Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

THE EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN MANAGING THEIR READINESS
TOWARDS CHANGES IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN
SARAWAK

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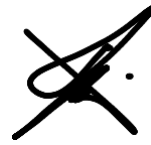|	
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THE EXPERIENCES OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN MANAGING THEIR READINESS TOWARDS CHANGES IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SARAWAK

KIKI LOH KIT KIE

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The project entitled 'The Experiences of Academic Staff in Managing Their Readiness Towards Changes in Private Higher Education Institutions in Sarawak' was prepared by Kiki Loh Kit Kie and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Human Resource Development).

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ABSTRACT

Change efforts have become a common practice for all kinds of organizations, both private and public sectors. Employee readiness is seen as a primary ingredient in successful implementation of change initiatives. This research intends to investigate the academic staff's experience in managing their readiness towards change in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak. The private higher education institutions are facing rapid changes and shifting expectations as well as students and industrial demands which causes changes to be occurred. A qualitative method was adopted, and the research is conducted using phenomenological approach. The research method in this study is in-depth interview. A total of 10 academic staffs from private higher education institutions were interviewed and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The main theme of this study regarding the academic staff's experience in managing their readiness towards change is individually and factor driven. There were two changes encountered by the academic staff which were teaching style and technological change. Besides, all the informants understand what "readiness towards change" meant and it is important to indicate level of readiness. There are two themes emerged for factors that influence academic staff readiness level which are training as the main factor and time as the least factor. Two themes that have been highlighted on how to improve readiness level are learning opportunities for employees and motivation and support by employers. This study is important because employees and employers can gain insight into what factors are affecting change readiness and what can be done to improve it.

Keywords: readiness towards change, academic staff, organizational change, employee readiness

ABSTRAK

Usaha perubahan telah menjadi satu amalan biasa bagi semua organisasi, termasuk kedua-dua sektor iaitu swasta dan awam. Kesediaan pekerja dilihat sebagai elemen utama dalam keberhasilan pelaksanaan inisiatif perubahan. Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengalaman staf akademik dalam mengurus kesediaan mereka terhadap perubahan di institusi pengajian tinggi swasta di Sarawak. Institusi pendidikan tinggi swasta menghadapi perubahan yang pesat dan perubahan jangkaan serta permintaan pelajar dan industri yang menyebabkan perubahan berlaku. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan kaedah kualitatif dan dijalankan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi. Metodologi kajian adalah temu bual mendalam. Sebanyak 10 staf akademik dari institusi pendidikan tinggi swasta ditemu bual dan analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Tema utama kajian mengenai pengalaman staf akademik dalam menguruskan kesediaan mereka untuk berubah ini adalah secara individu dan didorong oleh faktor. Terdapat dua perubahan yang dihadapi oleh staf akademik iaitu gaya pengajaran dan perubahan teknologi. Selain itu, semua informan memahami apa yang dimaksudkan dengan "kesediaan terhadap perubahan" dan mementingkan tahap kesediaan setiap individu. Terdapat dua tema untuk faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi tahap kesediaan staf akademik iaitu latihan sebagai faktor utama dan masa sebagai faktor paling kurang utama. Tema tentang bagaimana meningkatkan tahap kesediaan adalah peluang belajar untuk pekerja dan motivasi dan sokongan oleh majikan. Kajian ini penting kerana pekerja dan majikan dapat memperoleh perspektif tentang faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kesediaan perubahan dan apa yang boleh dilakukan untuk memperbaikinya.

Kata kunci: kesediaan terhadap perubahan, staf akademik, perubahan organisasi, kesediaan pekerja

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to investigate the academic staff experiences in managing their readiness towards change. It examines the factors that impacts academic staff readiness towards change and the measures on how private higher education institutions improve their academic staff readiness towards change. Chapter one presents the background of study, problem statement, research objective, research questions, the significance of the study and definition of terms.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Change, a process of moving from an old to a new state of things is a constant for the organizations to survive and stay competitive (Abdel-Ghany, 2014). As the economy environment is changing rapidly, organizations are endlessly implanting changes to make sure that they are competent enough to face any potential challenges or competition within and across industries. Change is often driven by current environmental conditions but is also caused by organizational needs. The main challenge for effective implementation of change strategies is the presence of intense resistance due to the lack of readiness for change for organizational members (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). Bernerth (2004) explains that experts and practitioners have both found employee readiness to be a key factor in effective attempts to change.

Readiness to change is the extent to which an individual or a group of people is cognitively inclined to accept, embrace, and adopt a specific plan to change the status quo purposefully (Rafferty, Jimmieson & Armenakis, 2013). Readiness is a critical aspect to successful organizational change because having high level of readiness provides the organizational members a sense of psychological safety. Change agents, managers, human resource professionals can identify gaps that exist in the expectations between employees and organization when measuring readiness to change. If the identified gaps are not bridged, resistance would happen and the implementation of change would fail (Holt, Armenakis, Harris & Field, 2007).

