

Research reveals workers care more about others when jobs are under threat

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Those enduring change in organisations where jobs are under threat are concerned as much about others as they are of themselves, according to a new study from a team of researchers at Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University (RSM).

In research which analysed employee reactions to 23 change projects in a large police organisation, workers were genuinely worried about what happens to their colleagues and for the fate of the entire organisation.

Gabriele Jacobs, who was part of the research team, said: "The reaction was totally unexpected as we were anticipating that those interviewed would want to minimise the damage to their own positions and careers. Yet only a minority of people expressed this to us. More voiced concern over what would happen to their colleagues and the organisation as a result of the organisational change."

Big reorganisations can be fear-inducing events for employees who see their roles and career opportunities affected by new structures and ideas. That's why managers often assume that employee behaviour – and backlash – against change is driven by self-preservation.

Yet, in the study some even said they would consider the change project a failure if their colleagues suffered or if the final result was negative for the organisation at large.

They were also worried about how the general public might react to the changes or how the quality of the police service might suffer.

After analysing all the interviews, the researchers noticed that most employees tend to form more elaborate opinions about the effects of change than managers often anticipate. They often see various gains and losses in every change, both for themselves, for others and for the organisation.

Jacobs added: "We observed that people want the gains and losses to be distributed fairly, according to a set of moral standards, even if the organisational changes do not affect them directly, or when the fair treatment of others comes at a personal cost. You could say people are more altruistic than earlier research has suggested."

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