Temporal meta-analysis	Perceived organisational support predicts the quality of the employee–organisation relationship over time
C1	Eisenberger et al. (2020)	Conceptual/theoretical	Review paper	Perceived organisational support links HR practices to employee commitment
C1	González-Cánovas et al. (2024)	Spain	Cross-sectional survey	Trust in leadership mediates the relationship between justice perceptions and commitment
C1	Hewett et al. (2019)	United Kingdom	Theoretical paper	Information, beliefs, and motivation shape HR attributions
C1	Ikeda et al. (2024)	Japan, nursing context	Cross-sectional survey	Procedural justice is associated with reduced psychological distress during COVID-19
C1	Ito et al. (2023)	Japan, nursing context	Multilevel longitudinal survey	Individual justice perceptions and team justice climate jointly predict commitment
C1	Kim and Beehr (2020)	South Korea	Cross-sectional survey	Procedural justice predicts thriving and discretionary effort (SET pathway)
C1	Kızıloğlu et al. (2023)	Turkey, finance sector	Cross-sectional survey	Trust supports organisational agility, with empowerment operating as a parallel pathway
C1	Kobayashi and Kondo (2019)	Japan, female employees	Cross-sectional survey	Justice perceptions differ across occupational classes
C1	Liu et al. (2014)	United States	Social network analysis	Leader behaviour shapes team procedural justice through trust networks
C1	López-Cabarcos et al. (2015)	Portugal, hotel industry	Cross-sectional survey	Justice perceptions and job satisfaction jointly predict commitment
C1	Men et al. (2020)	United States	Cross-sectional survey	Charismatic leadership communication strengthens trust and support for change
C1	Pignata et al. (2016)	Australia, university sector	Longitudinal survey	Stable predictors of procedural justice are identified in academic staff over time
C1	Ruppel et al. (2022)	Austria	Cross-sectional survey	Transparency and organisational support reduce uncertainty and disengagement
C1	Yue et al. (2019)	United States	Cross-sectional survey	Trust mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and openness to change
C2	Babin et al. (2021)	United States	Cross-sectional survey	Excessive transparency can reduce perceived distributive fairness under specific conditions
C2	Ellis et al. (2023)	Australia, hospital context	Cross-sectional survey	Communication and teamwork culture shape change readiness
C2	Georgalis et al. (2015)	Australia	Longitudinal survey	Informational justice and justification quality reduce resistance to change
C2	Gori et al. (2020)	Italy	Cross-sectional survey	Information quality predicts satisfaction through chained mediation
C2	Li et al. (2021)	United States	Cross-sectional survey	Transparent internal communication supports employee coping during change
C2	Pérez-Arechaderra et al. (2025)	Spain, United States	Cross-sectional survey	Communication quality predicts justice perceptions in healthcare settings
C2	Sun et al. (2021)	United States	Cross-sectional survey	Symmetrical communication strengthens organisational identification during change
C3	Brehaut et al. (2016)	Canada	Theoretical review	Design principles are identified for optimising feedback interventions
C3	Cenkci et al. (2021)	Turkey	Cross-sectional survey	Procedural justice mediates the relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement
C3	De Vente et al. (2016)	Multi-country dryland regions	Comparative case study	Context and process design shape participatory decision-making outcomes
C3	Gallie et al. (2021)	United Kingdom	Cross-sectional survey	Workplace inequality reduces perceived organisational fairness
C3	Hafferty et al. (2024)	United Kingdom	Mixed methods study	The effectiveness of digital participation depends on contextual conditions
C3	Holifield and Williams (2019)	United States	Case study	Sustained participation requires institutional embedding
C3	Knoll and Redman (2016)	United Kingdom	Cross-sectional survey	Formal voice mechanisms require psychological safety to generate positive effects
C3	Lennon et al. (2019)	Ireland	Participatory study	Authentic participation strengthens community acceptability
C3	Palmer et al. (2019)	Australia, healthcare context	Theoretical paper	A theoretical model is developed for coproduction and co-design
C3	Sarkies et al. (2023)	Australia	Realist implementation study	Feedback loops reduce unwarranted variation through identifiable mechanisms

Table 1 continues on next page →

TABLE 1 (Continues...): Characteristics and analytical contribution of included studies.