There are a lot of factors that influenced employees' readiness to change. There are several factors that are addressed by past researchers. Some factors that shows positive relation with readiness to change include organizational commitment and employee engagement (Mangundiaya, 2012), trust in peers and management (Samaranayake & Takemura, 2017) as well as management-leadership relationships (Miller, Madsen & John,

2006; Hanpachern, Morgan & Griego, 1998). We clearly see that studying the factors that affect the readiness towards change is a major concern among the researchers. Hence, the affecting factors must be recognized and assessed so that human resource professionals can come out with better interventions for effective change readiness.

This research focuses on the academic staffs' readiness towards change in the private higher education institutions in Kuching, Sarawak. It is undeniable that higher education institutions has evolved in these many years with information and communication technology (ICT) being introduced to the sector. Most of the higher education institutes has incorporated ICT into the teaching and learning process, by making it more accessible and convenient for students to learn wherever they are. A report by the Department of Statistics Malaysia showed that the value of private education contributed to the Gross Domestic Products has steadily increased 7.7% annually from 2015 to 2018. According to Shariffudin. Razali, Ghani, Shaaidi and Ibrahim (2016), they found that there are external and internal factors that attributed to the changes in private higher education institutions such as globalization, internationalization and world-class rankings. Furthermore, Nyagah (2016) found that staff attitudes is a strong indicator of change readiness in the higher education sector. Due to this condition, the researcher wants to investigate the degree to which they are prepared for the changes in the workforce and how they deal with the changes in the higher education services. This research will therefore examine the factors that affect the employees' readiness for change in the higher education sector in Kuching, Sarawak.

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

From past studies, it is clearly identified that employees' readiness is an important condition to the successful implementation of organizational change. According to Choi (2011), readiness for change which is conceptually based on the unfreezing phase of Lewin's model, is critical to the success of change initiatives. The managers in the organization highly

rely on the readiness of their employees when implementing changes but in fact, the employee readiness level may decrease in response to initiatives for change (Lau, David and Zhou, 2002; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). When the level of employee readiness declines during process of change, it could lead to high levels of non-attendance and turnover rate (Cotton & Tuttl, 1986) and it will lead to the failure of change implementation.

Employees' attitude, beliefs and behaviour plays a main role towards the success implementation of change in an organization (Rebeka & Indradevi, 2017). This is because they are the backbone of the organization. However, organizations nowadays are facing a major problem is that employees are resistant towards change. Resistance to change occurs because employees are uncertain towards the future. This affects the employees to resist the proposed changes in the organization. Nevertheless, work on organizational change was largely dominated by a macro-oriented perspective on the process (Soumyaja & Kamalanabhan, 2011). Although researchers have called for a more local, person-oriented emphasis on important change-related issues (Bray, 1994), micro-level work on organizational change is still minimal.

There are several studies that are done regarding employees' readiness to change in the education sector. For example, Qureshi, Waseem, Qureshi and Afshan (2018) have done a research to investigate the impact of organizational commitment on readiness for change among the teaching and non-teaching staff of higher education institutes of Karachi. It turned out that organizational commitment has a positive significant effect towards employee's level of readiness for change. Another research done by Quah (2018) also indicates that organizational commitment has a significant effect on the readiness for change.

A result from a computer search by Scopus from 2010 to 2019 shown that there are 529 researches when search using the keyword "readiness for change" and is mostly conducted in the Western context. Besides, there are only 17 researches within the Malaysia

context. Another keyword related is "change management" where it shows there are 49,787 researchers regarding it. However, there is no research found in the Malaysia context within the higher education industry. This proves that Malaysia is still lack of studies related to readiness for change. Based on the 2019 Change Readiness Index, they define change readiness as how countries prepare for and react to sudden shocks or long-term trends that has a significant impact on the success of citizens and institutions. Switzerland top the ranking two years consecutively for readiness for change. Besides Switzerland, Singapore, Denmark, Sweden, United Arab Emirates, Norway, Germany, United Kingdom, New Zealand and Netherlands are also in the top 10 of the ranking. This indicates that countries from the Northern, Southern and Western Europe region pays more attention to change readiness. The countries emphasize on the importance of change readiness for enterprise, government also people and society to prepare for and respond to change initiatives happening around them. In the meantime, Malaysia is ranked at 24th place out of 140 countries. Although Malaysia is ranked first among the upper-middle income countries, however it is still assumed left behind because among all the East Asia and Pacific region, Singapore is ranked 1st and 2nd in the overall rankings. New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan is ahead of Malaysia. Thus, this research intends to investigate the factors that affect academic staffs' readiness for change in Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak to bridge the gap of the studies.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

There are two types of objectives listed in this part, which are general objective and specific objectives. General objective states the main purpose of the whole research whereas the specific objectives explain the research specifically based on the research questions listed.

