A Case Study on Change Management Readiness for an Oil & Gas SME Company in Malaysia

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Abstract. Change management is vital in sustaining and remain competitive in a volatile environment. A well-planned change management effort has been craved by organizations in need as being more profitable, reputable and sustainable is the ultimate achievement. These changes to the pillars of the organization normally are more transformative than incremental in nature. All arrows pointing to the single biggest step an organization is to embark if they choose to ride the path of a successful change management execution – the change management readiness. This paper discusses the aspects of change management readiness which entails the need for readiness, the activities within readiness, the factors of leadership, communication and awareness that embodies the readiness as a whole. A case study of an actual organization participated in the study using leadership profiling assessment, organizational communication survey, change management awareness survey and maturity assessment. The results from this study is realistic and impactful to its readers. This paper validates the underlying theory of the three factors in a real industry environment and how successful change management readiness can be obtained with diligent planning and execution.

1. Introduction
The sixth Prime Minister of Malaysia initiated the Economic Transformation Plan, which place high priority to the Oil and Gas industry, as it has been the most potential and lucrative industry at the moment. The concentration encourages new companies to join the industry, while the current businesses grow within rapidly. Many incentives are being given to support this effort but the biggest question remains whether these “Small Medium Enterprises” (SME) companies are ready for expansion, globalization or survival. Are they ready to compete on the international playing field in terms of deliverability, quality and price competitiveness? These are the biggest questions asked of a company in these situations. While they try to pursue change through generative learning, they see things and begin transforming its structures when waves of alarming needs corner them for change in process, people, structure and strategy [1] in order to survive.

This is the current problem and scenario that most companies in Malaysia are facing, as majority are still operating on local standards and deliverables. When Malaysia eventually opens up its market in complying to the Asian Free Trade Agreement (AFTA), many will feel the pinch and loss of business opportunity. Only sustainable model implementation and adaptation to the current market demand will enable them to survive this phenomenon.
Since companies need to change in meeting the demands of the market, this study explores an element in change management for this concentrated industry in Malaysia – the readiness for change management in an organization. For the SME Construction companies within the Oil and Gas industry, they must be able to act fast and prevent the collapse of market competitiveness. Globalization will take its toll whether we like it or not, it's how these companies adapt and transform towards the external imposition that makes survival and growth possible.

This study has an objective of evaluating a company's readiness in executing change management through the factors of leadership, communication, and awareness. These three factors are essential in the completeness of change management readiness and have been proposed by previous research within the same field to study on the role of organizational communication processes, as well as the importance of information on levels of change readiness [2]. The discussion will be led on what change management is all about, its implementation, preparation for change management, leadership, communication, awareness, assessments, surveys and recommendation for the further impact the knowledge and industry stakeholders in the future.

2. Literature review

2.1 Change Management
Change Management was defined by Prosci as a process and set of tools to assist people/organization in achieving its desired outcome [3]. Change management in an organization relies heavily on human factor with leadership and communication prowess underlining its helm. Change Management is to be considered successful when the objective of the company is being met through people collaboration and successful execution of the program itself. It is glaring that change management is inevitable for companies in Malaysia as they need to respond to the volatile market. Many claim Malaysia [4] as one of the most open economies in the world [5], which makes change management and its readiness vital in any organization.

2.2 Organizational Readiness in Change Management
An organization's decision to embark in change management is as important as its decision to ensure the organization is ready for the change itself. Many top management fails to understand that the barriers to change are the employee themselves. There is a limit in imposing instruction on subordinates, therefore it is crucial to get the employee's willingness to improve, work better and embrace the changes within the organization.

While the majority of the change management effort failed due to the sponsor or the highest rank person with executive power in an organization didn't 100% on board with the change management program, the next contributing factor is the inability to remove or overcome the barrier of change itself. These barriers come in multiple forms from people resisting change, communication breakdown, insufficient time for training, and staff turnover during change [6]. These barriers boil down to three factors of leadership, communication, and awareness in change management respectively.

