

Influence of Employee Attitude on Employee Readiness for Organizational Change

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ABSTRACT

After more than three decades of civil war in the north and eastern provinces, number of changes has been introduced by the government of Sri Lanka focusing on a fast and significant development in the education sector. Researchers and practitioners have both found employee readiness to be a critical factor in successful change efforts. This study was conducted with a main objective to examine the influence of employee attitude on employee readiness for organizational change, focusing on the government schools in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. The sample of this study was the teachers of government schools in the Eastern Province. Hence the primary data was collected from 100 teachers from the study area by using a survey questionnaire. Further it was analyzed using the method of descriptive analysis to explore the nature of the sample group, and bivariate analysis was performed to assess the relationships between the study variables. The Results of this study revealed that the employee attitude was significantly and positively correlated with employee readiness for organizational change. Furthermore the findings of this study provide empirical evidence and also contribute to the existing body of knowledge for employee readiness predictor variables for organizational change.

Keywords: Employee attitude; employee readiness; organizational change.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The presence of the organizations is vital for their survival in the world. The present organization environment is increasingly critical and dynamic, and will continue to be dynamic much more every day. Due to the changing environment, organizations are continuously confronted with the need to implement changes in strategy, structure, process, policies, operations, technology, and culture, etc. Bernerth [1] explained, "researchers and practitioners have both found employee readiness to be a critical factor in successful change efforts" (p. 36).

The important fact is that, the difference in individual life experiences, motivational levels, socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge, attitudes, support systems, values, and behavioural patterns lead to painful learning and relearning and can create feelings of uneasiness, stress and tension among employees. Accordingly, researchers and practitioners need to know as much as possible about the factors that influence employee readiness as a predictive variable, so that management can understand an individual's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards the intended organizational change.

Change in organization can be in any form, but it usually affects employee attitudes, beliefs and behaviours because change is, moving a situation from the known to the unknown. Thus, domain experts and researchers are concerned with identifying the factors that influence them and how to deal with employees within organizations so that they can actively accept and become involved in change programmes.

Research suggests that the failure of organizational change initiatives can generally be attributed to negative employee attitudes towards the change [2,3,4]. Unless adequately managed, organizational change initiatives result in feelings of fear and uncertainty [5], leading to increased stress, reduced levels of trust between employees and management, and declining levels of organizational commitment [3,6].

Many factors contribute to the effectiveness with which such organizational changes are implemented. Most research scholars suggest that one of the primary and the most important determining factors for the success of a intended organizational change is the level of readiness

among the employees in which the change is being implemented [7-10]. Indeed, on its surface, the idea of change readiness appears to be a fairly intuitive and appealing concept, namely, individuals are more likely to participate in and contribute towards change that they are ready for in the first place.

Every individual employee experiences organizational change in a unique way. This gives a notion that employees in organization may contribute toward the achievement of the organization's objective and its efforts for development at varying scale depending on how he/she perceive. Therefore, it is important and valuable to study the influence of employee attitude on employee readiness as it is the most important and deterministic factor for organizational change which no organization can escape and it is inextricably linked to its survival and growth.

The education is the most important and valuable resource to produce a total man with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to meet the requirements of the world, not only for the present world but also for that of the future. In the case of delivery of quality education, the teachers are the most crucial and valuable resource.

In Sri Lanka, the state spends considerable amount of money to provide free education to all her citizens more than 50 years. During the early part of independence, the country produced many scholars, scientists, administrators and national figures of great ability and high distinction. The situation has changed in recent decades, and indicated a sharp decline in the standard and quality of education at all levels. Further, the education system does not produce pupils with the knowledge, understanding, and the skills and attitudes appropriate for successful living [11].

A study conducted by [12] Anders and Upali (2014) revealed that, in Sri Lanka the Northern and Eastern parts of the country have not been included in any kind of socioeconomic surveys or censuses carried out, due to the insecurity. Therefore, the northern and eastern districts have not been included in any kind of comparative analysis on economic and social wellbeing on a national scale. The assumption, though, is that this region is most probably worse off than other parts of the country [12].

1.2 Problem Statement

A number of scholars have identified employee readiness as an essential pre-requisite to the successful implementation of organizational change [2,13-15]. Change managers tend to rely on the readiness of their employees when implementing organizational change [16], but the levels of employee readiness, may, in fact, decrease in response to the change initiatives [17,18]. A decrease in levels of employee readiness during processes of change could lead to increased levels of absenteeism and higher turnover rates [19], further hampering the success of the change initiative.

