Readiness of Change Management in the Malaysian Public Organization

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Abstract. In order to make a transition from its current state to some desired future states, organisational change must be carried out in minimising employee resistance and cost to the organization while simultaneously maximising the effectiveness of the change effort. This paper aims to assess the value of the change management of organisation in the Malaysian public organisation with its three objectives of (1) identifying the attributes of change management in the Malaysian public organisation; (2) investigating the current practice of organisation and employees in the Malaysian public organisation towards change management and (3) assessing the factors influencing readiness of organisation and employees in the Malaysian public organisation towards change management. It is found that change management is a structured approach for ensuring that changes are thoroughly and smoothly implemented to transitioning individuals, teams, and organisations to a desired future state by focusing on the wider impacts of change, particularly on people, where change does not happen in isolation thus impacts the whole organisation. Furthermore, based on literature content analysis, questionnaires survey and Relative Important Index (RII), it is found that current practice of organisation and employees in the organisation towards change management involved three main factors, namely trust in management, communication and organisational commitment; with the factor for trust in management is the positive vision for the future by management team, meanwhile for communication, it is found that there is good communication between supervisors and employees about the organisation’s policy toward the changes. The factor found in organisational commitment is employees enjoying discussing about their organisation with outsiders. The findings of this paper provide a positive impact on change management planning, which ultimately help in ensuring more effective change programme implementation in the public organisation in Malaysia.

Keywords: change management; readiness for change; public organisation; organisational change; Malaysia.

1. Introduction
Change is common in life, which is something that presses a person out of his comfort zone. Change is observed by this paper as a specific type of critical thinking method, which 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, organisation capability to
change will lead to a more promising future. [1] Mentioned that the organisational changing rates had grown tremendously in the past few decades in line with the incremental of several factors, such as customers’ demand, globalisation, cost and technology advancement. Hence, according to [2], 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, common to see that the government’s efforts in enhancing business processes, which usually involve costly systems, are considered as a waste of money by the society since they do not experience any improvements. This occurrence is mainly due to low quality and responsiveness of the public service. According to [3], the complaints received from January until September 2016 are about failure to adhere to set procedures and unsatisfactory quality of service with 15.9 percent and 13.0 percent, respectively. These percentages are considered high, where trends have shown a decrease pattern in last five years. This figure reflects that the public organisation service is still lacking in adapting to the change and transformation environment. This is further supported by [4], who claim that if only the role has been carried out well, the public organisation will be very much appreciated and trusted by the people given that organisation’s success depends on a competent and accountable workforce.

Hence, via literature review and questionnaire survey on employees of the public organisation in Malaysia, this paper aims at appraising the change management of Malaysian public organisation with the primary objectives of investigating the current practice of organisation and employees in the Malaysian public organisation towards change management and assessing the factors influencing readiness of organisation and employees in the Malaysian public organisation towards change management. It is hoped that the current organisation practices could be improved for the betterment of nation development as a whole.

This paper is highly significant as 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 or opposed reaction towards change [5]. The study of readiness for change in Malaysia’s public organisation is also aligned with the government’s aspiration to provide better quality services to the people, especially in promoting public engagement. In ensuring that the transformation programmes achieve its objectives, readiness for change is an important field to study given the resistance to change reported by past studies.

This paper is expected to help public organisation employees in strengthening the trust and communication between themselves, which 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 to create an action plan to overcome resistance among employees, in addition to ensure the actualisation of organisational changes for the benefit of the people.

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

2. Current Organisation Practices

The rapid increase in knowledge, social status as well as enhanced technology, has resulted in a dynamic and challenging public sector environment. Nevertheless, organisations that have thrived in the 21st century are only those whose employees remain ready and supportive of organisational changes. Hence, according to [5], in facing these upcoming non-stop challenges, the organisation yearns for employees’ readiness to face changes. However, the primary challenge lies in implementing the change strategies, mainly because organisational changes often face intense resistance due to lack of organisation members’ readiness for a change [6]. Therefore, due to the increased lack of employees’ readiness for a change, the organisation’s strategic change implementation usually goes awry [7].

Some evidences suggest that organisation members are increasingly inclined to embrace and support organisational changes when their interest and belief 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, where such changes must be significantly aligned with the values of the organisation’s members [8]. Based on previous studies, there are numbers of factors that influence employees’ readiness for a change, which are individual and workplace factors [9]; [10]; [11]; [12]; [8]; [13]; [14]. However, there have been very few integrated studies, which take a holistic perspective by looking into both workplace and individual factors [15]. [16] Have identified four elements that influence readiness for a change, which are change content, process, internal context and the individuals involved. The literature has also found that most previous studies in employees’ readiness for change have not agreed with integrated model of [16] or elements as the studies only measured singular elements of employees’ readiness for change, such as for change content [17]; [18], change process [19], internal context [20]; [21] and individual attributes [22]; [23].