2.2.1 Leadership in Change Management.
Implementing change management is an easy feat with the right managerial leadership within the organization. Being exemplary and communicating strategies, information, updates, and instruction constantly towards people around you are the leaders of change management that have helped companies transformed successfully [7]. In a modern organization, the top-down approach is no longer valid as 360 relations, communications, interaction, evaluations come into the fray. This factor demands more from the manager to be more sociable, open and transparent with his/her subordinates. Studies have shown that two out of three transformation initiatives fail due to incompetent managers. We have seen many of these instances in companies struggling to compete and maintaining the high quality of services where lack of "movement" towards organizational needs.

This research emphasizes leadership role before, during and after the change management process. It is imperative to have the support, concern and committed managers to employee’s welfare during the times of change [8]. Managers become leaders, acting as change drivers and change agents during these
processes. They need to drive and gain the trust of their subordinates on why change is needed in the organization. Poor managers cum leaders will lead to a disastrous change climate within the organization and make it difficult to cope with the ever-increasing frequency of organizational change with it is already set in motion [9]. Developing managers with analytical, influential, emotional, political, interpersonal and technical attributes is essential, especially in contributing to the probability of change readiness success [10].

2. Communication in Change Management.

The purpose of employing communication as one of the key areas of change management is to disseminate information to the intended group of people. There are many forms of communication channels available within an organization including employee portals, newsletters, emails, static and non-static media as well as face to face communications. Many organization misunderstood the change communication as a process of mediating instead of intermediating [11]. To have effective communication, information needs to be interpreted and reinterpret them into ideas and processes that are easy to understand, thus applying the mediating technique. While using the communication channels, its best to incorporate latest technologies albeit social network and video conferencing to enhance outreach to employees. However, although it is the management's decision to establish any means of communication channels deemed effective, one must avoid a typical top-down and one way conduits approach while using these communication facilities to avoid a breakdown in communication [12].

2.3 Awareness in Change Management.

The first building block of one of the most popular change management model, Prosci’s ADKAR, is awareness. [13]. An employee needs to know why change is needed, how it is affecting them and what are their roles in participating in this change. This is where awareness is crucial in getting their willingness and buy-in towards implementing change. Another factor of awareness is the believability of the information they receive. This relates much to the manager's role in relaying accurate information to build trust and enable the communicated messages being interpreted in the right manner. It is advisable to have constant top management engagement with employees, regular communication between managers and subordinates and continuous monitor of awareness level about the change management situation within the organization.

2.3 Situation of SME Oil & Gas Companies in Malaysia

Through the economic transformation plan launched by the government, oil and gas and renewable energy contribute a major portion of Malaysian economy with the increasing growth of 5% per year up to the year 2020 [14]. The concentration on oil and gas industry has grown over the years and more opportunities and potential are available in the market. This makes the growth of companies inevitable as when there's a pull factor strong enough to attract local SME companies, the same pull factor influences international companies in protruding the local construction scene. With the development and launching of Rapid Project, increasing construction and revamping works by big players like Petronas, Shell, ExxonMobil, and Petron [15] for their current and upcoming facilities, increase in competitiveness is the need for all companies battling to survive.

The largest contributor to our national income/business participation is through SME companies. These companies are companies within the range of 75-200 people [16]. The challenge of SME to react towards an open market and globalization is to meet the standards expected by all the current big players and new players in the Malaysian market through the influx of investment through the market. Companies like Tokuyama Corp., LION Group, Assar are all newly invested companies in Malaysia which can be considered as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) [17]. The SMEs are facing an obstacle in the areas of manpower competency, infrastructure, business competition, technological and innovation infrastructure and government policies [18], [19]. It was identified that the key success factor for SMEs with more than 10 years in the business are including but not limited to the items mentioned below, which happens to be the biggest challenge for SME to compete and grow into an internationally competitive company [20]. The items are:

i. Sound management capability and integrity
ii. Sound business cultures and entrepreneurial spirit
iii. Prudent financial management
iv. High-quality products and services
v. An effective program for human resource development
vi. Strong support from financial institution
vii. Strong marketing strategies
viii. Continuously looking for opportunities to expand.

