Readiness for Change: A Literature Review

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Abstract
The advancement in market environment complexities has led to the rise of significant awareness amongst the organisations on the need for change. This paper thus reviews these employees’ readiness for change within the organisation, where readiness is defined as the organisational members’ belief, attitudes and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organisations’ capacity to successfully make those changes. It is crucial for an organisation to understand the employees’ readiness for the organisational change instead of focusing merely on resistance to change since it can be more useful for implementing effective human resource practices and organisation development interventions. Therefore, via content analysis, the concept of individual readiness for organisational change as well as its relationship with the four categories of antecedents, which are internal context, change-specific content, process and individual attributes are critically reviewed. This paper also highlights some of the issues on readiness for change and research areas that can be considered for future studies. It is hoped that this paper can be an eye-opener for the organisations in Malaysia to start embarking on the change management amongst their employees towards becoming a globally competitive nation by 2020.

Keywords: Change management; Readiness for Change; Malaysian Organisations.

1. Introduction
The rapid increase in markets, products, robust technology, as well as enhanced technology has resulted in a dynamic and challenging global business environment. Nevertheless, organisations that have thrived in the 21st century are only those whose employees remain ready and supportive of organisational changes. This makes them effectively respond to the emerging market environment turbulences.

Worth noting, most organisations are very aware of the need for change due to the growing market environment complexities; however, the main challenge lies in implementing the change strategies effectively. This is mainly because organisational changes often face intense resistance due to lack of employees’ readiness for change. Therefore, due to increased lack of employees’ readiness for change, an organisation’s strategic change implementation usually goes awry (Halkos and Bousinakis, 2012).

Despite its critical role in employees’ reaction to organisational change, research on readiness for change is much less compared to resistance for change. The literature indicates that readiness for change has received minimal theoretical research, especially in management or business area. Most theoretical researches are primarily in the health, psychology and medical studies. A review of the literature reveals this issue as well as indicates there are not many models developed in understanding readiness for change.

Previous research on readiness for change is limited in terms of scope and focus as most of the research are either focusing on workplace factors or individual factors. Rarely to find research that studies both elements even though these two (2) items are well-connected in confirming readiness for change among employees. This limited research attention has resulted in a lack of information on the findings but also contributed to the inadequate understanding of the employees’ readiness for change.

Based on the literature review, this paper reviews and discusses some of the research issues and areas essential to employees’ readiness for change. This paper is divided into five (5) sections with next section two and three will be discussed on definition and antecedents of readiness for change. Then, section four will highlight some issues from previous studies of readiness for change and lastly, Section five presents a conclusion of this paper.

2. Defining Readiness for Change
Various terms have been used to describe readiness for change as, without it, passive compliance and resistance for change will happen. Readiness was first introduced by Lewin (1947) as getting the organisation’s member to let

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organisational change happens physically and psychologically. The management has to prove that existing process or practice is no longer acceptable and relevant to the business environment in order to sustain or gaining back success. One earlier approach in creating readiness as suggested by Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) are through education, communication, participation, facilitation, support and explicit as well as implicit coercion.

However, Armenakis et al. (1993) definition of readiness for change is one of the most cited in the change management literature. Armenakis et al. (1993) define readiness as ‘organizational members’ belief, attitudes and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organisations’ capacity to successfully make those changes’. The concepts of discrepancy, appropriateness, major support, efficacy and valence are then identified as the dimension of individual readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 1999).

Similarly, Jones et al. (2005) expand on Armenakis et al. (1993) definition by including employees’ belief in the benefits gained from the changes. Eby et al. (2000) refer readiness for change as a unique interpretive and perception of an individual as it is influenced by organisation’s readiness to take on change. Holt et al. (2007) reviewed readiness for change literature and developed a new definition that incorporate factors influencing readiness for change which is readiness for change is a comprehensive attitude that is influenced by the content (what is being changed), the process (how the change is being implemented), the context (circumstances under which the change is occurring) and the individuals (characteristic of those being asked to change) involved; and collectively reflects the extent to which an individual are cognitively and emotionally inclined to accept, embrace and adopt a particular plan to purposefully alter the status quo’.

