Readiness of Change Management in the Malaysian Public Organisation

Mohd Hafis Ahmad

Ir. Dr Syuhaida Ismail

Prof. Dr Abd. Latif Saleh

Change is a constant in life, something that forces a person out of his comfort zone. In this paper, change is observed as a specific type of critical thinking method, one that consists of planning, participation and evaluation of social change. It is a comprehensive description of how and why the desired change is expected to happen, in a particular context.

In the organisation context, the capability to change will lead to a more promising future. Longenecker *et al.* (2007) mentioned that organisational changing rates had grown tremendously in the last few decades, in line with the increase in several factors, such as customer demands, globalisation, cost and technology advancement. According to Buono and Kerber (2010), due to the challenges caused by these rapid changes, people have to be ready for the change and adapt to the challenges of the environment.

It is, therefore, not surprising that society considers the government's efforts to enhance the business processes, which usually involve costly systems, as a waste of money since society does not experience any improvement. But this occurrence is mainly due to low quality and responsiveness of the public service.

According to Public Complaints Bureau (2016), complaints received from January to September 2016 are about failure to adhere to set procedures (15.9%) and the unsatisfactory quality of service (13%). These figures are considered high as trends have shown a "decrease" pattern in last five years. These figures are an indication that the public organisation service is still lacking in the ability to adapt to change and transformation environment. This is further supported by Ferreira and Antwerpen (2011), who claim that, if the role is carried out well, the public organisation will be much appreciated and trusted by the people, given that its success depends on a competent and accountable workforce.

Hence, via literature review and a questionnaire survey on employees of the public organisation in the country, this paper aims to appraise the change management of the Malaysian public organisation, with the primary objectives of investigating the current practice of organisation and attitude of employees in the public organisation towards change management as well as assessing the factors influencing readiness of organisation and employees in the Malaysian public organisation towards change management. It is hoped that the current practices can be improved for the betterment of the nation.

This paper is highly significant as the employees' readiness for change is vital in determining the success of organisational change. Readiness for change is an early cognitive behaviour, which consequently leads to support for or opposed reaction towards change (Armenakis *et al.* 1993). The study of readiness for change in our public organisation is also aligned with the government's aspirations to provide better quality services to the people, especially in promoting public engagement. To ensure transformation programmes achieve their objectives, readiness for change is an important field to study, given the resistance to change as reported in past studies.

This paper is expected to help public organisation employees strengthen the trust and communication between themselves as this indirectly affects readiness for change. This paper is also important to build understanding between the management and subordinates and to improve cooperation in the public organisation. This may help the management create an action plan to overcome resistance among employees, so as to ensure the actualisation of organisational changes to benefit the public.

This paper will also contribute new information to knowledge and existing literature of readiness for change. The findings may also provide a further understanding of readiness for change since research involving organisational commitment as a factor in our public organisation context, is limited.

CURRENT ORGANISATION PRACTICES

The rapid increase in knowledge, social status and enhanced technology has resulted in a dynamic and challenging public sector environment. Nevertheless, organisations which thrive in the 21st century are those where employees remain ready and supportive of changes. According to Armenakis *et al.* (1993), in facing these

upcoming challenges, the organisations yearn for employees' readiness for changes.

However, the primary challenge lies in implementing the change strategies, mainly because organisational changes often face intense resistance due to lack of members' readiness for a change (Kotter and Schlesinger, 1979). Therefore, due to the increased lack of employees' readiness for a change, the organisation's strategic change implementation usually goes awry (Halkos and Bousinakis, 2012).

Evidence suggests that employees are more inclined to embrace and support changes when their interests and beliefs are significantly aligned with the goals and mission of the organisation. Various research studies have established that, for employees to support and appreciate organisational changes, such changes must be significantly aligned with the values of an organisation's members (Elias, 2009). Based on previous studies, there are a number of factors that influence employees' readiness for a change, including individual and workplace factors (Hutagaol, 2012; McKay, 2012; Choi and Ruona, 2010; Dam, 2010; Elias, 2009; Hallgrimsson, 2008; Walinga, 2008).

