

## Assessing Change Readiness and Change Management Approach of Education Managers in Iran: Case Study of Bushehr City

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### Abstract

*In this study, we investigated the change readiness and preferred change management approach of 253 education managers in Bushehr city, Iran. In this respect, we studied driving factors for change in education organization and their relationship with change readiness and change management approach. This study is based on the research conducted by Robbins (1987), and surveying participants by designing a Persian-language questionnaire. Obtained data were analyzed in SPSS software and using statistical tests for examining hypotheses. Results showed that readiness of studied managers for change in culture was in higher level compared to that for change in process, technology, and structure. In addition their preferred strategy to deal with change resistance was participative approach. Past experiences related to change, workforce shortage, IT use and duration of change management training courses are the most important factors driving Iranian education managers for change in their organization. Also we found significant relationship between these factors and change readiness of participants, but among these factors, the duration of training courses related to change had no effect on the selection of change management strategy by education managers.*

**Keywords:** Change management, change readiness, change approach, education, Iranian managers.

## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, the need for change and innovation in organizations in developed and industrialized countries has been recognized, but in many developing countries, the role and importance of this concept is not clear, yet. Areas that have seen the strongest pressures for change are: People, technology, information and communication, competition, and social trends (Griffin and Moorhead, 1989). There are different definitions of change management. It is about managing changes. It is commonly used to refer to “the process of managing a shift from some current state of operation toward some future state” (Dawson, 2006). In our study, it means assessing the ability of managers to deal with the necessary adaptation to changes inside and outside the organization. For a change to be successful, it needs high quality management and include following activities: motivation towards change, the creation of a vision, the development of political support, management of the transition and the maintenance of the impetus (French and Bell, 1995). For Lewin (1951), the process of change entails creating the perception that a change is needed, then moving toward the new, desired level of behavior and finally, solidifying that new behavior as the norm (i.e. *unfreezing*, *changing*, and *refreezing*). Cummings and Worley (2009) describe a five-phase process for managing change including: motivating change, creating vision, developing political support, managing the transition, and sustaining momentum. The necessity for the implementation of change management can be searched in two things: change readiness, and change management approach. Based on the study of Robbins (1987), in this study our purpose is to investigate effective factors in change readiness and change management approach of education managers in Iran so that it can help in improving the performance of the education organizations in national and international level.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1. Types of change in organizations**

Most organizations have to change as part of keeping up with the competition or adjusting to new market trends or technologies. Things such as mergers, restructuring, technological advancements, process enhancements, changing customer demands and new product lines are fairly common in today's business environments. In this regard, four types of change are change in strategy, change in structure, change in technology and change in people (Lussier, 2000). *Structural changes* are those changes made to the organization's structure that might stem from internal or external factors and typically affect how the company is run. It includes things such as the organization's hierarchy, chain of command, management systems, job structure and administrative procedures. *Strategic change* involves making changes to the overall goals, purpose, strategy or mission of an organization. It is a major upheaval to how the organization conducts business. An organization may change its strategy in the three levels of corporate, business and functional. *Technological changes* increase the rate of change in technology. Technology is a common way of increasing productivity to achieve a competitive leverage. Skills and performance of *people* should also be changed. People develop and implement the strategy and structure. Change in other variables will not be effective without people (Plunkett et al. 2008).

### **2.2. Driving factors for/against change**

There are many factors that cause changes. Dawson (2006) introduced effective factors for change as internal and external drivers. internal drivers include “structural and administrative

elements, changes in the nature of products and the delivery of services, technology, and initiatives aimed at the human side of enterprise”, while external drivers include “changes in business market activity, world events, legislation, trade regulations, and advances in technology”. According to Robbins (1987), some of important factors that cause and affect organizational change are as following: 1) change in goals, 2) purchase of new equipments, 3) scarcity of labor force, 4) establishment of an advanced system of data processing, 5) national regulations, 6) the increase in turnover, 7) lack of potential for executive management positions within the organization, 8) spent training programs related to change management, and 9) past experiences related to change management. There is also driving factors against change which include individual and organizational resistance.

