

The Effect of Leadership Team to Manage Resistance for Change Via Understanding Thinking Styles in A University Transformation Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present factors influencing the alleviation of resistance towards transformation programmers in organizations. This research was conducted at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia Kuala Lumpur Campus with a sample of 160 employees from various departments. A conceptual model was developed in order to test the reliability and correlation of the measures. The findings indicate that the importance of becoming familiar with the thinking styles of employees is an effective factor to minimize of the resistance toward organizational transformation. This research also presents that there is a high level of resistance from employees with the UTM transformation programme. This paper provides valuable input to organizations that struggle with the resistance of employees towardstransformational programmers.

Keywords: organizationaltransformation, resistance to change, thinking styles

1. Introduction

Transformation is considered as one of the most important issues in organisational development in both public and private sector. To what extent the organisation could be successfully transformed is dependent on the multitude of internal and external factors. Internal factors include factors such as customer and finance perspectives whilst, external factors encompass the environment, opportunities and threats.

Before an organisation decides to undertake the transformation task, it must weigh the various factors that will insure many stake holders. Transformation is a delicate business that usually does not bring about a satisfactory result and comes to an end with disillusionment in many cases (Palmberg, 2010). One of the most important issues that organisations must consider very carefully before embarking on a transformational task is the high possibility of encountering resistance from the employees. Schein (1965) describes resistance as one of the most well-known factors of organisational issues.

Many studies have shown that resistance towards transformation result in unavoidable failures in the transformation programme (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Resistance to change result in many failed transformation projects (Lawrence, 1968; Strebel, 1994). Resistance to transformational tasks is described as an extensively prominent factor that affects negatively on the result. In most cases efforts for the transformation task have to experience failure due to the presence of the critically important factor called resistance (R Maurer, 1996).

Resistance toward transformational tasks usually comes from employees. The most important reason to terminate the transformation programme that ended in failure in many organisations is precisely due to the resistance from the employees (Beauregard, 2007; Martin, 1975; Rick Maurer, 1997; Spiker & Lesser, 1995). In some particular cases, managers define resistance as any reaction from employees that attempts to stop and cause delays to transformational tasks (Bemmels & Reshef, 1991). This paper investigates whether leadership team significantly reduces employee's resistance towards transformation.

Additionally, the thinking styles of employees are prominent in organisational development process. Becoming familiar with the thinking styles of employees can help managers to motivate individuals in the respective organisation to prepare the staff in the pursuit of organisational transformation which will lead to the minimisation of resistance. Thus, this paper also investigates whether employee's thinking styles positively moderates the relationship between team leadership and employees resistance towards transformation.

The process of diversified thinking styles of employees in organisational development certainly affects the performance of many organisations especially with regard to achieving organisational attractiveness. It also assists managers in discovering the priorities, qualities and values of the employees and creating better and improved support for them. When organisational leaders recognised the presence of diverse thinking styles of their employees, it would become easier in the planning and implementation of the transformation process and thus enhance the probability of greater success. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the effective factors that influence alleviation of resistance of employees towards transformation. The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part, the paper reviews the literature on the fundamental aspects of organisational transformation, resistance to change and thinking styles. The second part describes the conceptual

framework and methodology of the study. Finally discussion and implications of the findings are deliberated.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Organisational Transformation

Transformation could occur in an organisational entity through various areas such as size and quality over time (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Transformation comes along after deliberate presentation of new thoughts and related constituent operation (Schalk, Campbell, & Freese, 1998). The most prominent and basic purpose of change process in is to adjust the organisation system with the environment (Barr, Stimpert, & Huff, 1992; Child & Smith, 1987; Leana & Barry, 2000). However improving the performance of the organisation is also the general goal of change process (Boeker, 1997; Keck & Tushman, 1993).