A number of researchers Eby et al. [20] Madsen et al. [21] Rafferty and Simons [22]; and Elias [23], have investigated the relative influence of employee attitudes, beliefs and behaviors to organizational change. One of the most baffling and recalcitrant of the problems which organization face is employee resistance to change. Resistance is usually created because of certain blind spots and employee attitudes with the technical aspects of new ideas. Management need to take concrete steps to deal constructively with these employee attitudes [24].

In Sri Lanka, the state spends considerable amount of money to provide free education to all her citizens more than 50 years. During the early part of independence, the country produced many scholars, scientists, administrators and national figures of great ability and high distinction. The situation has changed in recent decades, and indicated a sharp decline in the standard and quality of education at all levels. The education system does not produce pupils with the knowledge, understanding, and the skills and attitudes appropriate for successful living. Total personality development such as creativity, initiative, discipline, team spirit, respect and tolerance for other people and other cultures is not achieved. Thus, considerable changes are continuously introduced by the Sri Lankan government to regulate this issues in educational platform [25].

Furthermore one of the major important change in the educational sector is curriculum development, it impacts teachers, students, society as well as the government. The challenges for government is that, when new curriculum is implemented, there would be an increased cost to government in the case of printing new books, preparing the new syllabus,

train the teachers as well as other relevant people to implement the new curriculum. Hence Organizations attempt to predict and adapt change through strategies such as curriculum revision and organizational redesign. It also includes shifting the culture of the organization. Therefore organizations implement change for optimistic reasons in order to adapt to changing environmental circumstances and stay competitive. However, Employees regularly react negatively towards change and oppose change efforts. This negative response is because change brings with it enlarged anxiety, pressure, and ambiguity for employees [26]. Therefore, it is paramount important to investigate the influence of employee attitude on employee readiness for organizational change in the government schools in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka.

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the previous studies, employee attitude has the relationship with employee readiness for organizational change. The primary aim of this study is to identify and assess influence of employee attitude on employee's readiness in the government schools in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka. This study has the following research objectives.

1. To identify the level of employee attitude in the government schools in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka
2. To identify the level of employee readiness for organizational change in the government schools in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka
3. To assess the relationship between employee attitude and employee readiness for organizational change in the government schools in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature provides a strong base for establishing the relationship of employee attitude with employee readiness for organizational change.

2.1 Changes in Organization

The problems and challenges faced by the organization due to the dynamic nature in the organizational environment is handled and solved through change in the organization. As there is continuous change in the organizational environment, constant changes in the

organization becomes important and essential [27]. Change is moving from an old status quo to a new position. According to [28] Sachin (1996) the extent of change depends on the extent of change in the environment. It may be large or small, easy or difficult, simple or complex reflecting the thoughts, feelings and intentions.

The successes of an organization give a better life to employees while a failure is a loss of life to those. According to [29] Cunningham, Woodward, Shannon, Macintosh, (2002) success and failure of change are credited to employees and thus, employee readiness is fundamental in change process to be successful.

Velopi, [30] 2015 has found Lewin's three stage change model as a very effective model for explaining the change management process. However, recent literature encountered a new model – Kotter's eight stage change model. It was investigated and found that Kotter's eight stage model pretty much aligns with Lewin's three stage model. The eight stages are:

1. Create Urgency
2. Form a Powerful Coalition
3. Create a Vision for Change
4. Communicate the Vision
5. Remove Obstacles
6. Create Short-Term Wins
7. Build on the Change
8. Anchor the Changes in Corporate Culture

Hence the above mentioned Kotter model, relates with Lewin's three stage model as follows.

1. **Unfreeze** – relates to Stages 1 to 4 of Kotter model
2. **Transition** – relates to Stages 5 to 6 of Kotter model
3. **Refreeze** – relates to Stages 7 and 8 of Kotter model

Research scholars were much more likely to absorb three items than eight. Therefore most of the researches applied Lewin model.

2.2 Employee Readiness

Armenakis et al. [31] defined employee readiness term as beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of the members of organization towards organizational change. According to Madsen [32], employee readiness for change refers to mental and physical preparedness of

the employees for immediate action that aim to improve, alter, vary, or modify something.

