



## TOWARDS A SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: THE ROLE OF DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION



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### ABSTRACT

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The impetus for change has ensued abundant failures in organizational change initiatives despite the profusions of research that have been conducted. While the change itself is becoming more volatile in times, scholars are struggling to find new strategies that can help to favour organizational change as change failure rate still persisted. Looking from the perspective of communication on change, ample of research has been carried out in this area since 1950. Although there are many different meanings and depths, the bases to what most communication types in change literature remain consistent. One of the key areas of effective change management is through communication. A recent study has shown dialogic communication has brought a new paradigm shift in managing organizational change. This research seeks to contribute to the theoretical establishment of dialogic communication through its unique conjecture lens that proven to support and facilitate organizational change. This study was conducted quantitatively via 333 respondents in public service education sector through multi-stage sampling technique. Analysis of structural equation modelling (SEM) demonstrated that dialogic communication has a mediating effect on the constructs along with good reflective and structural model measurements. The findings have unlocked many insights for change practitioners especially on utilizing dialogic communication. The implications of this research were further discussed in details.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature of organizational change and dialogic communication. Additionally, this study is one of very few studies which have investigated the influence of dialogic communication on organizational change through quantitative approach.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The expeditious globalization has resulted in many areas been affected to succumb to the need to change. Globalization has created many unprecedented ways on how changes can take place through the vastly changing landscape of technology, demographic, psychological, social and others. Nevertheless, institutional changes have been reported to have a high tendency of failure due to resistance to change among the stakeholders. In any change related event, a change programme will likely to fail rather than to achieve the change desired goal (Al-Haddad and

Kotnour, 2015). This phenomenon may potentially put a gargantuan gap on how the organization needs to mend suitable ways and strategies to attain success in organizational change thus directly thriving for the organizational growth and development.

The assessment of whether the change is successful or not can be assessed through the attitude of change from individuals in regards to change. Organizational change can only be effective if the change is followed by a change of attitude (Dobrea and Găman, 2011). The avenue of attitude towards change is also a topic of interest as it covers affective (emotion), cognitive (thought) and behaviour (action). Since the variables of change involved in many relating elements, the study of attitude towards change can lead to many auspicious discoveries as it will uncover the holistic human aspect of change. An individual may perform the change but not entirely have the right mindset and feelings to embrace the change. Similarly, an individual may feel confident and think that the change is necessary but did not act accordingly. Additionally, Nafei (2014) revealed that there is a correlation between resistance to change and attitude towards change.

Anyhow, change is always associated with resistance and becomes one of the most concern areas in organizational change study. Introducing changes in an institution will put hiccups in the routine process before it acclimates but some changes initiatives did not acclimate and failed due to resistance to change (Rosenberg and Joseph, 2011). There are ample of research related to resistance to change as it is still the most critical determinant of organizational change success. Past research revealed disturbing figures of current organizational change failure rate as it was 70% (Maurer, 2010) and above (Decker *et al.*, 2012). The current figures still remain high since the early study as it is debatably implied that nothing much has changed. It is either the current framework for managing change is not enough or the changes are becoming more extensive to manage.

In relation to organizational change, communication is paramount for the policymakers in ensuring successful change. An organization needs to be alert to the broad provisions and communications tools, approaches and strategies available when making a change since the nature of communication will influence the change initiatives (Melanie and Tim, 2012). In addition, it was stated that communication is the main problem during a change process as it was cited that 70% of change programme failed due to communication (Plewes, 2014). Nevertheless, many studies still need to be done in the communication of change as it is not merely just an action to convey messages but also a medium to facilitate change. An effective communication on change should not just be a tool to exchange messages but should be imbued with strong humanistic elements. Messages will be conveyed with stronger means and the longevity of what to be conveyed will be greater. Additionally, it was proven qualitatively that change can be effectively managed by adopting a dialogic communication approach (Matos and Mark, 2014).