However, there are very few integrated studies which take a holistic perspective by looking into both workplace and individual factors (Soumyaja et al., 2011). Holt et al., (2007) have identified four elements that influence readiness for a change: Change content, process, internal context and the individual involved. It also found that most previous studies in employees' readiness for change do not agree with integrated model of Holt et al., (2007) or elements as the studies only measured singular elements of employees' readiness for change, such as change content (Morgeson et al., 2006, Kiefer, 2005), change process (Armenakis and Harris, 2002), internal context (Shah, 2011; Jones et al., 2005) and individual attributes (Al-Abrow, 2013; Faghihi and Allameh, 2012).

It is important to probe further and investigate the employees' readiness for a change from a holistic perspective, by considering the internal context, process and individual attributes. Realistically, there is a vital need for organisations to understand employees' readiness for a change towards the actualisation of organisational changes. It is also important to identify the factors or forces which will affect an employee's readiness for change. These will allow the leaders or top management to improve the employees' readiness for change by taking appropriate steps which can lead to a decrease of resistance to change in the organisation.

READINESS FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change management is a structured approach to ensure that changes are thoroughly and smoothly implemented (Potter, 2015) and that the lasting benefits of change are achieved. According to Judith (2014), change management is an approach to transitioning individuals, teams and organisations to a desired future state. The focus is on the wider impacts of change, particularly on people and how they, as individuals and teams, move from the current situation to the new one. The change in question may range from a simple process change to major changes in policy or strategy if the organisation is to achieve its potential.

Furthermore, theories about how organisations change draw on many disciplines, from psychology and behavioral science, to engineering and systems thinking (Matthews and Joshua, 2014). The underlying principle is that change does not happen in isolation and that it impacts the whole organisation (system) and all the people touched by it.

Various terms have been used to describe readiness for change as, without it, passive compliance and resistance to change will happen. Readiness was first defined by Lewin (1947) as getting an organisation's members to let organisational change happen physically and psychologically. The

management has to prove that the existing process or practice is no longer acceptable or relevant to the business environment in order to sustain or to gain back success. Definition by Armenakis *et al.*, (1993) on readiness for change is one of the most cited in the change management literature, where it is organisational members' belief, attitudes and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organisations' capacity to successfully make those changes. The need for change can be stressed to employees, so that they feel the desire for the change.

However, there are many common issues and limitations of research on readiness for change documented in the literature. Among these is the lack of conceptual studies on readiness for change, where literature on readiness for change in journals (such as the *Journal of Organisational Change Management, Journal of Management and Journal of Organisational Behavior)* shows that studies have focused on investigating factors that influence readiness for change, either individual or workplace factors.

In addition, regardless of the relevance and importance of readiness for change in an organisation, limited research was done to examine readiness for change in the public sector compared to private sector (Mason, 2004; McCann, 2004). Like the private sector, the public sector has also undergone organisational change to be more effective in the delivery of public sector services. In the Malaysian context, research on the public sector was not as extensive as that on private sector, as indicated in the findings by Che Awang (2000) and Norman (2012).

Literature also shows that previous studies on readiness for change are lacking in the theoretical approach. Although there were various theories governing behavioural change, such as theory of planned behaviour and theory of trans-theoretical model, there was not much research on the relevance of these theories with readiness for organisational change. Most previous studies on readiness for change, adopted the descriptive and case studies from earlier research. Most previous studies were also based on cross-sectional data and therefore, did not allow for tracing changes in an individual. Longitudinal paper of the relationships between variables may better capture the dynamic nature of readiness for change.

On the other hand, the majority of previous studies explored change process that occurred in a single organisation, which prevents consideration of change content as variable. The difficulty in obtaining data from multiple organisations and different types of on-going change, resulted in limited research in this variable. Studies confined to a limited number of organisations, also limited the ability to generalise findings and conclusions (Yousef, 2000).

In addition, the variables used are also observed by this paper as one of the issues related to readiness for change. Even though there are four elements – internal context, change content, process and individual attributes – that influence readiness for change (Holt *et al.*, 2007), most researchers focus only on one element as their independent variable. Lack of integrated studies resulted in less understanding in determining the key and crucial factor among the four elements.