Employee attitudes towards organisational change can be a result of the effect of employees past experience either in the same organisation or in a previous one [33]. The evidence suggests that what individuals perceive about their work situation influences their attitudes and behavior during organizational change. Lan Coa [34] opined employee attitude is proactively determined by the environment and their individual objective and morals. Hechanova, [35] said that in order to make change valuable, employees need to feel sufficiently skilled and knowledgeable in particularly during change supportive statement which would reduce panic and doubt and therefore, opposition to change. Thus when organizations plan to implement the change first they need to think about employees perception for that change initiative and it help them to take action when employees perceive the change negatively. Saunders and Thronhill [36] argue that it is likely that employees will perceive the changes as threatening, because of feelings of being defenseless and fear of losing security. They can face difficulties in accepting and adjusting to the new environment. Jenke [37] indicates that employees who face difficulties to adapt new environment will resist it. And they will show negative attitude to the change.

As cited in Guttormur and Margret [38] change is new for employees they Perception is a related concept to attitudes, and generally attitudes are believed to influence perceptions. Again, it is up to the change leadership to develop and encourage more favorable attitudes and perceptions amongst employees. Sairakhaton and Ayesha Farooq [39] 30, developed a conceptual model to understand that employee's attitude is one of the most important determinants of successful organizational change and performance. The more employees are willing, the greater will be the desire to accept organizational change. Employees have positive attitude towards change because change benefits all employees and would enhance work competence and effectiveness. As attitudes of employees are established as a background for change and performance, it is accomplished that employees would show some supportive attitudes and behavior. Thus, the positive attitudes of employees toward change and organizational performance will facilitate the

organizations to achieve their goals and objectives.

Traditionally, organizational efforts have tended to focus on processes within the organizations, more than how individuals react to change. That perspective has however been criticized, as some claim that a more individual-centric approach is needed in order to successfully understand changes within organizations [40].

2.3 Employee Attitude and Employee Readiness for Organizational Change

The change can be really effective only if there is a change of attitude [41]. Attitudes towards organizational change may be defined as an employee's overall positive or negative evaluative judgment of a change initiative implemented by their organization [23]. It is the internal state that influences individual's choices of personal action, or a response tendency towards the change [42]. Positive attitudes changes were found to be vital in achieving organizational goals and in succeeding change programmes [20]. The most important factor behind failure of change initiatives is employees' resistance to change, which is closely linked with the development of negative attitudes to change. Employee attitudes toward change can impact their morale, productivity and turnover intentions [20].

Not only practitioners pay too little attention to the individual in a change process. Scholars have largely neglected individual characteristics likewise, hence there is a scarcity of studies on the human aspects of change [14,43]. Studies on organizational change that did include individual characteristics have identified personality traits that seem to influence individual attitudes towards organizational change [43]. However, more often it is argued that personality traits do not determine an attitude towards change, but rather the individual's belief about the necessity and the potential success of the change [44].

Therefore, researchers have identified various employees' responses to an organizational change ranging from strong positive attitudes (i.e. "this change is essential for the organization to succeed") to strong negative attitudes (i.e. "this change could ruin the company"), [45]. Therefore, change can be received with excitement and happiness or anger and fear while employees' response to it may range from

positive intentions to support the change to negative intentions to oppose it.

Ali and Sayyed [46] stated that, an attitude is referred to as a hypothetical construct representing an individual's degree of like or dislike for an item. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person, place, thing, or event these views are often referred as the attitude object. In this instance the attitude object is referred as the individuals' view of the change and is not a physical entity independent of the individual [47]. The definition given by Elias [23] attitudes towards organizational change as an employee's overall positive or negative evaluative judgment of a change initiative implemented by their organization. Bianey, Ulloa and Adams [42], also define attitudes towards change as the internal state that influences individual's choices of personal action, or a response tendency towards the change. Attitudes towards change may be defined as certain regularities of an individual's feelings, thoughts and predispositions to act towards some aspect of his or her environment [47].