The outcome of what dialogic communication can do to organization change may potentially give more insights to change practitioners in coming out with the best communication approach. Though the construct of dialogic communication itself still suffers from a paucity of research, recent qualitative evidence on the construct has demonstrated a promising discovery on what dialogic communication can do (Matos and Mark, 2014). Therefore, this research aims to explore the effect of dialogic communication on resistance to change and attitude towards change.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Antecedents of Resistance to Change**

Resistance to change is widely discussed by scholar since the early 1950s. At present, there are many different opinions and views regarding resistance to change through its complex nomological's net. Though the findings may have offered a diversity of insights on organizational change study, the study may have suffered from jingle jangle fallacies. An integrative review of the topic found that equivalent constructs were given different labels (Oreg *et al.*, 2011). Although there are many spectrums of meaning, all are portraying the same consistency in which resistance

to change involves an act of resisting or even opposing a movement from a definite or familiar state into an indefinite or unfamiliar state.

Resistance to change as mentioned by an early researcher, Zander (1950) defined the construct as “behaviour that resolved to protect an individual from the effects of real or imagined change”. Another definition of resistance to change by Zaltman & Duncan in 1977 is “any action that serves to protect status quo during the pressure to change the status quo” as cited in Bolognese (2018). The meaning from previous researches are still in line but added that resistance is a natural process (Coghlan, 1993). He defines change resistance as “a normal and natural response to change since change itself concerns with moving from known to the unknown. The definition has further reinforced the meaning as “employee act that intends to disrupt, challenge or reverse prevailing assumptions, discourses and power relations (Folger and Skarlicki, 1999). Resistance is “behaviour portrayed by employees in an attempt to deny the influence and power of their employers” (Smollan, 2011).

There are many forms in which resistance to change factors can manifest (Jason and Pauline, 2015). Since resistance is complex, there are many but differing opinions from the past researchers towards change resistance antecedents (Smollan, 2011). Nevertheless, past researchers discovered that majority of these antecedents rooted in the employees’ psychological well-being on how the change affecting them (Pieterse *et al.*, 2012). Resistance correlates with an individual’s mind reflecting one’s willingness and receptiveness to change influenced by one’s thinking and behaviour.

## 2.2. Dialogic Communication

The pioneer of dialogic communication theory outlined five features of dialogic communication which encompassed mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment (Kent and Taylor, 2002). Mutuality will elevate collaborative orientation promoting co-learning, gauging on understanding on others’ positions and fairness. Propinquity involves thorough communication and participation. As such, participants will be communicating at both before and after a decision has been made. Meanwhile, empathy gauges acceptance to those who are in disagreement by practising compassionate orientation. However, there is a risk resided in this method of communication. For example, participants are vulnerable to manipulation and uncertainties when disclosing themselves to build the relationship. The foundation for the fifth feature is made up of the previous four features. The fifth feature which is the commitment highlights the values of honesty and open participation and a commitment to conversation and interpretation. Recent research explored that in a highly dialogic communication setting, resistance to change was descending (Matos and Mark, 2014).

Further findings suggested that though there were many forms of communication, dialogic communication seems to be more effective in managing organizational change. Dialogic communication is based on philosophy and relational communication theory. This form of communication is dissimilar compared to other forms of communications such as “debate”, “discussion” or “monologue” (Carpenter *et al.*, 2016). As such, dialogic communication is built upon two-way symmetrical communication (Seow and Mallika, 2014). Although developing a dialogic communication can be expensive and time-consuming, it is more effective than a monologic communication. Unfortunately, the theoretical development of the dialogic communication’s dimensions still remains undeveloped.

## 2.3. Attitude towards Change

This line of research is based on the growing consensus about the key role that changes recipients’ reactions to change have in determining the change’s potential to succeed. Indeed, a surge of recent studies of organizational change demonstrated the meaningfulness of change recipients’ attitudes toward change for understanding the organizational change process (Oreg and Berson, 2011).

Measurement of organizational change has been studied in a multidimensional construct involving the interactions between affective, behavioural and cognitive responses one may portray resulted from organizational change (Piderit, 2000). Although there is a rich amount of research on attitude towards change in the psychological field, attitude in the context of resistance towards change remains to be varied with many different placements as variables. Oreg (2003) use the attitude towards change model as a measurement to measure resistance to change while other use this model to measure organizational change (Nafei, 2014). Marlene (2015) measures change implementation via attitude among leaders and followers. In another research by Brenner (2013) teachers' efficacy was used to measure attitude towards change. This shows that attitude towards change remains to be a very promising avenue to be included in organizational change studies.