Most of the local SME are struggling with these key success factors and in order to overcome these challenges, especially in oil and gas, must undergo change management to be competitive, maintain quality, meeting on-time delivery while gaining significant profit at the same time. An SME company in Malaysia will need to transform by redirecting its strategies, internal competencies, structure, process, culture, and people in order to succeed [21].

3. Case study description, instruments, and method

3.1 Case organization

3.1.1 Background.
The case study for change management readiness is a medium sized oil & gas engineering construction company based in Kuala Lumpur. The company has been operating in Malaysia for more than 50 years with employee’s headcount of 100 people at the point of the study (22 managerial level, 72 non-managerial level and 6 non-managerial/non-executive directors). Steadily growing since its establishment, the company’s revenue for 2013 was RM153 million. Their previous clients are from international and local based company such as Petron, Petronas, ExxonMobil, and Tokuyama. The company specializes in "Engineering, Procurement, Construction and Commissioning” (EPCC) operations and provides its services with exceptional quality and standards. Company objective is to satisfy client through quality, safety and completion timeliness, maximizing profit for the shareholders as well as providing a rewarding career to all its employees.

3.1.2 Organizational issues and problems.
Change management was mooted by the managing director of the organization after a decline in client satisfaction in the “Customer Satisfaction Feedback (CSF)” for 4 of the last 7 projects, where they achieved below 2.5 of 5, completed by the company. The main reason for the decline in results was due to lack of manpower support, substandard engineering drawings quality and technical ability of the employees executing the projects.

3.1.3 The change management program.
In order to turnaround the company’s performance, the company underwent organizational assessment and detailed analysis of every segment of the organization using 6-pillar model, introduced by Indera Shaiful and Bulan Abdullah [22]. The change management program was introduced based on these results and was carried out with the full support of board directors and company owners. The change management masterplan has 7 programs as follows:

i. Preparation for change programme
ii. Total organizational improvement programme
iii. Employees performance management system programme
iv. KPI tailoring programme
v. Organizational performance monitoring programme
vi. Compliance programme
vii. Work approach programme

The first change management program is to be conducted within the first three months and the next six programs to be completed within a year after the first program is completed. The preparation for
change program was designed to minimize implementation risk and ensure success for the whole change management masterplan. This preparation is also called change readiness[23], where in order to overcome the barrier of change within the organization, the company has focused on leadership, communication, and awareness as the key towards achieving organizational change goals set by the management. Detail activities obtained from the company's masterplan are as follows:

i. Managerial training
ii. Readiness of communication channels
iii. Improvisation of communication channels and distribution of knowledge
iv. Leadership program
v. Communicating organizational strategies
vi. Change awareness initiatives

3.2 Instruments
There were 4 instruments/tools used to conduct the study by the researcher. These instruments/tools were carefully adopted and created in order to reflect the true nature of the organization through these assessments and surveys. The first instrument is the leadership profiling assessment, which identifies the managers in the organization on their sociability, dominance, and openness. This assessment was adopted from a book titled "Managers As Mentors: Building Partnerships for Learning" published in 2013 [24]. The second instrument is the organizational communication survey, which is a survey emphasizing to the communication condition within the organization through channels available internally. This survey was generated and distributed by Qualtrics, an online survey tool [25].

The third instrument was is the change management awareness survey, intended to gauge the awareness level of all employees on the objective, execution detail, roles and relationships and timeline of the change management plan the company intends to implement. This instrument was developed within the organization itself. The fourth instrument is the maturity assessment (overall change readiness assessment) which highlights the readiness of the organization and risk level in implementing change management as a whole. This instrument was adapted from November ag, a renowned consultant based in Switzerland [26].

4. Results and discussions
After the execution of the activities in preparation for change programme, the results of leadership, communication, and awareness was observed using the tools and measurement techniques in the previous section. It can be observed since total preparation and readiness of the organization is dependent on these 3 factors, these results determine whether there is more time required for change management preparation activities or it can be done immediately.

The results of the factors of leadership, communication awareness within the organization influence the outcome of the maturity assessment, which entails whether the organization is ready for change management implementation. All factors must comply with the readiness minimum requirement to reduce the risk of change management activities to be affected during execution.