The review of the literature found that it is agreed by above researchers that readiness for change in organisational context involve individual perception about the extent to which change in needed, the organisation’s capacity to make change successful and the benefits gained from the change. Other key elements of readiness for change include the appropriateness and organisational support for the change. This consistent definition of readiness for change may have resulted due to the expansion of definition from one primary source as unavailability, limited and lack of knowledge in this field of study.

3. Antecedents Readiness for Change

Past studies in readiness for change have found several factors that influence the level of readiness for change and mostly categorised them into two (2) categories which are individual and workplace factors. Holt et al. (2007) have defined four (4) elements that influence readiness for change which is content, process, context and the individual involves. This relationship has been represented in an integrated model of readiness for change as in Figure 1.

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**Figure-1. An Integrated Model of Readiness for Change**

Holt et al. (2007) highlights the uniqueness of individual organisation’s content, context, the process of change and the individuals, all of which impact on the development of readiness for change. Even though most researchers tend to limit their factor to individual and workplace category, it is found that most factors identified by researchers fit into the categories defined by Holt et al. (2007) as in Table 1.
| Category                        | Factors                                                                 | References                                                                 |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Internal Context**           |                                                                         |                                                                           |
|                                | Trust (in Peers, Management Leadership)                                 | (Eby et al., 2000); (Rafferty and Simons, 2005; Weber and Weber, 2001); (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009) |
|                                | Organizational commitment                                              | (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002); (Madsen et al., 2005); (Elias, 2009)       |
|                                | Organizational Culture and Climate                                      | (Iverson, 1996); (Cunningham et al., 2002); (Jones et al., 2005)          |
|                                | Job characteristic                                                      | (Iverson, 1996); (Eby et al., 2000); (Weber and Weber, 2001); (Cunningham et al., 2002) |
|                                | Job satisfaction                                                        | (Iverson, 1996); (Wanberg and Banas, 2000)                                |
|                                | Turnover intentions                                                     | (Lam and Schaubroeck, 2000); (Wanberg and Banas, 2000)                    |
|                                | Teamwork                                                                | (Eby et al., 2000)                                                        |
|                                | Discrepancy                                                            | (Armenakis et al., 1993); (Armenakis and Harris, 2002)                    |
| **Change Content**             | Extent of change                                                        | (Herscovitch and Meyer, 2002)                                             |
|                                | Merger                                                                  | (Kiefer, 2005)                                                            |
| **Process**                    | Communication                                                           | (Wanberg and Banas, 2000); (Peach et al., 2005); (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009) |
|                                | Support                                                                 | (Eby et al., 2000); (Wanberg and Banas, 2000); (Cunningham et al., 2002; Peach et al., 2005; Holt et al., 2007); (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009) |
|                                | Participation                                                           | (Eby et al., 2000); (Wanberg and Banas, 2000); (Weber and Weber, 2001); (Cunningham et al., 2002); (2000); (Rafferty and Simons, 2005); (Bouckenooghe et al., 2009) |
| **Individual Attributes**      | Self-efficacy                                                           | (Eby et al., 2000); (Wanberg and Banas, 2000); (Cunningham et al., 2002); (Rafferty and Simons, 2005) |
|                                | Rebelliousness                                                          | (Holt et al., 2007)                                                       |
|                                | Personal resilience                                                     | (Wanberg and Banas, 2000)                                                 |
|                                | Depression                                                              | (Cunningham et al., 2002)                                                 |
|                                | General attitude                                                        | (Holt et al., 2007)                                                       |
|                                | Emotional exhaustion                                                    | (Iverson, 1996); (Cunningham et al., 2002)                                |
|                                | Demography                                                              | (Weber and Weber, 2001); (Madsen et al., 2005); (Holt et al., 2007)        |

4. Research Issues from Previous Studies

Even though readiness for change has attracted attention from researchers nowadays, the researches about it are still limited and not integrated. The literature indicates that despite being an important area in change management, readiness for change is less emphasis compared to other reactions toward organisational change. The literature also reveals that most researches about readiness for change focus on empirical study and mainly to identify factors influencing readiness for change. The common issues and limitations of research on readiness for change as documented in the literature are described in following subsections.