Looking on the deeper side of this tripartite view by revisiting back the pioneering model of attitude towards change, although the attitude towards change comprises of three different dimensions, Piderit (2000) highlighted that people can have a contradictory attitude in responding to the initial stage of the change whether it is acceptance or resistance. These ambivalent attitudes toward change exist when an individual has a different stance on each dimension. As such, it can exist when an individual being positive on cognitive dimension while simultaneously being negative on emotional dimension. Attitude towards change study is very critical (Nafei, 2014) as it ventures the human psychological aspect of affective, behavioural and cognitive whether they want to accept or oppose the change. Past study acknowledged that attitudes were the key to understand human behaviour and this basis is still remained true today (Marlene, 2015).

#### **2.4. The Mediating Effect of Dialogic Communication on the Relationship between Resistance to Change and Attitude towards Change**

Communication has long been acknowledged as one of the relevant elements to organizational change in many studies and there are ample of previous researchers that highlighted communication as the most critical part in overcoming resistance to change. In managing organizational change, a good communication constitutes in building up change readiness among the stakeholders, reducing uncertainty, building momentum for commitment and enhanced employees' control and well-being (Kramer *et al.*, 2004). Past study also discovered that change is a communicative challenge (Allen *et al.*, 2007) and adequate communication strategy can minimize the resistance to change. Since change itself is a communicative challenge process, a great attention needs to be given in this area whenever a change initiative is to be made. In addition, previous scholar added that communication processes are parts of change implementation itself (Bordia *et al.*, 2004). Past study discovered that communication mediates change (Reis, 2002). Additionally, there was a high correlation between communication and organizational change as employees that satisfied with management communication shows positive responses to change (Melanie and Tim, 2012). Another research added that the relationship between attitudes and dialogues influence behaviours towards an organization change (Bruning *et al.*, 2008) and improved receptivity towards change (Frahm and Brown, 2003). This further supports the research conceptual framework which positioned dialogic communication as a mediating variable.

#### **2.5. Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework derived in this research was based on three underpinning theories relate to organizational change as depicted in Figure 1. The theories are; resistance to change (Coch and French, 1948) adapted in the form of antecedents to change resistance, dialogic communication (Kent and Taylor, 2002) and attitude towards change (Piderit, 2000).



Figure-1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Coch and French (1948), Kent and Taylor (2002) and Piderit (2000)

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research Design

A cross-sectional research design was undertaken for this study. This form of design allowed the researchers to combine the organizational change literature, the pre-study, the pilot study and the parent study as the main procedure for this research. The focal advantage of this procedure may help researchers to gather accurate, less bias and good quality data (Sekaran, 2000). During the early stage of research, a survey questionnaire was drafted based on organizational change and dialogic communication literature. The validity and reliability of the questionnaires were enhanced during pre-rest and pilot test.

#### 3.2. Measures

The survey questionnaires consist of four major sections which comprised of section; demographic profile, antecedents of resistance to Change (ARTC), dialogic communication (DC) and attitude towards change (ATC). ARTC had 7 items adapted from different literature that gave evidence on workload and time in regards to organizational change from education sector (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006; Naim and Talib, 2014) DC had 10 items adopted from the literature of Kent and Taylor (2002) and ATC had 6 adapted items from Piderit (2000).

#### 3.3. Sample

A mixed sampling technique was used via simple random sampling and non-purposive sampling methods. The sampling frame was only available during the first stage of sampling while the sampling frame for the second stage was unavailable. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to public sector employees who worked in the education sector throughout Selangor, Malaysia. This sampling technique was utilized to yield a good external validity to the extent that the non-random sample was a sufficiently large proportion of the overall population. The population shared the same homogeneity in which all of the elements in the population were exposed to the specific organizational change. A total of 366 questionnaires were returned. Non-response and monotone response were omitted. After missing value analysis was conducted, only 333 usable questionnaires were made available for subsequent data analysis.

#### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted according to the reporting procedure for partial least squares structural equation modelling (SEM) via SmartPLS Version 3 software which can give researcher high efficiency in parameter estimation which manifested in greater statistical power that is more likely to render a specific relationship significant when it is, in fact, significant in the population (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The data were analyzed through the (i) assessment of reflective model, (ii) the assessment of the structural model and (iii) the assessment of mediation. The assessment of reflective model was made on internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (indicator reliability and average variance extracted) and discriminant validity. Meanwhile, the assessment of structural model was made on collinearity issues, the significance and relevance of structural model

relationships, assessment of coefficients of determination,  $f^2$  effect sizes and  $Q^2$  predictive relevance. The threshold values for each of the measurements were as follow:

- Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability > 0.6 is preferred (Hair *et al.*, 2017).
- Indicator reliability > 0.7 is acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 2017).
- Average variance extracted > 0.5 is preferred (Hair *et al.*, 2017).
- HTMT < 0.9 is preferred to avoid lack of discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2017).
- VIF < 10 is preferred to avoid collinearity issue (Kline, 2016).
- Critical values for two-tailed test (2.57 significance level = 1%), one-tailed test (1.28 significance level 10%) (Hair *et al.*, 2017).
- $f^2$  0.02, 0.15, 0.35 represent small, medium and large effects (Cohen, 1988).
- $Q^2$  value larger than zero indicates the path model’s predictive relevance (Hair *et al.*, 2017).
- The advanced analysis of mediation effect through direct effect and indirect effect (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. Results

##### 4.1.1. Assessment of Reflective Model

The assessment of internal consistency in Table 1 shows that all of the constructs’ Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability values were all above 0.6 which passed the threshold value. As for the convergent validity, all of the outer loadings were ranging from 0.728 to 0.948 which passed the threshold value of 0.7. Additionally, the values for average variance extracted (AVE) were higher than the threshold value of 0.5. Last but not least, the assessment of discriminant validity through HTMT showed that the values among constructs were below 0.9 which suggested that the model achieved discriminant validity.

Table-1. Internal Consistency Reliability

Construct	Item	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Workload	C1, C2, C3, C4	0.826 to 0.889	0.885	0.887	0.743
Time	F1, F2, F3	0.848 to 0.948	0.880	0.895	0.808
DC	J1, J3, K1, K2, L1, L2, M1, M2, N1, N2	0.760 to 0.876	0.950	0.952	0.690
ATC	O1, O2, P1, P2, Q1, Q2	0.728 to 0.921	0.933	0.939	0.753

Table-2. Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	ATC	DC	Time
DC	0.667		
Time	0.762	0.643	
Workload	0.586	0.550	0.723

##### 4.2. Assessment of Structural Model

The assessment of structural model for collinearity issues found that all of the variance inflation factor values were below 10 which implied that the model is free from collinearity issue (Kline, 2016). Looking on the significance and relevance of structural model relationships, the values in Table 3 shown that the relationship between time and ATC and the relationship between DC and ATC change were two-tailed significant at significance level of 1% while the relationship of workload and attitude towards change was only one-tailed significant at significance level of 10%. The coefficient of determination  $R^2$  shown that attitude towards change had weak predictive accuracy while dialogic communication has moderate predictive accuracy. As for the effect size, both of the relationships between time and ATC and DC showed a medium effect size. Meanwhile, since the value of  $f^2$  from workload and ATC shown no effect size since the value is less than 0.02. As for the predictive relevance, both dialogic communication

and attitude towards change shown path model's predictive relevance since both values of 0.393 and 0.241 are larger than zero.