4.1 Leadership
For the leadership factor, the assessment was done using the leadership profiling matrix as explained in section 3. The assessment was done successfully with 100% participation within the population of the managers in the organization. As explained in section 3 above, the 22 managers involved were subjected to 3 leadership factors of sociability, dominance, and openness. The Table 1 show the manager profile matrix.
Table 1. Manager profile matrix

| Factors     | Category | No. of Managers | Percentage |
|-------------|----------|-----------------|------------|
| Sociability | Reserved | 5               | 22.73%     |
|             | Outgoing | 11              | 50.00%     |
|             | Moderate | 6               | 27.27%     |
|             | Follower | 4               | 18.18%     |
| Dominance   | Leader   | 8               | 36.36%     |
|             | Moderate | 10              | 45.45%     |
|             | Guarded  | 8               | 36.36%     |
| Openness    | Expressive| 12              | 54.55%     |
|             | Moderate | 2               | 9.09%      |

In the sociability traits, 77.27% (17 of 22) of the managers are moderate and outgoing. At this stage, this is a positive indicator as the organization requires significantly “outgoing and sociable” managers to have higher chances of persuasive prowess over his/her subordinates in achieving the desired goal. A study on leadership attributes indicates that this influence the outcome of cohesiveness of a unit/department to have a leader who knows how to socialize within boundaries with its compatriots [27].

In the dominance traits, 8 persons show strong instructive influence while another 10 persons are acting based on situation and responses. This accumulated to 81.81% of desired traits as the communication although is more top-down but resulting in positive results in ensuring change happens within stipulated time [28].

However, in the openness traits, there is only a slight majority of 63.64% of managers who are moderate and expressive in nature. While this is not an alarming rate, there are risks of the fluency of change management activities to be embraced by the managers themselves where being guarded and not open to new ideas are one of the major barriers in the success of change management implementation [29].

4.2 Communication

Communication Survey was done with participation from all level of employees of 100 personnel within the organization. Figure 1 show the results for the communication survey held within the organization. This result shows that 88% of the respondents are happy with the existing communication channel and infrastructure available in the organization which allows smooth communication being done through all level of employment. This results also interpret that the use of these channels is well implemented and easy to use for employees to receive and transmit necessary information.

Q1. Overall, how satisfied are you with the communications (Lotus Notes, E-mails, Notice Boards, News by Management, News by Superior) in your organization?

![Figure 1. Results for question 1 in the communication survey](image-url)
Figure 2 shows that 13% of the respondents are very satisfied and fully informed on all communications within the organization. It also highlights the regular communication that has been conveyed to the staff, underlining a further 60% satisfaction from the respondents. On another side of the spectrum, there are pockets of improvements needed, as 27% still feel isolated and uninvolved within the communication circle. This may due to the direct supervisor/manager handling them are having guarded behaviour and release information on a need to know basis.

Q2. Which best describes your impression of communications within your organization?

Figure 2. Results for question 2 in communication survey

Figure 3 shows the trust of information which has been circulated to employees, with an overall percentage of only 12% have trust issues on the information they received. It is important to highlight that 66% of the respondents have high confidence in the information they receive and this may point to the positive transparency of information between staff, management, and interdepartmental relations.

Q3. How do you feel about information you receive?

Figure 3. Results for question 3 in communication survey

The documentation, oral presentation, and direct supervisor's explanation have contributed to the 69% of employee knowing a fair amount and knowing very well about the organization as shown in Figure 4. Although this may be due to the longevity of employment in the organization, it doesn't dismiss the fact that information about the company has been flowing smoothly and reaching its intended targets.

Q4. How well do you feel you know your organization?

Figure 4. Results for question 4 in communication survey
While 81% of the employees expressing sufficient increase/retention of knowledge about the organization’s strategies and accomplishments, 19% is still somewhat less knowledgeable as shown in Figure 5. This again points to the known issue but has to be addressed accordingly soonest to get total involvement from everyone in the organization. This results also in-line with the leadership profiling matrix results. The implication of this question is to increase the level of awareness of employees towards the company’s objectives and strategies.