### 2.3. Change readiness

Change readiness is the ability to continuously initiate and respond to change in ways that create advantage, minimize risk, and sustain performance. It is an assessment whether the organization will be able to successfully do some new tasks which have been asked. “Change readiness takes into account a compilation of multiple viewpoints to assess not only whether various audiences feel confident in making the change, but also to establish root causes of discomfort” (Combe, 2014a, p.6). Change readiness considers three important factors that impact readiness:

- “Cultural readiness: the degree of alignment between cultural norms and the proposed change.
- Commitment readiness: the degree of resolve and ability of the organization, through its leaders at all levels, to see the change through to successful and sustainable completion within the organization’s overall strategic agenda.
- Capacity readiness: the degree to which the organization is able to bring supportive work processes, historical knowledge and experience, current knowledge, skills and abilities, and resources to bear to aid in successful implementation and sustainability of the change” (Combe, 2014b).

One study on measuring general readiness to accept change and attitudes toward change showed that older managers are more conservative than the younger managers, and the confident managers are more radical than the unconfident; stable introverts and emotional extraverts tend to support innovation, while emotional introverts and stable extraverts did not (Kirton & Mulligan, 1973).

### 2.4. Change management approaches

There are different ways for managers for change management in organizations. Dunphy and State (1993) in their research proposed a contingency model of change implementation and claimed that managers should differentiate their change strategies based on the different external environments. Their proposed strategies are: participative evolution, charismatic transformation, forced evolution, and dictatorial transformation (see table 1).

**Table 1.** Dunphy and State’s model

Styles of change management	Scales of change management			
	Fine tuning	Incremental adjustment	Modular transformation	Corporate transformation
Collaborative	1- Participative evolution		2- Charismatic transformation	
Consultative				

Directive	3- Forced evolution	4- Dictatorial transformation
Coercive		

*Participative evolution* is used when organization is in fit but needs minor adjustment, or is out of fit but time is available and key interest groups help change; *charismatic transformation* is used when organization is out of fit, there is little time for extensive participation but there is support for radical change within the organization; *forced evolution* is for when organization is in fit but need minor adjustment or is out of fit but time is available, but key interest groups oppose change; and finally *dictatorial transformation* is for when organization is out of fit, there is no time for extensive participation and no support within organization for radical change, but radical change is vital to organizational survival and fulfillment of basic mission (Dunphy and State, 1988)

In another study conducted by Kotter and Schlesinger (2008), different strategies has been proposed to deal with resistance for change in organizations including education/communication, participation/involvement, facilitation/support, negotiation/agreement, negotiation/agreement, manipulation/cooperation, and explicit/implicit coercion (see table 2).

**Table 2.** Different approaches to change management (Kotter and Schlesinger, 2008)

Approach	Situation
Education/communication	Where there is a lack of information or inaccurate information and analysis
Participation/involvement	Where the initiators do not have all the information they need to design the change, and others have considerable power to resist
Facilitation/support	Where people are resisting because of adjustment problems
Negotiation/agreement	Where someone or some group will clearly lose out in a change, and where that group has considerable power to resist
Manipulation/cooperation	Where other tactics will not work or are too expensive
Explicit/implicit coercion	Where speed is necessary and the change initiators have considerable power

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1. Design

In this paper our aim is to assess the change readiness and change management approach of education managers in Bushehr city of Iran, and also investigate the effective factors for change in organizations. Our research is a descriptive-correlational study conducted as a field study.

#### 3.2. Participants

In this survey study, our participants consists of directors, deputy directors, and managers of education units and offices in 17 counties of Bushehr city in Iran in the academic year 2008 (n=270).

#### 3.3. Measures

We designed a questionnaire (in Persian) for measuring participants' change readiness and change management approach as well as determining effective factors for change. It has 36 items based on five-point likert-scale ranging from 1- very low to 5-very high. Items 1-7 measures cultural readiness, 8-12 measures readiness for structural change, 13-17 assess readiness for change in business processes, and item 18-21 assess readiness for technological change. Questions 22-25 concerns participative approach and 26-29 are about coercive approach. Also item 30 concerns managers' past experiences related to change management,

items 31-34 are related to IT use, and finally items 35 and 36 measures the workforce shortage. We used opinions of university professors and after modification and initial test, the validity of our questionnaire was verified. For testing its reliability we employed Cronbach's alpha coefficient whose value was obtained as 0.841 which was in acceptable range. We distributed 270 questionnaires among participants and 253 of them were filled out and returned.