Change process is related deliberately interfering the organisational performance in order to achieve a more appropriate result (Lippitt, 1958). The concept of change in large scales for managers refers extensively to fundamental strategies. (Andrews, 1971; Thompson, Strickland, & Gamble, 1998). Change process has been considered through many different conceptual points of view (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Huy, 2001; Levy, 1986). Change process is often designed as a project following related operations that enable the organisations experience a new state (Garvin, 2012). Change process could be divided into three fundamental levels (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992). The first level involves investigation into the present level of the organisation. At the second level, new methods and systems substitute the old ones. At the last stage institutionalization occurs for new activities. These mentioned levels are observed in a lot of conceptualizations for change process (Lewin, 1951).

2.2 Resistance Towards Transformation

There have been a number of definitions by authors for resistance. For instance, Ansoff (1988) believes that resistance is a fact that includes various affects such as unpredictable delay, expenses and unstable circumstances in the transformation process. Resistance has been defined by Zaltman and Duncan (1977) as any attitude and behaviour that try to keep the present situation despite the pressure for development and change.

Resistance towards a transformation project is not the elementary problem to be solved. Any resistance is usually a sign of more basic dilemma underlying the special situation. Thus resistance is a warning sign directing the timing of technological changes (Judson, 1966). Some authors such as (Beer & Eisenstat, 1996; Goldstein & Link, 1988; Lawrence, 1968; Piderit, 2000; Waddell & Sohal, 1998) have stressed that resistance can be considered as a source of data in order to improve and bring a success to the change process. However, leadership team of transformation project call resistance as an enemy that defects bringing about the necessary changes (Schein, 1965). Expenses and delays due to the resistance towards transformation are difficult to predict as they require consideration (Lorenzo, 2000). Resistance has been described as an accepted and normal phenomenon of transformation programme (Coghlan, 1993; Steinburg, 1992; Zaltman & Duncan, 1977). Resistance happens because change consists of moving from the known to the unknown (Coghlan, 1993; Myers & Robbins, 1991; Nadler, 1981; Steinburg, 1992). Generally, individuals investigate for a soft level which is empty of challenges, therefore they try to keep that level (Nadler, 1981; Zaltman & Duncan, 1977).

Employees are different in terms of their capabilities and trends to adapt the transformational tasks (Darling, 1993). Some employees are able to adjust to transformation programme quickly, whilst others are responsible for slowing down the transformation process (Scott & Jaffe, 1988). The role of managers and leaders is paramount in convincing employees at every level so that they could reach an agreement in undertaking this vital task which is crucial for the continuous survival of the organisations in today's uncertain global environment. Hence, the first hypothesis of this paper is forwarded:

H1: Leadership Team significantly reduces employee's resistance towards transformational tasks.

2.3 University Transformation

A considerable number of universities worldwide in the past have undertaken serious efforts in undertaking transformation project (Hopkinson, 2010). In view of the increasingly competitive nature of higher education especially to the less established universities sustainability is the same where the survivability of the universities is at stake. Universities are just like public listed firms and continuous investment is valued especially for foreign students. Many universities worldwide attempt at the transformation projects (Ferrer-Balas, Bruno, De Mingo, & Sans, 2004; Jansen, Holmberg, & Civili, 2005; Kamp, 2006). Obviously there are a number of desires and aims that are tough to perform, such as equality, combining the various points of view regarding educating, research and innovation. Transformation and change process through high level of education is well-known to be very difficult, and the outcome terminates different from what was expected of high level of education for sustainable development (The Observatory, 2006; (Holmberg & Samuelsson, 2006).

2.4 Thinking Styles

There have been a number of views among researchers regarding theories which were related to cognitive thinking styles from the late of 1950s to the early of 1970s (Zhang, 2002). Thinking styles have been explained as people's preferences regarding using mental abilities for doing tasks and consist of comprehension and

conscious effort for the purpose of solving problems and encountering with challenges. Thinking styles are socialized and well-known as unconscious patterns of cognitive complexity. Thinking styles are considered for the purpose of decision making and they could be different depending on the specific demands for doing the tasks (Dane & Pratt, 2009; Sternberg, 1988; Sternberg & Ruzgis, 1994). Thinking styles are defined as an important learned pattern regarding cognitive complexity for the purpose of understanding, feeling, and anticipating external events, thinking styles are also considered for the purpose of interacting with external environment in order to have more appropriate personal results. These learned patterns of thought are defined as the outcome of direct interaction or observing the instances of others (Seligman, 2011).