Analytical cluster	Study	Context	Research design	Main construct and synthesised contribution
C3	Wu and Paluck (2020)	India, factory context	Randomised field experiment	Authentic participation changes attitudes toward authority and procedural justice
C4	Ahmad (2018)	Pakistan, United Kingdom	Cross-sectional survey	Ethical leadership reduces workplace bullying through cross-cultural justice mechanisms
C4	Deschamps et al. (2016)	Canada, healthcare context	Cross-sectional survey	Transformational leadership influences motivation through organisational justice
C4	Dierckx et al. (2020)	Belgium	Cross-sectional survey	Fair procedures can strengthen majority-group identification under specific conditions
C4	Eib et al. (2021)	Sweden	Longitudinal survey	Hierarchical position moderates sensitivity to procedural fairness
C4	Erat et al. (2020)	Turkey	Comparative cross-sectional study	Managerial perception and organisational identity vary across contexts
C4	Liao et al. (2017)	United States	Cross-sectional survey	Leader–member exchange differentiation moderates the effectiveness of idiosyncratic deals
C4	Nasr et al. (2019)	France, Tunisia	Longitudinal survey	Socialisation tactics interact with insider fairness perceptions
C4	Netto et al. (2025)	United Kingdom	Critical realist case study	Digital service design and intersectional positions shape procedural justice perceptions
C4	Schuh et al. (2019)	China	Serial mediation survey	Leader mindfulness reduces bias in procedural justice enactment
C4	Simcock (2016)	United Kingdom	Case study	Real influence is more important than formal participation structures
C4	Tse et al. (2018)	China	Cross-sectional survey	Leader–member exchange differentiation undermines team-level procedural justice climate
C4	Walker and Baxter (2017)	Canada	Comparative case study	Participation type moderates procedural justice perceptions in wind energy projects
C4	Walumbwa et al. (2017)	United States	Cross-sectional survey	Ethical leadership shapes group conduct and justice climate
C4	Yuan (2021)	China	Cross-sectional survey	Organisational culture moderates procedural justice perceptions in policy contexts

Notes: Please see the full reference list of this article, Özdemir, H. (2026). Procedural justice, transparent communication and change acceptance: An integrative review. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 24(0), a3697. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v24i0.3697>, for more information. Studies are organised by dominant analytical contribution. C1, theoretical foundations and psychological mechanisms of fairness perception; C2, communicative architecture, including transparency of information policy and justification of decisions; C3, structural anchoring through participatory formats and workforce voice; C4, interacting moderators, including magnitude of change, culture and leadership behaviour.

FHT, fairness heuristic theory; GEM, group engagement model; LMX, leader–member exchange; PJ, procedural justice; POS, perceived organisational support; SET, social exchange theory; TF, transformational; UMT, uncertainty management theory.

between fairness and acceptance. Cognitive trust is established through the verifiable consistency of management decisions, while affective trust emerges from the emotional bond generated by respectful interactional treatment. Leadership enactment connects directly to this trust pathway because leadership practices translate formal fairness structures into credible day-to-day experiences. Transformational and mindful leadership are specified in Figure 1 because they capture the directional and bias-reducing dimensions of this enactment pathway, while inclusive leadership is reflected through the voice and psychological safety mechanisms already embedded in the participatory input architecture. Structural empowerment operates as an additional mechanism, amplifying the psychological contract (Kızıloğlu et al., 2023). Accordingly, perceived organisational support, cognitive and affective trust, psychological ownership, and leadership enactment form the four parallel mediating pathways in Figure 1.

Across studies, the mediating mechanisms identified above, particularly perceived organisational support, cognitive and affective trust, psychological ownership and leadership enactment, were associated with higher levels of affective commitment during periods of disruption. Particularly in acute times of crisis or during disruptive restructuring, transparent process design acts as a psychological protective factor that prevents demotivation and maintains emotional attachment to the organisation (Einwiller et al., 2021; González-Cánovas et al., 2024; Ruppel et al., 2022).