Therefore, it is important to probe into the matter 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 that will affect employee’s readiness towards change in an organisation. These factors can allow the leaders or top management of the organisation to improve the employees’ readiness to change by taking appropriate steps, which can lead to a decrease of resistance among employees in the organisation.

3. Readiness of Change Management

Based on [24] definition, for ensuring the changes are thoroughly and smoothly implemented and lasting benefits of change are achieved, a structured approach is a must in change management. According to [25], 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, especially on people and how they move from the current situation to the new situation as individuals and teams. For the organisation to achieve its potential, they must execute change from as simple as change process to the major change whether in policy and organisations strategy. Furthermore, according to [26], the theories about how organisations change draw on many disciplines, ranging from psychology and behavioral science, to engineering and systems thinking and; the principle is its does not happen in isolation environment.

Various terms have been used to describe readiness for change, as without it, passive compliance and resistance for change will happen. Readiness was initially defined by [27] as getting the organisation’s member to let organisational change happen physically and psychologically. The management has to prove that the existing process or practice is no longer acceptable and relevant with the business environment in order to sustain or to gain back success. Definition by [5] 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 of change can be stressed through dissemination the discrepancy among employees, thus 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. Amongst all is the lack of conceptual studies on readiness for change, where literature on readiness for change in journals 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 to organisations, surprisingly, limited research has been done to examine readiness for change in public sector compared to private sector. Like the private sector, the public sector has also undergone organisational change to be more effective in the delivery of public sector services.

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

On the other hand, most of previous studies explored change process that occurred only in a single organisation, which prevents consideration of change content as variable. The difficulty to obtain data from multiple organisations and different type of change undergoing has caused limited research in this variable. Studies that confined to a limited number of organisations are also found to limit the ability to generalise its findings and conclusions [28].

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, namely internal context, change content, process and individual attributes that influence readiness for change [16], most researchers are focusing only on one element as their independent variable. Lack of integrated studies resulted less understanding in determining the key and crucial factor among the four elements.

4. Factors Influencing Readiness for Change Management

Various factors have been determined via literature review on the factors influencing the readiness for change management. It is divided into organisational factor and organisational commitment factor, where organisational factor is further divided into trust in management and communication, whilst the latter is divided into affective commitment, continuous commitment and normative commitment.

In terms of organisational factor, according to [29], 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 [30]. Trust in management provides direction in the relationship between employee and management especially when involved with openness and spontaneity [31]. In an organisation, it is recommended by this paper that trust in management is important to ensure employees’ cooperation. Organisational change that may lead to crisis and risk for the employees requires the management to place importance on building a trust.

With trust in management, employees may recognise the management’s good intentions [32] and believe that they can enjoy the benefits gained from the organisation. This is supported by [33] who stated that employees believe that they may not be manipulated by the management since the management is trustworthy. Besides that, [34] explained that employees who trust their management would give a positive reaction towards organisational change. [35] Further proved that trust in management is a strong factor for employees to accept any change or new system.

In addition to trust in management under organisational factor that influence readiness for change management, communication is also vital in determining the success of any change initiative [36]. According to [37], communication is information exchange and happens in three dimensions, which are upwards, downwards and horizontally. It is important for an organisation to communicate on organisational change since weak or low level of communication leads to the feeling of resentment towards the change [38]. Hence, open and honest communication is essential for change actualization [39]. 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 [6], who identified misunderstanding due to communication problems or insufficient information as one of the main reasons for resistance to change.

As for the second factor that influences readiness for change management i.e. organisational commitment, it is the nature of the relationship between the individual and organisation, where the individual has confidence towards organisation’s values and mission, and is willing to work vigorously for the best interest of the organisation. It is, therefore, suggested by this paper that employees who are committed to the organisation have a strong feeling to be part of the organisation due to the fact that commitment reflects the nature and relationship between employees and organisation [40].
Organisational commitment may be influenced by many factors, such as individual characteristics, namely gender, age and years of experience, together with organisational factors, like leadership style. Organisational commitment is related to individual identification and involvement in the organisation, and the level of loyalty to the organisation [41]. By having organisational commitment, one will feel strongly attached with the organisation and voluntarily adapt with the organisation’s values and always be ready for any changes made by the organisation.

As the organisational commitment is divided to three components of affective commitment, continuance commitment/g4142 and normative commitment, the first component of affective commitment is related to an employee’s emotional attachment and involves an individual feeling towards the organisation. Employees who hold strong affective commitment will stay in the organisation because they want to. On the other hand, the second component of continuance commitment refers to the individual awareness on the cost implication if one leaves the organisation. Employees who hold this commitment will stay in the organisation because they have to. In addition, the third component of organisational commitment is the normative commitment that deals with individual values pertaining the needs of obligations to the organisation. Because of believe that it is the right thing to do, the employees who fall in this category will stay in the organisation.

[42] Stated that organisational commitment was higher among employees who underwent good experience in work, such as the feeling satisfied that the organisation had fulfilled employees’ needs. Establishment of positive behaviour and satisfactory relationship at work will encourage the employees to be committed towards the works assigned. To conclude based on previous studies, it is found that organisational commitment is one of the factors that has a significant effect on the organisation.