Table-3. Assessment of Structural Model

Relationship	Std. Beta	t-value	Significant?	R <sup>2</sup>	f <sup>2</sup>	VIF	Q <sup>2</sup>
Time → ATC	0.457	6.057**	Yes	0.378	0.237	2.010	0.393 (ATC)
Workload → ATC	0.078	1.299*	Yes		0.008	1.763	
DC → ATC	0.321	5.274**	Yes	0.562	0.146	1.607	0.241 (DC)

4.3. Assessment of Mediation

Table-4. Assessment of Mediation Effect on Workload

Mediation Assessment on Workload > Attitude towards Change					
	Direct Effect	95% Confidence Interval of the Direct Effect	t Value	Significance (p<0.05)?	Decision
Workload	0.457	[-0.298, 0.592]	1.299	No	Full Mediation
	Indirect Effect	95% Confidence Interval of the Indirect Effect	t Value	Significance (p<0.05)?	
	0.071	[-0.018, 0.134]	2.412	Yes	

The mediation analysis for change programme shown there was full mediation effect of dialogic communication between workload and attitude towards change. The direct effect was insignificant while there was a significant indirect effect. This represents the best-case scenario as this suggested that the mediator complies with the hypothesized theoretical framework (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, it was concluded that dialogic communication mediates the relationship between workload and attitude towards change.

Table-5. Assessment of Mediation Effect on Time

Mediation Assessment on Time > Attitude towards Change					
	Direct Effect	95% Confidence Interval of the Direct Effect	t Value	Significance (p<0.05)?	Decision
Time	0.078	[-0.043, 0.192]	6.666	Yes	Complementary (Partial mediation)
	Indirect Effect	95% Confidence Interval of the Indirect Effect	t Value	Significance (p<0.05)?	
	0.145	[0.082, 0.234]	3.657	Yes	

The mediation analysis for change programme shown there was complimentary (partial mediation) effect of dialogic communication between time and attitude towards change. Both of the direct effect and indirect effect were significant. This may provide a cue that another mediator may have been omitted whose indirect path has the same directions as the direct effect (Hair et al., 2017).

4.4. Discussion

The study produced results which were corroborated by the finding of past research which found that communication mediates change (Reis, 2002). Findings also contributed to the theoretical development of dialogic communication on how this method of conveying a message can facilitate organizational change from the standpoint of the employees' attitude towards change. The antecedents of resistance to change may, in fact be dialogically communicated to muster understanding between stakeholder of why change is necessary and why certain things need to be changed within a certain time frame. Research by Matos and Mark (2014) found that resistance to change was reduced by practising dialogic communication. Nonetheless, the effect of dialogic communication may vary across organizational change as it may be influenced by other factors. For instance, the

weightage of each dimension is different depending on the type of leadership imposed in managing change (Carpenter *et al.*, 2016). All in all, the findings further connect the possibility of what dialogic communication holds as it was mentioned that the elements of dialogic communication were correlated to the success of organizational change (Heuvel *et al.*, 2016).

## 5. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

This study has several methodological and conceptual limitations. First, a cross-sectional time frame was undertaken in this study which may not capture causal connections between the variables. Second, the dimensions of dialogic communication and attitude towards change were measured via Two-step approach which did not account for a higher level of measurement abstract as they were measured as a whole (Wilson and Henseler, 2007). Third, this research sampling was mixed with probability and non-probability method which may raise the question on the generalization aspect as this study was bounded by the non-availability of sampling frame on second stage sampling. In order to strengthen this research, any future study may address the limitations mentioned. Additionally, the relationships among dimensions of dialogic communication should also be considered as this can give a deeper understanding of the construct. Cross-validating the findings in different organizational change setting may also need to further reinforce the theoretical development of dialogic communication.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The findings discovered many potential benefits of practising dialogic communication in managing organizational change. Change management must be deeply anchored in the reality of today's society (Diana and Dorina, 2018). Therefore, it is suggested that change practitioners adopt this communication approach in order to amplify the likelihood of organizational change success as this form of communication addressed bigger angle of human aspects. Dialogic communication may ease the resistance among affected stakeholders which indirectly can nurture the right attitude to embrace organizational change. Practising this form of communication may require certain mastery and balancing of the five dimensions according to the change imposed. In practising this dimension, communicators need to not withholding information, rather communicators should disclose the adequate amount of information about the change whether it is favourable or unfavourable depending on the situation. In addition, communicators should seek to learn from parties involved and tend to those who may give uncomfortable responses. Nonetheless, this dimension in turns can be a strength as it can be developed collectively as the change progresses. Parties involved may be vulnerable to criticism and manipulation but accepted solutions from all parties might emerge from the dialogue.

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