Multilevel analyses provide evidence that the aggregated justice climate at the team level drives this commitment, underscoring the importance of a consistent collective governance architecture (Ito et al., 2023). Affective commitment therefore represents a central outcome of the framework, emerging through the interaction between procedural fairness, transparent communication and the mediating mechanisms specified above.

An additional implication of procedural justice concerned the prevention of resistance-related implementation frictions. If management orchestrates change in an opaque manner, it frequently provokes cynical defensive reactions and active resistance. As soon as employees experience a high degree of procedural justice, these risks decrease significantly, as fair procedures directly promote functional compliance (Georgalis et al., 2015; Tse et al., 2018). From an HRM perspective, such functional compliance may reduce internal coordination frictions, implementation delays and resistance-related costs. Reduced resistance and functional compliance therefore constitute a further outcome strand of Figure 1, complementing change acceptance, affective commitment, and implementation speed.

To operationalise this experience of justice, advanced governance approaches utilise specific interventions. Randomised field experiments demonstrate that restorative justice programmes and targeted leadership development in mindfulness achieve sustained effects in breaking up

entrenched destructive routines within the change process (Ortega et al., 2016; Schuh et al., 2019; Sherman et al., 2015). These restorative formats enable conflicting parties to safely articulate grievances and repair fractured trust, directly re-establishing procedural legitimacy (Ortega et al., 2016). At the operational level, leadership enactment gives practical credibility to formal justice structures by translating procedural fairness into consistent, respectful and trust-building daily interactions. Within Figure 1, leadership enactment therefore represents one of the four parallel mediating pathways through which the architecture of fairness becomes behaviourally consequential.

The magnitude of conflict reduction is influenced by situational, structural and individual boundary conditions. Findings consistently show that the balancing effect of procedural justice is substantially more pronounced among employees at the lower and middle hierarchical levels than in top management (Eib et al., 2021; Kobayashi & Kondo, 2019). This is attributable to the higher formal dependency and the lower autonomous latitude of the lower levels. Individual dispositions such as self-esteem and internal locus of control moderate the relationship between perceived fairness and the onset of destructive behaviours (Gori et al., 2020). Effective change design, therefore, requires careful calibration of transparency and participation mechanisms to respond flexibly to these boundary conditions. In Figure 1, magnitude of change, hierarchical position and corporate culture are conceptualised as situational and structural boundary conditions, while control beliefs, change readiness and personal value orientation are conceptualised as individual boundary conditions.

Trustworthiness

Reliability

Reliability was strengthened through a structured search protocol, database triangulation, explicit eligibility criteria and a consistent screening logic across thematic clusters. Manual de-duplication and multi-stage screening were applied consistently across data sources.

Validity

To ensure the internal and external validity of the synthesised data, the inclusion criteria were strictly limited to peer-reviewed articles published in Q1 and Q2 journals according to the Scimago Journal Rank classification. This restriction was deliberate and bears methodological costs that should be acknowledged transparently. Q1/Q2 inclusion improves the reliability of measurement instruments and reduces the risk of incorporating low-quality or non-replicable findings, yet it systematically excludes emerging evidence from journals indexed in lower quartiles. The geographic restriction to OECD and EEA contexts produced a comparatively homogeneous institutional baseline at the cost of broader contextual generalisability. This trade-off is intentional rather than incidental: the present review derives a baseline of mechanisms from mature labour-governance settings, against which future research can test their portability to

other contexts, particularly the South African and broader African HRM landscape. The implications of these restrictions for the framework's external validity are addressed in the Limitations section.

Discussion

The discussion is structured around the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1. It distinguishes between evidence directly supported by the included studies and synthesis-level interpretations developed in this review. Direct empirical claims are linked to the primary studies, whereas integrative claims are framed as conceptual extensions of the reviewed evidence.