FACTORS INFLUENCING READINESS FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Various factors have been determined via literature review on the factors influencing the readiness for change management. These are categorised as organisational and organisational commitment factors. Organisational factor is further divided into trust in management and communication while the latter is divided into affective commitment, continuous commitment and normative commitment.

In terms of organisational factor, according to Korsgaard *et al.*, (2002), trust in management is the employee's inclination to follow and support the leader. Trust in management is an internal context factor and component of an organisational climate (Bouckenooghe *et al.*, 2009). Trust in management provides direction in the relationship between employee and management especially when involved with openness and spontaneity (Sztompka, 1998).

It is recommended by this paper that trust in management is important to ensure the cooperation of employees. Organisational change which may lead to crisis and risk for the employees, requires the management to place importance on building trust.

With trust in management, employees may recognise the management's good intentions (Harvey and Keashly, 2003) and believe that they can enjoy the benefits gained from the change. This is supported by Byrne *et al.*, (2005) who stated that employees believe they will not be manipulated by the management if the management is trustworthy. Besides that, Martin (1998) explained that employees who trusted the management would give a positive reaction towards organisational change. Reinke (2003) further proved that trust in management was a strong factor for employees to accept any change or new system.

In addition to trust in management under organisational factor which influences readiness for change management, communication is also vital in determining the success of any such initiative (Hultman, 1995). According to Robbins & Judge (2007), communication is information exchange and happens in three dimensions: Upwards, downwards and horizontally. It is important for an organisation to communicate on changes since weak or low level of communication leads to the feeling of resentment towards the change (Covin and Kilmann, 1990).

Hence, open and honest communication is essential for change actualisation (Jones *et al.*, 2004). It is therefore observed by this paper that an interrupted communication, together with misunderstanding during change, will create a severe impact on strategy implementation as well as action. This is further supported by Kotter & Schlesinger (1979), who identified misunderstanding due to communication problems or insufficient information as one of the main reasons for resistance to change.

As for organisational commitment, the second factor that influences readiness for change management, it is the nature of the relationship between the individual and the organization. Confidence in the organisation's values and mission means the individual will be willing to work hard for the interest of the organisation. Therefore, this paper suggests that employees who are committed to the organisation, have a strong desire to be part of the organisation, due to the fact that commitment reflects the nature and relationship between employees and organisation (Mowdays et al., 1979).

Organisational commitment may be influenced by many factors, such as individual characteristics (gender, age and years of experience) as well as organisational factors such as leadership style. Organisational commitment is related to individual identification and involvement in an organisation and the level of loyalty (Powell and Meyer, 2002). With commitment, employees will feel strongly attached to the organisation and so, voluntarily adapt to the organisation's values and be always ready for changes in the organisation.

Organisational commitment is divided into affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. Affective commitment is related to emotional attachment and involves an employee's feeling towards the organisation. Employees with strong affective commitment will stay in the organisation because they want to.

On the other hand, continuance commitment refers to the individual's awareness on the cost implication if one leaves the organisation. Employees who hold this commitment, will stay in the organisation because they have to. The third component, organisational commitment, is the normative commitment dealing with individual values pertaining to the needs of obligations to the organisation. Employees in this category stay in the organisation because they believe that it is the right thing to do.

Meyer et al., (2002) stated that organisational commitment is higher among employees who undergo good experience in work, such as feeling satisfied that the organisation has fulfilled the employees' needs. Establishing positive behaviour and satisfactory relationships at work will encourage employees to be committed to work assigned. In conclusion, based on previous studies, it has been found that organisational commitment is one of the determinants that has a significant effect on the organisation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve this paper's objectives, questionnaires were distributed to the respondents via softcopy (email), online survey software/questionnaire tool and hard copy (distribution) over two weeks.