4.1. Lack of Conceptual Studies on Readiness for Change

A review of the literature suggests that conceptual studies on readiness for change are still lacking. A review of readiness for change in journals such as the Journal of Organizational Change Management, Journal of Management and Journal of Organizational Behaviour shows that studies have focused on investigating factors that influence readiness for change either individual or workplace factors.

4.2. Limited Studies on Readiness for Change in Public Sector

Regardless of the relevance and importance of readiness for change to organisations, limited research has been done to examine readiness for change in 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 efficient in the
delivery of public sector services. In Malaysia context, research on public sector also has not been as extensive as on private sector as indicated in the findings by Che and Che (2011) and Nor (2012).

4.3. Methodological Issues
The literature shows that previous studies on readiness for change lack a theoretical approach. Although various theories are governing behavioural change such as the theory of planned behaviour and theory of trans-theoretical model, there has not been much research into the 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. The majority of the previous study were also based on cross-sectional data and therefore, does not allow for tracking changes on an individual. A longitudinal study of the relationships between variables might better capture the dynamic nature of readiness for change.

4.5. Limited Number of Organisation
The majority of previous studies explored change process that occurred in a single organisation which prevents consideration of change content as the variable. The difficulty in obtaining 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 (Yousef, 2000).

4.6. Variables Used
Even though there are four (4) elements which are internal context, change content, process and individual attributes that influence readiness for change; most researchers are focusing only on an item as their independent variable. Lack of integrated studies resulted in less understanding in determining the critical and crucial factor among the four elements. Little empirical studies have also been conducted to test mediating and moderating variables proposed in some conceptual studies. Hence, some mediating and moderating variables serve as independent variables whereas more complex, and causal paths may exist among those variables tested. Given the limitations of previous studies on readiness for change as discussed above, the following presents a research recommendation for future studies in this field.

4.7. Theoretical Perspective
As mentioned previously, most of the research on readiness for change to date has not examined readiness for change from the perspective of theories available. In this regard, future research could further develop a theoretical model concerning readiness for change for different types of predictors’ relationships. Future research could address more on sophisticated relationships between antecedent measures and readiness for change.

4.8. Time Horizon
Longitudinal studies may help determine if the relationships studied differ depending upon the stage of the organisational change process under evaluation since perceptions concerning change intervention may change over time. In future research, researchers could examine the differences in attitudes and behaviours depending on how long the change process had taken.

4.9. Unit of Analysis
Readiness for change can be studied at three different levels which are individual, group and organisational. The review of the literature indicates that researchers tend to confine their analysis to the individual level only even though the studies include the examination of organisation-level antecedents. Future studies should investigate more on the group and organisational level to provide findings that can be generalised across types of change content. The data collection problem which been stated above can be overcome by examining companies with multiple branches, undergoing a company-wide change, or in the public sector, in which a government-initiated change simultaneously influences numerous organisations and consequently made research at organisation level possible.

5. Conclusion
Based on the review of literature of previous studies on readiness for change, this paper identified various antecedents and issues for better understanding as well as improving knowledge in readiness for change. The paper began by defining the term of readiness for change and indicates the antecedents of readiness for change that has been tested and proven. It is then; highlight some of the issues found from the literature. It is suggested that terms used in research of readiness for change to be defined appropriately so that the researchers be clear about the difference between other reactions toward change.

Readiness for change should be examined from the integrated analysis, so it becomes more meaningful study. The study of readiness for change, especially in Malaysia, should be emphasis more as it is an important and crucial field to study with regards to the evolving business environment and implementation of transformation programme by the Government. It is also hoped that this paper has provided some insights and contributions towards more useful and rigorous research on readiness for change.
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