### 3.4. Data analysis

Obtained data from questionnaire was analyzed in SPSS software using statistical test (frequency and Pearson correlation).

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Characteristics of participants

Results reported that participants had ages 30 above mostly between 31 and 40. Most of them were education branch managers (n=168). Also management experience of most of them was higher than 14 years (16%). In addition, results indicated that most of participants (n=123) had passed 101 to 200 hours change management courses (see table 3)

**Table 3.** Statistics of study participants

Measures	Frequency	%
<b>Age</b>		
<30	17	6.7
31-40	122	48.2
41-50	104	41.1
>50	7	2.8
Not specified	3	1.2
<b>Total</b>	253	100
<b>Management experience (year)</b>		
<2	10	4.0
2-5	48	19.0
5-8	57	22.5
8-11	82	32.4
11-14	12	4.7
>14	41	16.2
Not specified	3	1.2
<b>Total</b>	253	100
<b>Job title</b>		
Head	10	4.0
Deputy	31	12.3
Branch Manager	168	66.4
Not specified	44	17.3
<b>Total</b>	253	100
<b>Spent change management courses (hour)</b>		

<100	28	11.1
101-200	123	48.6
201-300	64	25.3
>300	38	15.0
Total	253	100

#### 4.2. Change readiness assessment

Assessment of change readiness for education managers in our study showed that mean value of cultural readiness was 4.075, for readiness for structural change it was 3.69, for change readiness in activities was 3.97, and the mean value of readiness for technological change was 3.85 (see table 4). So we can say that their readiness for structural and technological change was less than their other change readiness factors.

**Table 4.** Change readiness assessment results of the study subjects

Change readiness factors	Number	Mean	SD
Culture	253	4.0751	0.42583
Structure	253	3.6907	0.64083
Activity and process	253	3.9694	0.52213
Technology	253	3.8498	0.56758

#### 4.3. Change management strategy

Results assessing the used change management approach by education managers showed that the mean value of participative and coercive approach was 4.02 and 3.078, respectively (see table 5).

**Table 5.** Change management approach

Change management approach	Number	Mean	SD
Participative approach	253	4.0166	0.59378
Coercive approach	253	3.0791	0.48056

#### 4.4. Effective factors for change according to participants

Results of testing key factors for change in organizations showed that, according to participants, manpower shortage factor was the most effective driving factor for change (mean value= 3.23). In this regard, past experience factor (mean value=3.19) and the use of information technology (mean value= 3.05) were other driving factors for change (see table 6).

**Table 6.** Mean value of effective factors

Factors	Number	Mean	SD
Past experience	253	3.1897	1.00177
Manpower shortage	253	3.2253	0.81445
IT application	253	3.0514	0.92439

#### 4.5. Testing hypotheses

##### 4.5.1. Hypothesis one

Hypothesis one states that there is significant relationship between past change management experiences and change readiness. We used Pearson correlation test for this hypothesis.

Results indicated that correlation coefficient (R) between the two variables was 0.415 with a significance level of zero (p-value <0.05). This result supported our hypothesis.

#### **4.5.2. Hypothesis two**

Hypothesis two states that there is significant relationship between passed change management training courses and change readiness. Results of Pearson correlation test reported that correlation coefficient (R) between the two variables was 0.103 with a significance level of 0.02 (p-value <0.05). This also supported our second hypothesis.

#### **4.5.3. Hypothesis three**

Hypothesis three states that there is significant relationship between IT use and change readiness. Results of Pearson correlation test reported that correlation coefficient between the two variables was 0.338 with a significance level of 0.01 (p-value <0.05) which supports our third hypothesis.

#### **4.5.4. Hypothesis four**

Hypothesis four states that there is significant relationship between workforce shortage and readiness for change. Results of Pearson correlation test showed that correlation coefficient between the two variables was 0.360 with a significance level of zero (p-value <0.05) which supports our fourth hypothesis.