Eliyahu (2014) argued that the quantitative methodology tends to estimate a phenomenon from large numbers, therefore the data is collected through surveys. Prior to the questionnaire survey, a pilot study, a run-through or dress rehearsal of the actual study, was carried out. A pilot is a good way to troubleshoot any equipment problem, familiarise the team with the procedures and generally, to see if the experiment design has any potential flaw. Following Connelly (2008) and Treece & Treece (1982), 10% of the sample projected for the larger parent study was chosen using a convenience sampling technique on employees of the public organisation, comprising three different position levels, namely top management, professional and supporting staff. Cronbach's alpha value of 0.891 was recorded which, according to George and Mallery (2003), was considered reliable as it falls within a range of 0.7 to 1.0. As for sample, that suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was 379, so over 1,000 questionnaires were distributed to public organisation employees. However, only 336 were successfully returned with complete answers.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The level of agreement on the current practice of organisation and employees towards change management and factor influencing readiness for change management are investigated via Relative Importance Index, which is able to make the ranking based on its level of importance (Chan and Kumaraswamy, 1997). Both the current practice and factors influencing readiness for change management are investigated from two factors influencing readiness of change management as discussed earlier: Organisational factor (trust in management and communication) and organisational commitment factor as discussed in the following sub-sections.

1. Current Practice of Organisation and Employees towards Change Management

Table 1, which shows "the management team has a positive vision for the future", is the most agreed current practice of organisation and employees towards change management in organisational factor of trust in management (B1). In addition, it is also claimed that in the current public organisation, "the supervisors speak up for employees during the change process"; this is a very good sign of change management initial practice in the public organisation in Malaysia. Nevertheless, it has been found that "the top management does not pay sufficient attention to the personal consequences that change may have for the employees", although "they coach employees very well about implementing the change".

Meanwhile, "good communication between the supervisors and employees about the organisation's policy towards the changes" is a major current practice of organisation and employees towards change management in organisational factor of communication (B2). It is also found that "the employees are regularly informed on how the change is going to be" although on the contrary, "the employees lack sufficient information on the progress of the change from the top management". In comparing both the organisational factor of trust in management and communication, it has been found that trust in management (Bi) plays a better role in the current practice of public organisation and employees towards change management with generally higher RII.

Table 1: Ranking of current practice of organisation and employees towards change management

Construct Code	Organisational Factor Category	RII	Rank
(B1) Trust in management			
B1.5	The management team has a positive vision for the future	0.774	1
B1.3	The supervisors speak up for employees during the change process	0.716	2
B1.4	The supervisors are capable of fulfilling their new function as a result of the change	0.716	3
B1.2	The top management coaches employees very well about implementing the change	0.701	4
B1.1	The top management pays sufficient attention to the personal consequences that the change may have for the employees	0.669	5
(B2) Communication			
B2.2	There is good communication between the supervisors and employees about the organisation's policy towards the changes	0.720	1
B2.1	Employees are regularly informed on how the change is going to be	0.718	2
B2.6	Employees are informed about the reason for the change	0.699	3
B2.5	Departments are informed about the change sufficiently	0.699	4
B2.3	Information provided on the change is clear	0.693	5
B2.4	Employees are sufficiently informed of the progress of the change	0.672	6

2. Factors Influencing Readiness for Change Management

As for factors influencing readiness for change management among employees in terms of organisational commitment (C1), it has been found that "the enjoyment discussing about organisation with outsider" and "staying with the current organisation is a matter of necessity as much as desire" are the most important factors as shown in Table 2. In addition, all the other 13 factors of organisational commitment recorded the Relative Importance Index (RII) of more than 0.5. This apparently shows that the Malaysian public organisation is starting to give its organisational commitment to influence readiness for change management among employees.

As for individual commitment (C2) factors which influence readiness for change management among employees, the majority of respondents claimed that the most important factors are that they are willing "to support change" and "to do things in new/creative ways". In comparing the factors that influence readiness for change management among employees between the organisational commitment and individual commitment, this paper found that the individual commitment (C2) contributes a more significant factor than organisational commitment towards influencing the readiness for change management among employees with all of the RIIs record more than 0.75.