Outline of the results

Taken together, the present synthesis suggests that procedural justice supports change acceptance not because fairness is inherently preferred, but because fair procedures help employees interpret change as intelligible, relationally respectful and organisationally trustworthy. This review proposes that this integrative mechanism links uncertainty reduction, social valuation and reciprocal commitment. As a synthesis-level contribution that goes beyond any single primary study, the review proposes that these three pathways should not be treated as competing explanations, but as complementary mechanisms through which procedural justice and transparent communication shape change acceptance. The impact level of procedural justice on organisational change acceptance does not represent a static automatism but is subject to distinct situational and dispositional boundary conditions. Across the included primary studies, reported effects vary substantially with the magnitude of organisational disruption (Simcock, 2016; Walker & Baxter, 2017). During profound or highly controversial restructurings, procedural justice exerts a particularly strong effect on the workforce, whereas this causal influence measurably flattens out during purely incremental adaptations (Simcock, 2016; Walker & Baxter, 2017). The hierarchical location of those affected acts as a determining constant. Employees at the lower and middle hierarchical levels respond substantially more sensitively to variations in procedural fairness than top management because of their more limited autonomous latitude. This sensitivity is additionally amplified by anticipated status loss or a rejecting personal preference regarding the substantive change (Eib et al., 2021).

Beyond these situational moderators, dispositional boundary conditions form a parallel moderator layer. Individual manifestations of locus of control, general readiness for change, and personal value orientation determine reaction patterns to formal change structures (Gori et al., 2020; Nasr et al., 2019). These factors represent individual boundary conditions within the framework, because they influence how employees interpret and respond to formally identical justice structures. Formal organisational socialisation tactics can substitute or amplify the effects of justice perceptions

depending heavily on the specific interplay with the immediate team climate (Nasr et al., 2019). Research also points to paradoxical fair process effects. Under specific conditions, a highly fair procedure may lead individuals to strongly identify with newly formed corporate groups, which can counterintuitively spur intergroup friction or anti-assimilation attitudes against previously established norms (Dierckx et al., 2020).

Beyond the situational and dispositional layers above, a third boundary condition operates at the meso-level: the historically developed corporate culture of the organisation interacts directly with justice perception. In an established participatory culture, the positive effect of transparent processes is amplified, whereas technocratically driven top-down cultures tend to weaken this mechanism (Lennon et al., 2019; Simcock, 2016; Walker & Baxter, 2017). The perceived organisational competence of management in the operational execution of the change further determines the level of acceptance (Arnéguy et al., 2020). Within the framework, corporate culture therefore operates as a meso-level boundary condition, while perceived organisational competence links this cultural layer to the leadership practices through which justice structures are enacted. The following paragraphs turn from these moderator layers to the micro-level practices of operational leadership, which interact dynamically with the cultural foundation established here.

The effectiveness of the institutional change design is substantially shaped by the individual behaviour of the executing leaders. Current research indicates a highly interdependent relationship between the systemic architecture of fairness and lived leadership practice at the micro-level. Transformational, inclusive and mindful leadership styles significantly amplify the effect of formal justice structures (Cenkci et al., 2021; Deschamps et al., 2016; Schuh et al., 2019). Leaders who model fairness in their daily routines and create a climate of psychological trust can strengthen employee engagement (Cenkci et al., 2021; Schuh et al., 2019). Transformational leadership can strengthen trust by providing direction, idealised influence and credible change narratives, while mindful leadership can strengthen trust by reducing bias in justice enactment. Inclusive leadership is not displayed as a separate category in Figure 1, but is conceptually captured within leadership enactment and the participatory voice mechanisms because it operates through voice, inclusion and psychological safety. Transformational and mindful leadership translate formal fairness structures into credible day-to-day experiences and thereby support the trust pathway in Figure 1. The positive effect of these leadership approaches on change motivation is almost entirely mediated by the subjective perception of procedural and interpersonal justice (Deschamps et al., 2016; Erat et al., 2020).

Inconsistent leadership practices impair the integrity of the entire system. If supervisors treat their workforce noticeably unequally, this undermines the collective justice climate and

frequently provokes mistrust and active resistance (Liao et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2014; Tse et al., 2018). This is particularly evident in high Leader-Member Exchange differentiation, where visible privileges for an in-group alienate the out-group, thereby eradicating any positive effects previously established through formal organisational justice structures (Liao et al., 2017; Tse et al., 2018). Within the framework, inconsistent leadership therefore operates as a negative enactment mechanism: it weakens trust, disrupts the credibility of formal justice structures, and can convert procedural design into perceived favouritism.