Thinking styles that express how individuals prefer to process information are explained under the notion of intellectual styles (Zhang, 2002). Sternberg's theory (1988) regarding intellectual styles well-known as mental self-government has attracted a number of interests. The phrase "government" has been used by Sternberg to emphasize that as there are various ways to govern a community, there are various ways that individuals would like to use their abilities as well. Sternberg has described thinking styles as the preferences that people have for using their abilities. TSI which stands for Thinking Styles Inventory is an instrument which comes from Sternberg's theory regarding mental self-government (Sternberg, 1999). Thinking Style Inventory was first tested in some countries with various cultures. Empirical results proved appropriate reliability and validity for the instrument. Thinking Style Inventory instrument was also tested for the types of Holland's personality and the theory of Biggs learning as some against constructs for the purpose of external validity (Zhang & Sternberg, 2000).

Sternberg opined that there are 13 thinking styles and they are categorized into five dimensions namely: functions, forms, levels, scopes, and leanings. The thirteen thinking styles were re-conceptualized by (Zhang & Sternberg, 2005, 2009) into three types. Type I that belongs to creative and generative people marks greater levels of cognition. This type consists of legislative thinking style that comes from creativity and generating, judicial thinking style which is based on the evaluation, hierarchical thinking styles that consider priorities for doing tasks, global thinking style which concentrates on the holistic pictures, and liberal thinking style that allows people to experience new ways of doing tasks.

Type II of thinking styles which is different from Type I represents a norm-favouring tendency and marks lower levels of cognition. This type consists of executive thinking style that requires instructions for doing tasks, local thinking style that focuses on details, monarchic thinking style which refers to people who follow one task at a time, and conservative thinking style that does not let people experience new approaches and focuses on old ways for doing tasks.

Type III thinking styles may reveal the features of Type I and Type II of thinking styles which depend on the tasks and their stylistic demands. For instance, there is a possibility that one person may have creativity which shows he or she uses Type I thinking styles and also is conservative as he or she uses Type II thinking styles. Type III thinking styles includes anarchic thinking style which experiences whatever tasks that come along, oligarchic thinking style that focuses on multiple tasks without any priorities, internal thinking style which refers to people who prefer to work alone and external thinking style where people would like to work with other. Generally, Becoming familiar with the thinking styles of employees provide a deep knowledge regarding employees for the leadership team through transformational tasks. Therefore, this discussion leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Employee's thinking styles positively moderate the relationship between team leadership and employees resistance towards transformation programme.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample

Employees including lecturers and academic staff in the Kula Lumpur campus of University Teknologi Malaysia were chosen as the scope of study. Universiti Teknologi Malaysia as one the research universities in Malaysia has undertaken a global plan in order to position itself to be one of the internationally renewed universities in terms of scholarly contributions, human capital generation, impact to the Malaysian and regional innovation economy, prominence at international levels, and premium academic brand (Ujang, 2012). Necessary data was collected by distributing 200 questionnaires in Malay and English languages among the active employees in UTM Kuala Lumpur Campus of which 160 of were returned to the researcher.

As Table1. demonstrates a pilot test was conducted on 30 samples and Cronbach's Alpha for six items regarding employee's resistance towards organisational transformation was 0.711. The Cronbach's Alpha for the five items regarding the influence of leadership team on minimizing resistance was 0.860. And the Cronbach's Alpha for thirteen items regarding employee's think styles was 0.790.