#### **4.5.5. Hypothesis five**

Hypothesis five says that there is significant correlation between workforce shortage and change management approach of education managers. Results of Pearson correlation test showed that correlation coefficient between the two variables was 0.379 with a significance level of zero (p-value <0.05). This supports our fifth hypothesis.

#### **4.5.6. Hypothesis six**

Hypothesis six declares that there is significant relationship between past experience related to change management and approach to change management. Results of Pearson correlation test showed that correlation coefficient between the two variables was 0.332 with a significance level of zero (p-value <0.05). This supports our sixth hypothesis.

#### **4.5.7. Hypothesis seven**

Hypothesis seven states that there is significant relationship between duration of spent training courses related to change and change management approach. Results of Pearson correlation test showed that correlation coefficient between the two variables was 0.063 with a significance level of 0.32 (p-value >0.05) so this does NOT supports our seventh hypothesis and we can not claim the existence of such correlation between two variables.

#### **4.5.8. Hypothesis eight**

Hypothesis eight claims that there is significant relationship between IT use and approach to change management. Reported results of Pearson correlation test was 0.33 and sig.=0.000 (p-value <0.05). This supports our eighth hypothesis.

## **5. Conclusion and recommendations**

This case study was conducted for the purpose of investigating change readiness and change management approach of education managers in Iran based on Robbins' model. Results of change readiness assessment indicated that cultural readiness of education managers in Iran was in higher level than their readiness for change in process, technology, and structure. In addition, results reported that they prefer participative approach to coercive approach for change management. Results of testing our hypotheses revealed that there is significant

relation between *past experiences* of managers related change management and their readiness for changes which is in consistence with the results of French and Bell (1995). Managers to deal with change needs many skills in this field one of which the experience factor which provides the necessary context to prepare managers for change. Managers by using their expertise and past experience in change and modernization of the organization have readiness to close their organization toward its goals. Human and cultural issues in the education have certain complexities that cannot be resolved without the experience and the knowledge of managers. We also found out that *IT use* and change readiness have significant relationship with each other. By using information technology on the one hand, the possibility of reducing educational costs is provided and on the other hand, it provides educational services in different areas, and access to education for everyone. Most of education managers consider it necessary to use information technology in their organizations and hence can react more quickly to problems and are ready to accept changes. According to the results of our study we also concluded that there is significant relationship between *workforce shortage* and change readiness of education managers which is in consistence with the results of Robbins (1987). Shortage of manpower in the education organization puts managers under pressure which may lead to changes for the dealing with shortages. It forces managers to use structures that are highly flexible and able to make use of employee participation, and provides the conditions that lead to the education director's readiness for change.

According to our results, we concluded that past experiences of education managers related to change, workforce shortage, and IT use can affect the selection of change management approaches in education managers in Iran, but we found no relationship between duration of change management training courses and selection of approach to change. An experienced manager establishes a stronger relationship with employees, respects their values, and involves them in decision making. When managers are faced with a shortage of manpower, to settle the affairs of the organization, turns to employees available in the organization and uses of their contribution. When an education director use information technology in organizations, the focus of the organization is changed he takes a decision in consultation with their staff, and participate them in the affairs of organization to work together as a group. Given that most managers in our study believed in a participative approach, the approach provided the context for change in management, such that self-confidence, self-esteem and responsibility in them had increased and led them to be closer to their goals so that change the status quo and to reach optimal point. Lack of relationship between the amount of spent training courses related to change and the strategy of education managers to deal with change resistance may indicate to the weak efficiency of spent training courses in strengthening the participatory.

### **5.1. Recommendations**

Since the change readiness of education managers in Bushehr city of Iran was verified, to enhance their readiness and openness to change we recommend:

- Preparation and informing the managers and employees about the need for change and its benefits for the organization;
- Creating an open and favorable space (culture) in the organization and strengthening the spirit of innovation, experience, and risk;
- Short-term and long-term in-service training courses related to change management;



- Revision of the curriculum of educational programs related to the change, with the aim of improving the participative approach;
- Institutionalization of change and its importance and in the education;
- Use of managers who have the experience of successful change management;
- Use of the units in organization that are facing a shortage of manpower to implement change

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