**Figure 5.** Results for question 5 in communication survey

These questions No 6 and 7 are referencing to how employee perceive their immediate superiors in day-to-day communication and while the results for their communication effectiveness is fairly balanced between excellent and poor, many find it is still easy to express their opinion to the manager. This trend indicates there are two-way communication between managers and subordinates on a positive level and a need for further training and improvement from management staffs in communicating effectively and in a timely manner as shown in Figure 6-7.

**Figure 6.** Results for question 6 in communication survey

**Figure 7.** Results for question 7 in communication survey

From the data obtained from the seven (7) questions above, the general statistics is being calculated and shown in Table 2 below. The questionnaire scoring is based on 5 level of ratings, where rating 1 is
the best and 5 is the worst. The statistic shows that all questions have mean rating of 2.00 and below. This concludes that the level of communication for change management in this organization is good and rated positively. The best response was answers to question 4, where the majority of the employees know and well informed of the organization. This means that the dissemination of information in a timely manner has been done properly and in an orderly fashion. However, there are mix responses for question 6 on the manager's communication skills. This is consistent with the results of leadership profiling matrix in section 5.1 above, concerning some managers not being sociable and lack of openness while interacting with their subordinates.

Table 2. Communication survey overall statistics

| Question   | Mean | Min | Max |
|------------|------|-----|-----|
| Question 1 | 1.66 | 1   | 3   |
| Question 2 | 1.97 | 0   | 4   |
| Question 3 | 1.31 | 0   | 3   |
| Question 4 | 1.06 | 0   | 3   |
| Question 5 | 1.68 | 0   | 4   |
| Question 6 | 2.00 | 0   | 4   |
| Question 7 | 1.83 | 0   | 3   |

4.3 Awareness

Through all the activities done for the readiness of change management, employees below “managerial level” of 72 personnel took the survey on the awareness of change management activities to be done within the organization for the next year. Managerial level and above personnel were excluded because they are the change drivers and change agents respectively. Results are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Change management awareness survey results

| No | Questions                                                                 | 1 (Poor) | 2 (Below Average) | 3 (Average) | 4 (Good) | 5 (Excellent) | Total |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|----------|---------------|-------|
| 1  | How do you feel about the change management awareness activities?        | 0        | 0                 | 5           | 50       | 17            | 72    |
| 2  | How do you rate the content of the activities informatively?             | 0        | 0                 | 7           | 45       | 20            | 72    |
| 3  | The content of the awareness activities was well organized.              | 0        | 0                 | 7           | 49       | 16            | 72    |
| 4  | I know more about organizational change in my organization after experiencing these activities. | 0 | 0 | 17 | 41 | 14 | 72 |
| 5  | The change management awareness activities answered all my questions.    | 1        | 2                 | 18          | 42       | 9             | 72    |
From the awareness activities using promotion, presentations, forum, and other communication methods for the 3 months of change readiness activities, employees within the organization are rating high level of awareness and responding well to the change effort. Almost 99.99% commented average or better in all 5 questions combined and only three-person rates below average on question number 5. It can be said that the employees are well informed, satisfied and feel important being included in the change management effort from the early stage of implementation.

4.4 Maturity assessment (overall change readiness assessment)
Maturity assessment was conducted with the participation of 72% population of the organization and the results are shown in Table 4. With all the measurement tools, methods, activities, and surveys being done during the readiness towards change management in the organization, the ultimate test which reflects the overall outcome comes with the 31 questions of maturity assessment. It gives a clearer picture of change management implementation. Table 4 shows the results of the assessment based on the areas mentioned in the previous section. It can be seen that the mean for all areas was scoring a minimum of 7 out of 10. This indicates that the organization is ready for change and have a high success probability in ensuring change is being done with minimal risk.