5. Research Methodology

In achieving the paper objectives, questionnaires were distributed to the respondents using softcopies (email), online survey software and questionnaire tool; and hard copies (distribution) for a duration of two weeks to complete the questionnaires. 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 problems, familiarise the team with the procedures, and to generally see if the experiment design has any potential flaws. The sample projected for the larger parent study was chosen using a convenience sampling technique on employees of the public organisation, comprising of three different position levels, namely top management, professional and supporting staff. Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.891 was recorded, where according to [43] is considered as reliable as it falls within a range of 0.7 to 1.0. As for sample, the suggested sample by [44] was 379, hence, over 1000 questionnaires were distributed to the Malaysian public organisations’ employees. However, it was found that only 336 were successfully returned and fully answered by the respondent.

6. 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. Both the current practice and factors influencing readiness for change management are investigated from two factors influencing readiness of change management as discussed beforehand: organisational factor (divided into trust in management and communication) and organisational commitment factor as discussed in the following sub-sections.

6.1 Current Practice of Organisation and Employees towards Change Management

Table 1 shows that “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”, which shows a very good sign of change management initial practice in the public organisation in Malaysia. Nevertheless, it is found that there is still lacking of practices whereby “the top management pays sufficient attention to the personal consequences that the change could 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” becomes a major current practice of organisation and employees towards change management in organisational factor of communication [B2]. It is also found that “the employees regularly informed on how the change is going to be” although on the contrary, “the employees are lacking of 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 is found that trust in management [B1] 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 could 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 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 |

6.2 Factor Influencing Readiness for Change Management

As for factors influencing readiness for change management amongst employees in terms of organisational commitment [C1], it is 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 their organisational commitment in influencing readiness for change management amongst employees.

As for individual commitment [C2] factors that influence readiness for change management amongst employees, majority of the respondents claimed that the most important factors are “they are willing to support change” and “do things in a new or creative ways”. In comparing the factors that influence readiness
for change management amongst 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 amongst employees with all of the RIs record more than 0.75.

Table 2. Ranking of current practice of organisation and employees towards change management

| Construct Code | Organisational Commitment Factor Category                                                                 | RII    | Rank |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------|
| **[C1] Organisational commitment**                                                                                                                                 |
| C1.2           | I enjoy discussing about my organisation with people outside it Right now, staying with my organisation is a matter of necessity as much as desire | 0.751  | 1    |
| C1.8           | 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  | 2    |
| C1.1           | I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation                                | 0.734  | 3    |
| C1.4           | I think I could easily become as attached to another organisation as I am to the current organisation       | 0.730  | 4    |
| C1.9           | I feel that I have very few options to consider leaving this organisation                                  | 0.658  | 5    |
| C1.6           | It would be very hard for me to leave my organisation right now, even if I wanted to                       | 0.655  | 6    |
| C1.13          | I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organisation                               | 0.655  | 7    |
| C1.3           | I really feel as if this organisation's problems are my own                                                | 0.653  | 8    |
| C1.14          | Things were better in the days when people stayed in one organisation for most of their careers            | 0.652  | 9    |
| C1.7           | Too much in my life would be disrupted if I decided to leave my organisation now                            | 0.646  | 10   |
| C1.10          | Jumping from organisation to organisation does not seem at all unethical to me                             | 0.636  | 11   |
| C1.5           | This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me                                              | 0.633  | 12   |
| 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  | 13   |
| C1.15          | I do not think that to be an organisation man or organisation woman is sensible anymore                      | 0.592  | 14   |

| **[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                                                | 0.798  | 5    |
| C2.9           | I am willing to be part of the change program                                                              | 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   |
7. 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 to the public organisation to focus in 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 from the employee’s opinion on the management current practice in the organisation whose pays insufficient attention to the personal consequences. Meanwhile, in communication, the organisation must be focus and put more effort in informing the progress of the change sufficiently to the employees in order to make organisational change be more effective. It is also suggested that the public organisation pays more attention to the factor of rewarding in a form of appreciation to the employees who work and contribute in organisation change programme and encourage them to sell the change ideas in influencing readiness for change management amongst employees.

Eventually, the results discussed have demonstrated that this paper has successfully achieved its aim of appraising the change management of Malaysian public organisation since limited research is available in examining the readiness for change in 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 also provides an understanding to the management on the factors that help employees to be ready for organisational change. By considering the role of management and employee characteristics, it is possible that the success of organisational change is achievable since it is impossible to implement the change programme without the involvement from both parties. As a result, the management can plan and manage the change programmes more effectively since it is important for the public organization to perform well and be prepared in the business reengineering and transformation process in order to provide better outcomes to the members of the public. This requires public organisation to always ready for enhancement and not be complacent. Hence, through this paper, better strategies can be taken up to ensure that public organisations are in the high readiness in order to achieve the vision and mission established by the organisation.

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