Table1. The Results of Reliability Statistics

Factors	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
employee's resistance	6	0.711
leadership team	5	0.860
employee's think styles	13	0.790

3.2 Data Analysis

The relationship between Leadership Team and Employees Thinking Styles was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. As Table 2 shows, there was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables [$r=.773$, $n=160$, $p<.0005$], with high levels of Leadership Team associated with higher levels of Employees Thinking Styles. And the relationship between Employees Thinking Styles and Employees Resistance was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables [$r=.953$, $n=160$, $p<.0005$], with high levels of Employees Thinking Styles associated with higher levels of Employees Resistance.

Table2. Correlation Analysis

		LeadershipTeam	ThinkingStyle	Resistance
LeadershipTeam	Pearson Correlation	1	.773**	.689**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	160	160	160
ThinkingStyle	Pearson Correlation	.773**	1	.953**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	160	160	160
Resistance	Pearson Correlation	.689**	.953**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	160	160	160

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As Table2 shows team leadership significantly reduces employee's resistance towards transformation [H1]. The Sig. is 0.000, which means that Team Leadership is effective in alleviating employee's resistance towards transformation. Additionally, employee's thinking styles positively moderates the relationship between team leadership and employees resistance towards transformation [H2].

Table3. The Results of Regression Analysis

	Hypotheses	R	R Square	Sig.	Status
H1	leadership Team → employee's resistance	0.689	0.745	0.000	Accepted
H2	team leadership → Employee's Thinking Styles → employee's resistance	0.926	0.858	0.000	Accepted

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing the alleviation of resistance towards organizational transformation. Based on the results of this research team leadership significantly reduces employee's resistance towards transformation. Employee's thinking styles positively moderate the relationship between team leadership and employees resistance towards transformation.

UTM employees seem not to be interested in transformation and this supports the finding of previous studies. For instance, Waldersee and Griffiths (1996) show that employee resistance have been the most serious issue when presenting change process by management. Thus the management should identify reasons for the resistance and undertake corrective measures to improve the situations.

The research has found out that the actions, behaviours, decisions, and words of the leaders are critically vital and effective on the employees. There is a dire need of leadership team to plan and implement actions that could reduce potential resistance. Managers are expected to pay attention to employees to obtain success through change process (Rose-Ackerman, 1986; Spiker & Lesser, 1995).

Becoming familiar with employee's thinking styles would assist UTM Transformation Leadership team to exert a systematic influence on the employees. Systematic influence comes from adequate knowledge regarding employee's priorities, norms, beliefs, and their decision making ways. This vast knowledge is critically helpful in reducing the employee's resistance towards transformation.

Conclusion

This research was done since there seemed to be possibilities regarding the effects of employees' thinking styles for minimization of resistance towards organisational transformation task. For example in judicial thinking style, employees would tend to evaluate and make comparison among different points of views in relation to attract point of views an issue that interests them. Therefore, in response to these types of thinking styles, leaders should elaborate the differences between the current stage of the organisation and the subsequent stage after the realization of the transformation process in order to interest the employees.

The findings of this study transformation showed that there was a high potential of resistance from employees towards UTM transformation programme. It was found in that UTM employees agreed that they were influenced highly by their leaders. Therefore, UTM effective leadership team was critical to alleviate the resistance. The findings of this study also showed which kind of thinking styles the respondents possess which helps the transformation leadership team to have effective communications with the employees.

5.1 Managerial Implications:

UTM Transformation Leadership Team should encourage and persuade employees into new changes because this research revealed that many employees would like to do the same old things rather than try new and different ones. A considerable number of respondents do not change their mind easily. Many employees still have the propensity and willingness to be consistent with the old ways of doing things rather than embracing new ways. Hence, it is imperative that the UTM Leadership Team continues to persuade the hardcore employees in to changing and being part of the transformation. Arguably it is not an easy task.

UTM Transformation Leadership should be precisely aware that it can influence critically on the employees and use this opportunity to bring success. Additionally, UTM Transformation Leadership should focus more on the employees who have conservative thinking styles. These employees have more resistance towards transformation than the others because these employees are not interested in new ways and prefer old and traditional ways for dealing with tasks.

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