| No | Area            | Topic                                                                 | Mean |
|----|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| 1  | Develop Leadership | Leaders share a common vision of this change                        | 9.24 |
| 2  |                 | Leaders are demonstrating their personal resolve for change through their actions | 8.16 |
| 3  |                 | Leaders are creating a sense of urgency to change in the organization | 8.35 |
| 4  |                 | Leaders understand trust and respect each other                      | 8.27 |
| 5  | Create Change Vision | There is a clear and compelling need for this change             | 9.13 |
| 6  |                 | It is clear what this change will mean in practice                 | 8.28 |
| 7  | Define Change Strategy | The approach taken to implement this change will work well in this organization | 8.19 |
| 8  |                 | Change will happen fast enough to sustain interest                  | 7.23 |
| 9  |                 | Authority and responsibility to achieve this change is clear        | 7.41 |
| 10 |                 | Project structures e.g. task forces, steering groups are keeping change on track | 8.38 |
| 11 |                 | Decision making is not slowing this project down                    | 8.11 |
| 12 |                 | Problems emerging in change are being solved quickly                | 7.05 |
| 13 |                 | Sufficient time to implement change is being allowed                | 8.13 |
| 14 | Build Commitment | People expect this change to succeed                               | 9.14 |
| 15 |                 | People will learn and apply the new skills and behaviour required for this change | 7.98 |
| 16 |                 | People are being encouraged to be constructively critical of this change | 7.35 |
| 17 |                 | Managers have the change skills necessary for this change           | 7.29 |
| 18 |                 | Change can be achieved without a significant shift in attitude and behaviours | 8.42 |
| 19 |                 | There will be no losers (groups/individuals) through this change e.g. loss of job or status | 8.21 |
| 20 |                 | There are rewards for participating in this change and punishments for failing to participate | 7.27 |
|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 21 | Everyone involved is being well informed and kept up to date in this change | 7.09 |
| 22 | Those impacted by the change are clear about how change affects them and what to do differently | 8.06 |
| 23 | People’s commitment is being built rather than change forced | 7.37 |
| 24 | The commitment of middle managers is being won before they are expected to lead change | 8.06 |
| 25 | Manage People Performance | Manages are being disciplined in this change. They are getting things done | 8.33 |
| 26 | This change will not be blocked by established organizational processes such as reward and performance management | 7.25 |
| 27 | Processes, policies, and rules are being changed where necessary to support this change | 7.95 |
| 28 | There is sufficient cross-functional co-operation for this change to succeed | 7.14 |
| 29 | Develop Culture | This change will be supported by the current management style and behaviour | 8.00 |
| 30 | Design Organization | This change will be supported by the current organization structure | 8.26 |
| 31 | This change will be supported by current the way jobs are structured | 7.31 |

The risk chart in Figure 8 shows the level of risk the company will undertake in implementing the change management program in the organization. It can be seen that only 11 of the 31 points touches the border between medium and low risk, which can be mitigated and included within the revised change management program. All other points are well on the low-risk section and is a good indicator supporting the high probability of change management implementation success in this organization.

**Figure 8. Risk chart of maturity assessment**

5. **Conclusion**
The study on change management readiness efforts and assessment has demonstrated success in meeting its objective. The four objectives of determining leadership readiness, communication readiness,
Awareness, and overall change management readiness in the organization has been discovered. All 4 determinants are positive in nature as the leadership profile shows more than 60% have the desired leadership traits, organizational communication shows all feedback are good or better, awareness survey shows more than 99% are aware of the change management activities and maturity assessment shows minimum rating of 7/10. This shows that the organization is ready to embark in the change management journey with high success probability. Even with the limitation of willingness, cooperation, and time availability, the true and existing condition of the organization was assessed accurately and benefited the stakeholders involved.

From the finding, it can be clearly understood that it is important to have leaders in the organization who understands and execute the role in being a leader instead of just a mere manager who lack mentorship qualities. It can also be underlined that only with good communication flow, transparency and timeliness of information dissemination that you will get the involvement, satisfaction, and commitment for the population at large, in this case, the employees of the organization.

In future research, it is recommended to benchmark the outcome of an actual change management program implementation barrier results to the probability findings of this study, which will continuously improve the matrix of readiness within change management implemented organization in waiting.

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