Table 2: Ranking of factor influencing readiness for change management amongst employees

Construct Code	Organisational Commitment Factor Category	RII	Rank
(C1) Organisational commitment			
C1.2	I enjoy discussing about my organisation with people outside it	0.751	1
C1.8	Right now, staying with my organisation is a matter of necessity as much as desire	0.751	2
C1.11	One of the major reasons I continue to work in this organisation is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain	0.748	3
C1.1	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation	0.734	4
C1.4	I think I could easily become as attached to another organisation as I am to the current organisation	0.730	5
C1.9	I feel that I have very few options to consider leaving this organisation	0.658	6
C1.6	It would be very hard for me to leave my organisation right now, even if I wanted to	0.655	7
C1.13	I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organisation	0.655	8
C1.3	I really feel as if this organisation's problems are my own	0.653	9
C1.14	Things were better in the days when people stayed in one organisation for most of their careers	0.652	10
C1.7	Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my organisation now	0.648	11
C1.10	Jumping from organisation to organisation does not seem at all unethical to me	0.636	12
C1.5	This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me	0.633	13
C1.12	If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere I would not feel it was right to leave my organisation	0.618	14
C1.15	I do not think that to be an organisation man or organisation woman is sensible anymore	0.592	15

(C2) Individual Commitment			
C2.12	I am willing to support change	0.815	1
C2.6	I am willing to do things in a new or creative ways	0.808	2
C2.3	I am willing to be part of the new project team	0.804	3
C2.4	I am willing to create new ideas	0.800	4
C2.7	I am willing to change the way I work because of the change	0.800	5
C2.9	I am willing to be part of the change programme	0.798	6
C2.10	I am willing to learn new things	0.798	7
C2.13	I am willing to improve what we are currently doing rather than implement a major change	0.798	8
C2.2	I am willing to solve organisation's problem	0.780	9
C2.11	I am willing to change something even if it appears to be working	0.774	10
C2.8	I am willing to take responsibility for the change if it fails in my area	0.773	11
C2.1	I am willing to work more because of the change	0.765	12
C2.5	I am willing to find ways to make the change fail	0.763	13
C2.14	I am willing to sell ideas about the change	0.756	14

CONCLUSION

In general, from the investigated current practice of organisation and employees in the Malaysian public organisation towards change management and the factors influencing readiness of organisation and employees in the Malaysian public organisation towards change management, it is suggested that the public organisation focus on trust in management, the factor in which the top management should pay sufficient attention to the personal consequences that the change could have for the employees.

This is reflected in the employees' opinion on the management current practice where the organisation pays insufficient attention to personal consequences. Meanwhile, in communication, the organisation must be focused and make greater effort to inform employees on the progress of the change, in order to make organisational change more effective. It is also suggested that the public organisation pay more attention to the factor of rewards in the form of appreciation for employees who work on and contribute to the change programme and encourage them to sell the change ideas so as to influence readiness for change management among employees.

Eventually, the results discussed have demonstrated that this paper has successfully achieved its aim to appraise change management in the Malaysian public organisation as limited research is available, as claimed by Mason (2004) and McCann (2004), in examining the readiness for change in the public sector compared to private sector. This paper has not only identified various antecedents and issues for better understanding as well as improving knowledge in readiness for change management, but it also provides, for the management, an understanding of factors that help employees get ready for organisational change. By considering the role of the management and employee characteristics, organisational change can be achieved since it is impossible to implement any change programme without the involvement of both parties.

As a result, the management can plan and manage change programmes more effectively since it is important for public organisations to perform well and be prepared in the business reengineering and transformation process so as to provide better outcomes for the public. This requires public organisation to always be ready for enhancement and not be complacent. Through this paper, better strategies can be taken up to ensure public organisations are in "high readiness" in order to achieve the visions and missions established by the government.

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Authors' Biodata

Mohd Hafis Ahmad, is a Civil Engineer with Malaysia's largest public technical organisation. He is currently pursuing his PhD at Faculty of Civil Engineering, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor. His research interests include Project Management and Strategic Management.

Ir. Dr Syuhaida Ismail, is a Senior Lecturer with UTM Razak School of Engineering and Advanced Technology, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Kuala Lumpur. Her research interests include Project Management, Construction Management and Strategic Management. She has published more than 100 articles in related areas.

Prof. Dr Abd. Latif Saleh, is a Professor with Faculty of Civil Engineering, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Johor. He is currently the Director of Work of UTM.