1.3.1 General Objective

The key objective of this research is to study the employees' experiences in managing their readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

Below are the specific objectives in this study:

1. To examine contextual data associated with academic staffs' experiences in managing their readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak.

2. To study the factors that influence academic staffs' experience in managing their readiness towards change in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak.

3. To investigate the strategies used by the employees to improve their readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak.

4. To investigate the strategies used by the employer to improve academic staffs' readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question is divided into two parts, which are general and specific research questions. The general research question is the fundamental core for the whole study while the specific research questions are inquiries that are accountable to a concern or issue.

1.4.1 General Research Question

The general research question is what is the employees' experience in managing their readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak?

1.4.2 Specific Research Question

Below are the specific research questions for this study:

1. What are the contextual data associated with academic staffs' experiences in managing their readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak?

2. What are the factors that influence academic staffs' experiences in managing their readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak?

3. How the academic staffs improve their readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak?

4. How the employers improve academic staffs' readiness towards changes in the private higher education institutions in Sarawak?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The research is important because it will include awareness, data and a clear view of the readiness for change. Through the analysis, the management may gain insight into what are the most prominent factors in increasing the level of readiness towards change for academic staffs. The results of this study will enable the management to design and develop strategies and plans to increase readiness for change.

Furthermore, academic staffs will benefit from this study. By having this study, it will promote their participation and engagement in the implementation of change as their readiness is the key towards effective change management in an organization. As the academic staffs involve themselves more in the transition phase, they will start considering how the changes will benefit them and seek ways to further learn about it so they will not have trouble catching up with the learning curve.

Besides, the findings of this study will clarify every private higher education sector which are concerned about their academic staffs' level of readiness towards change. They can use the findings of this study as a framework to prepare their academic staffs towards change in

the future by having a set of policy documented which includes change process description, change management roles and responsibility as well as supporting sections.

Finally, this research is vital for people outside from the organization, students as well as other researchers. They are benefited as it will be a good initiative to continue further studies on this area of topic. In this study, it focuses on the private higher education sector and related concepts and issues are discussed and explained which are associated with the sector. Thus, future researchers can use the findings from this study as a reference to explore more relevant factors. With more related researches done in the future, the implementation of change in the higher education sector can be more successful.

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

In order to have a better understanding on the terms used in this study, the definition of key terms is defined. The terms that will be defined are academic staffs, individual readiness to change, and private higher education institution. The definition consists of two types which are conceptual and operational.

1.6.1   Change

Conceptual definition: Change is described as an alteration of an organization's environment, structure, culture, technology, or people (Igbal, 2011).

Operational definition: Change is defined as any transition from an old to a new state happened for the past three years within the private higher education institutions in Sarawak.

1.6.2   Academic Staffs

Conceptual definition: Academic staff are described as educational professionals responsible within higher education institutions for preparing, directing and carrying out academic teaching and research. They also include vice chancellors, medical practitioners, dentists, veterinarians,

and other healthcare professionals who are engaged in lecturing or research (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2010).

Operational definition: In this study, academic staffs is defined as educational professionals, lecturers that are responsible in academic teaching and research. There are three career levels of academic staffs, which are early career, mid-career and late career, working at private higher education institutions in Sarawak.

1.6.3   Readiness to Change

Conceptual definition: According to Madsen (as cited in Andrew, 2017), individual readiness to change refers to mental and physical preparedness of the employees for immediate action that aim to improve, alter, vary, or modify something.

Operational definition: In this context of study, individual readiness to change is the degree to which an academic staff is ready to accept, support and follow the type of changes experienced in private higher education institutions.

1.6.4   Private Higher Education Institution

Conceptual definition: Private higher educational institution means a non-governmental organization or educational institution, including University or a University College or a branch campus, licensed and registered under this Act (Private Higher Educational Institutions Act, 1996).

Operational definition: Private higher education institution is defined as any universities or colleges that provides higher education in Sarawak, that is not under the supervision of the government.

1.7 CONCLUSION

To sum up, this chapter discussed about the background of study, problem statement, research objectives (general and specific objectives), research questions, significance of study and definition of terms. On the next chapter, the literature review regarding the study will be discussed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the literature review of the study. Issues related to the study concerning the academic staffs' readiness towards change are discussed. Theories which assist in explaining the understanding about change is also discussed. This is then followed by past similar studies that has been done by other researchers. The chapter is ended by a summary.