As stated in Guttormur, [48] the study of attitudes and perceptions dates back to the 1930s, and has long been a staple of the social psychological tradition. The term attitude has been defined as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" [49]. For example, an employee may have certain pre-determined attitudes towards organizational change, which might influence the way he/she perceives change initiatives. It is then up to leaders to manage those attitudes, and form new favorable attitudes towards the process Rebecka and Indradevi [50] states that, The capabilities of managers, employees and work environment are examined by organizational change that affects employee attitudes and behaviors by turning a situation from the known to the unknown. Some researchers focused on change that may have a serious negative impact on employee attitudes [51]. Therefore, creating employee positive attitudes boosts the readiness of employees as an important factor for successful organizational change [22,43]. There are two important aspects of attitude: one of them is a belief aspect that uses cognitive processes to describe an object and its relation to other objects, the other is an affective aspect that leads to liking or disliking an object. [52] therefore, after describing and understand the things employees will decide to

like or dislike it the same is true for change in the organization employees will pass through cognitive process and then they will have positive or negative attitude to the change.

Change is concerned to solve the problems and challenges of the organization. It might be small or large but affects employee attitudes and behaviors because of shifting from one stage to another. This particular situation can develop uncertainty, strain and anxiety among employees. A review of the literature undertaken by these researchers has revealed that an individual's attitudes and behaviors towards organizational change are influenced by employee readiness factors [53].

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The present study aimed to examine the influence of employee attitude on employee readiness for organizational change in the government schools in the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka.

Fig. 1 depicts the conceptual frame work developed for this study based on the extensive literature review.

3.2 Study Setting

This research was conducted in the government schools in the eastern provinces of Sri Lanka where changes have been introduced in the recent past to enhance the quality and relevance of the programmes conducted. Teaching staff members of these government schools are the key role players going through these changes. By applying the survey questionnaire, this study examined employee attitudes towards readiness for organizational change.

3.3 Sample Size

A sample of 100 teaching staff from the government schools in the Eastern Province were selected for this study. Then the survey

questionnaires were handed over by personal visits, and were collected during the follow up visits.

3.4 Data Collection

The study by and large depends on the primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected by two methods.

1. Survey through hard copy
2. Follow up interviews

The respondents were explained about the purpose of the research, and assured that their response will be kept confidential and will not be used other than this study.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data was cleaned, coded and entered for the analysis using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) has been used broadly to infer results in the business, and social science researches. In this empirical study, SPSS version 22.0 for Windows was used to find relationship between research variables.

3.6 Method of Data Evaluation

3.6.1 Percentage, mean, standard deviation and correlation analysis

Descriptive analysis of the data will be carried out using percentage, mean, standard deviation, and correlation as the first step of the data analysis. Furthermore criteria shown in table were adopted to evaluate mean values. This was established to determine the variables of this study.

Table 1. Decision rule for univariate analysis

Range	Decision attributes
$1 \leq X_i \leq 2.5$	Low level
$2.5 < X_i \leq 3.5$	Moderate level
$3.5 < X_i \leq 5.0$	High level

Source- Formed for this research

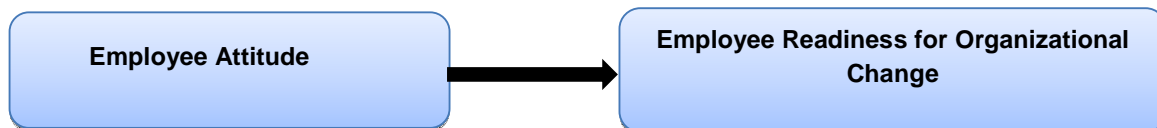


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The personal characteristics of the respondents such as age, higher education qualification, number of dependents, and work experience in the field, were asked in the questionnaire. The details of the demographic profiles of the participants show that 65% (n=65) of participants were male and 49 % (n=49) were between 46 to 55 years of age. A majority (99%, n=99) of the participants were married and most of them (54%, n=54) had 3 to 4 dependents. About 50 % (n=50) had Master's degree as the highest educational qualification. The majority of respondents (43%, n=43) had remained in their present job for 16 to 20 years (Table 2).

4.2 Individual Attitude of the Respondents

Among the sample of the respondents analyzed, 71% of the respondents were in favour of higher level of Individual Attitude, while only 29% of the respondents indicated lower level of Individual Attitude. The average mean value and standard deviation (sd) for Individual Attitude were 3.87 and 0.60 respectively (Table 3). The mean value indicated higher level more than the range of moderate scale of $2.5 < x_i < 3.5$. Thereby, the level of Individual Attitude of the employee

became high influence over the employee readiness for organizational change.