The mental well-being of the leaders is a critical factor. The psychological condition of management appears to shape the team climate and employees' affective responses (Ito et al., 2023). Building on these findings, the present review suggests that an exhausted leader may struggle to sustain the cognitive and relational resources required to authentically enact procedural justice, leading to a deterioration of the collective fairness climate. In demanding phases, ethical leadership acts as an indispensable buffer. It effectively curbs destructive dynamics such as organisational bullying and secures a reliable foundation for trustful collaboration (Ahmad, 2018; Walumbwa et al., 2017).

The conceptual framework model presented in Figure 1 is the principal synthesis-level contribution of this review. As progressively constructed across the Results section, the framework synthesises the empirical patterns reported there into an integrated causal architecture: the institutional architecture of fairness functions as the primary input variable, operates through four parallel mediating pathways, generates four outcome strands, and is systematically calibrated by situational, structural and individual boundary conditions. This structural foundation includes transparency, justification, voice and participation, and feedback loops (Georgalis et al., 2015; Sarkies et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2021). The synthesis suggests that these structural inputs influence employee outcomes through perceived organisational support, cognitive and affective trust, psychological ownership, and leadership enactment. The strength of this main causal path is systematically determined by magnitude of change, hierarchical position, corporate culture, control beliefs, change readiness and personal value orientation.

Practical implications

The behavioural psychology dynamics presented can be translated into tangible human resource control parameters. From an interdisciplinary HRM perspective, the architecture of fairness operates as a strategically relevant governance mechanism to secure implementation efficiency. Through a transparent information policy and comprehensible justification, change-induced uncertainty is strategically reduced, thereby minimising those internal frictions that would otherwise emerge from destructive conflicts, organisational cynicism or an increased propensity for turnover (Georgalis et al., 2015; Gori et al., 2020; Hewett et al., 2019). Institutional investments in participatory co-design

processes and iterative feedback loops generate returns in the form of psychological ownership and increased implementation speed (Palmer et al., 2019; Sarkies et al., 2023; Wu & Paluck, 2020).

For human resource practitioners, particularly those operating in highly unionised or socio-economically dynamic environments like South Africa, the framework provides a structured approach to mitigating structural conflict. Interventions such as restorative justice formats allow conflicting parties to safely articulate historical or structural grievances without the immediate threat of disciplinary repercussions (Ortega et al., 2016; Sherman et al., 2015). This represents a critical governance tool in diverse workforces. The trust in top management cultivated by procedural justice transforms initial aversion into robust affective commitment (González-Cánovas et al., 2024; López-Cabarcos et al., 2015). This commitment operates as an operationally consequential mechanism during phases of transformation. It may lower costs associated with change-induced turnover intentions and accelerate the implementation of new organisational structures. This mechanism is of critical economic importance during exogenous crises or disruptive market shifts, as an effectively committed workforce is more likely to sustain operational stability during periods of disruption (Einwiller et al., 2021; Ruppel et al., 2022).

Beyond these specific mechanisms, two overarching managerial principles emerge from the synthesis. Firstly, change architects and top management should understand procedural justice as a calculable investment in the psychological capital of the organisation. This requires the strategic implementation of professionally moderated co-design processes and iterative feedback loops, alongside the targeted training of leaders to utilise transparent justifications as an emotional buffer during disruptive changes (Schuh et al., 2019; Yue et al., 2019). Secondly, the calibration of these instruments must always be flexibly adapted to situational boundary conditions, such as the hierarchical position of those affected or the historically developed corporate culture (Eib et al., 2021; Lennon et al., 2019; Walker & Baxter, 2017).