4.3 Employee Readiness for Organizational Change

Among the sample of the respondents analyzed, 24% of the respondents were in favour of higher level of Employee Readiness for Organizational Change, and 74% were in favour of moderate level of Employee Readiness for Organizational Change, while only 2% of the respondents indicated lower level. The average mean value and standard deviation (sd) for Employee Readiness for Organizational Change were 3.30 and 0.44 respectively (Table 4). The mean value indicated within the range of moderate scale of $2.5 < x_i < 3.5$. Thereby, the level of Employee Readiness for Organizational Change became moderate.

4.4 Relationship between Individual Attitude and Employee Readiness for Organizational Change

By observing the data a significant positive relationship exists between the independent variables and dependent variable, that is; Individual attitude and Employee readiness for change. The Table 5. shows a correlation matrix, which describes such relationship between the variables.

Table 2. Summary of the Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Age group (years)	%	Higher education qualification	%	Number of dependents	%	Work experience in the field (years)	%
26-35	14	Master degree	50	1-2	44	6- 10	11
36-45	29					11- 15	32
46-55	49	Bachelor degree	50	3-4	54	16- 20	43
> 56	08			5-6	02	>20	14
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

(Source: Survey data)

Table 3. Individual Attitude of the respondents with related mean and Sd.

Dimensions	Mean	Sd
Individual Attitude	3.87	0.60

(Source: Survey data)

Table 4. Employee Readiness for Organizational Change with related mean and Sd.

Dimensions	Mean	Sd
Employee Readiness for Organizational Change	3.33	0.44

(Source: Survey data)

Table 5. Coefficient of Correlation between Individual Attitude and Employee Readiness for Organizational Change

Variables	Individual attitude	employee readiness for organizational change
Individual attitude		
Pearson Correlation		0.595
Sig.(2-tailed)	1	0.000
No	303	303

(Source: survey data)

(P_r = Significance level, the model is significant at 5%)

The Table 5 shows that employee readiness for organizational change (ERO) have a positive significant relationship with Individual attitude (IA) ($r = 0.595$, $Pr < 0.000$). In addition, the correlation analysis describes how the relationship between dependent variable and independent variables exists at 5% significance level. The correlation between Individual attitude and employee readiness for organizational change shows a strong positive significant relationship

5. FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The research study on the influence of employee attitude on employee readiness for organizational change was encouraged by new interest manifests due to recent change reforms in the government schools of Sri Lanka. Increased attention on local and global competition, technological advancement, mergers, expansion, changes in the structure, product quality maintenance, enhancing employee efficiency, stimulating opportunities, innovations, and new leadership, policy reforms, and management approaches have to be taken as change initiator to increase the level of employee readiness for intended organizational change.

5.1 Findings

This empirical study was intended to identify the level of the independent variables and to investigate the relationship between independent variable with the dependent variable. The descriptive statistics shows that the high mean values were obtained for individual attitude (Table 3), and employee readiness for organizational change were at moderate level (Table 4).

As per the decision rule for univariate analysis (Table 1), the mean values of variables indicated

a high level for individual attitudes, and moderate level for employee readiness for organizational change. Therefore, the study on the influence of employee attitude on employee readiness for organization change with its relative influence become meaningful and acceptably proved at a significant level in this investigation.

5.2 Suggestions

Based on this study, it was revealed that compared to the schools in the other part of Sri Lanka the working environment is not conducive and adequate. The teaching and learning environment is too in short supply therefore, services of the academics have been offered with limited resources. Action should be taken by the authorities to improve and increase learning resources for student centered learning. Conducive working environment with adequate working instruments and equipment should be made available. Ideally, resources would be made available to give remedial training to the willing seniors to deliver world class education.

It is revealed that when introducing change programmes the employees were informed clearly, but as change may be affected by situational factor, any interruption on the implementation process were not been supported by the management and or so called change leader. The proper feedback and facilities in the form of necessary resources need to be provided.

All statistical analysis undertaken in this study indicated that individual attitude had the high level. Most of the employees had strong positive attitude towards organizational change is great strength for these organizations. The top management should maintain the level of influence of the individual attitude of employees on their readiness for successful organizational change.

5.3 Conclusion

To sum up the research study, the employee readiness for organizational change was measured in terms of its relationship with employee attitude. The high level of employee readiness for organizational change was reported by teachers of government schools in Sri Lanka.

The thorough analysis of the literature relating to employee readiness for organizational change clearly suggests that initiatives of organizational change will only be successful if the employees accept and support the so called change initiatives. This research provides the reader with an understanding of the current levels of employee readiness for organizational change in the schools in the eastern provinces of Sri Lanka.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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