Limitations and recommendations

Despite the robust evidence base, substantial blind spots remain for interdisciplinary organisational justice research. A central methodological limitation of this integrative review is the extreme geographic and cultural concentration of the underlying primary data. Because the empirical evidence originates almost exclusively from the Western-dominated OECD region, the universal generalisability of the identified mechanisms to organisations in other macro-cultural contexts remains a critical research gap (Bilotta et al., 2021; Hewett et al., 2019; Silva & Caetano, 2016). This pronounced Non-OECD gap poses a specific challenge for the African HRM context. South Africa's unique labour dynamics, characterised by historical structural inequalities, strong union density and distinct cultural frameworks, require a

careful contextualisation of this fairness architecture. Macro-cultural variables, such as societal power distance or collective engagement norms, could determine a divergent calibration of justice perception. This illustrates the need for methodologically rigorous comparative studies to empirically test these OECD-derived mechanisms within South African organisations and the broader African continent (Eib et al., 2021; Yuan, 2021). Specifically, future research should examine how institutional history, collective employee relations, and leadership practices jointly shape procedural justice and transparent communication in change processes across diverse African HRM settings.

A further limitation concerns construct migration across sectors: although the review identifies portable mechanisms, the strength and salience of these mechanisms may differ across HRM settings, occupational groups, and institutional regimes. At the same time, this cross-sectoral breadth strengthens the review's analytical focus on recurring employee-level mechanisms rather than on sector-specific surface differences. Furthermore, a persistent methodological weakness of the discipline manifests in the heterogeneity of the measurement instruments used, which complicates the precise comparability of effect sizes across different industrial sectors (Silva & Caetano, 2016; Yuan, 2021). Furthermore, current research lacks elaborate experimental designs for the causal examination of distinct interaction effects among multiple moderators, such as the simultaneous investigation of specific change types and divergent leadership cultures (Simcock, 2016). While the correlation between justice and change acceptance is strongly validated, the direct causal evidence linking procedural justice to profound psychological health metrics or well-being during change requires more stringent longitudinal assessment (Ikeda et al., 2024).

Finally, recent research indicates unintended paradoxical phenomena that require further analysis. Initial studies document that an absolute excess of unstructured transparency when conveying negative news can counterintuitively lower the distributive justice perception of those affected (Babin et al., 2021). Similarly, there is a lack of robust longitudinal data evaluating how the progressive shift of participation formats into purely digital communication spaces affects perceived authenticity and perceived procedural fairness (Hafferty et al., 2024; Netto et al., 2025). Verifying whether digital voice formats can effectively substitute face-to-face interaction regarding justice perception represents the most urgent frontier for future academic inquiry.

Conclusion

In summary, the present investigation provides evidence that procedural justice and transparent communication function as governance mechanisms that can improve implementation conditions during organisational transformation. The synthesised findings from the OECD baseline consistently suggest that a procedural architecture perceived as fair

systematically transforms initial uncertainty into measurable affective commitment. This psychological mechanism is substantially supported by two structural pillars. Firstly, a transparent information policy characterised by early timing, inter-sectoral consistency and honest justification of management decisions was consistently associated with trust formation. Secondly, resilient change architectures require the institutionalisation of genuine employee participation. Participatory formats that enable a genuine sense of control and psychological ownership can reduce resistance, cynicism and withdrawal responses when they are credibly enacted.

This institutional architecture of fairness is highly interdependent with the micro-dynamics of operational leadership. Transformational and mindful leadership calibrate the effectiveness of structurally anchored procedural justice, while inclusive leadership is reflected in the participatory voice and psychological safety mechanisms. Leadership enactment thus functions as a central mediating pathway through which the organisation's formal fairness commitments are translated into employees' lived experiences. Preferential leadership practices erode the integrity of the entire change structure. Taken together, the synthesised evidence positions procedural justice and transparent communication as operationally relevant governance mechanisms for organisational transformation in mature institutional contexts, while indicating that their portability to diverse labour-governance settings requires further empirical examination.

Acknowledgements

Hüseyin Özdemir confirms that this work is entirely their own and acknowledges the foundational theoretical contributions of the cited researchers in the fields of organisational psychology and human resource management.

Competing interests

The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

CRedit authorship contribution

Hüseyin Özdemir: Conceptualisation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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