

Examining the effect of employee commitment on organizational change management: A study of Public Sector Universities in Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: In recent times, it has become important for the institutions to evolve according to the changing environment to sustain in the industry. In this scenario, the public sector universities, like any other institutions, need to respond to change according to the dynamic needs of the industry and the developments in general environment. The purpose of this study is to draw the attention of the universities about the significance of the organizational change. **Methodology:** The present study adopted the quantitative method and the SPSS program was utilized to analyze the effect of employee commitment (independent variable) on organizational change management (dependent variable). To achieve the objective, a questionnaire was used to gather the data from three public universities. A total of 54 responses were collected from the universities employees and analyzed in this study. **Findings:** The study results revealed that the increased degree of employee commitment has a positive impact on the success of the organizational change management process in public universities. In addition, the results infer that an increase in the employee commitment decreases the employee resistance. Finally, the results also confirm that when the employee commitment and their effectiveness increases, it has a positive effect on the need to change. **Implications:** The study findings are crucial and emphasize the importance to focus on strategic and sustainable human resource management in universities. This is attributed to the fact that it impacts the degree of employees' commitment in fostering a successful organizational change management in the tertiary institutions. **Originality:** To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have been conducted earlier in this subject in the context of public universities located in Kurdistan, Iraq.

Key words: Change management, change resistance, employee commitment, universities

JEL Classifications: Research Paper

INTRODUCTION

In the past few decades, the public sector organizations started implementing the reforms and changed their contents, contexts, structures, policies, and strategies due to internal and external reasons (Ahmad and Cheng, 2018). However, not all the initiatives taken to adapt and

implement the changes in the organizations were successful (Van der Voet et al., 2016). Hassan (2018) considered the change management process as an important aspect of the modern organizations. It is important for the institutions to evolve irrespective of its nature such as the public sector or private sector, companies, or factories. Hence, the educational institutions must adapt to the changes in

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the industry, not only to satisfy their students' needs or beneficiaries of the provided service or commodity but also to maintain their position in the market. This is crucial due to the strong relations between the universities and the market, where it functions (Chikaeva et al., 2020). Further, the role played by information and knowledge in socioeconomics and the effect of the skilled workforce on labor market are also significant (Gryshchenko et al., 2021). One of the important aspects that affect the success of the change initiatives is the behavior of the employees toward the change and their responses to change in the organization, that is, either acceptance or resistance toward the upcoming change. Since the public sector universities in Iraq are striving to attain sustainability (Hamadamin and Atan, 2019), it should believe in adopting the change in their working culture.

Change Management

The concept of change management has evolved in a way such that it covers the need for the change within organizations and the institutions. According to Stouten et al. (2018), change is the application of materials and human resources in new ways or methodologies to bring or move forward from the current situation to the intended situation. As per the literature, the attempts made to adapt and manage the change were not completely successful in the earlier studies. This is due to the lack of preparation and analysis of all the factors that are required to successfully implement an organizational change. Among the main influencing factors of a successful change management process, the participation of the individuals in change process, their attitudes, convictions, opinions, behavior, and reactions toward the process gain significance (Raineri, 2011).

The Context of Organizational Change Management (OCM)

In 1947, Lewin used the term "Organizational Change Management" (OCM) at first in organizational behavior studies. The focus of the study was to understand the behavior of the individuals as study subjects in the institutions (Burnes, 2020). Lewin divided the OCM stages into three phases such as the unfreezing phase, moving phase, and the refreezing phase. The first phase is the phase of motivation to implement a change (Bashori et al., 2020) in the organization. According to Bashori et al., (2020), the second phase is the moving phase, in which the concepts and approaches are developed to implement a change. Finally, refreezing phase is followed during when the changes that have occurred in the culture of an organization are indulged.

In change management process, many applications are used with different purposes. In general, the success of an organizational change is influenced by multiple factors such as the organizational change plan, selection of the responsible leaders to lead the change process, interchange in the jobs as a result of change implementation, and employees' reaction to the change implemented (Hassan, 2018). Besides, multiple models of change management applications are followed such as the monitoring programs to measure the effectiveness of a change, participation of the stakeholders in the change process to reduce the resistance to change, change agents, the degree of commitment among the senior departments toward the change plan, and training of the employees to manage any change that occurs within the change management processes (Burnes, 2011).

There is no doubt that the change management process has its own challenges. Hence, the change leaders must prepare for such challenges. They must persuade the employees to accept the change process rather than resist the change. The aim is to keep the employees coherent and in line with the goals set for the organization (Van Dam et al., 2008).

Various research investigations have been conducted earlier to identify the individuals' reactions to a certain number of variables including the factors that affect their behavior and responses. As per the literature, if more organizational employees are involved in the change process, the chances of the desired change increases in terms of yielding the desired results (Wanberg and Banas, 2000). On the contrary, if the percentage of dissatisfied employees increases during the change process, the employees will be reluctant to participate in the change management process. If an organization undergoes the change process multiple times, many problems are experienced due to resistance to change, which, in turn, increases the possibility of failure of the required change (Cohen and Williams, 2021).

In the literature, the behaviors of the individuals involved in the process of change are defined. Two attitudes are commonly found in human behavior such as the resistance and the openness (Oreg, 2006). The main role of the administrative leaders and those who are responsible to bring the change process is to reduce the resisting behavior among the employees and increase a supportive behavior and openness to change.

EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT

The most debated concepts in academia and scientific research include organizational commitment and

institutional commitment. The concept of institutional commitment can be linked to social exchange theory, since the theory emphasizes a mutual benefit between the needs of the employees and the goals of the organization (Ali et al., 2022). According to Lee and Olshfski (2001), the concept of commitment is an interactive relationship between an employee's feelings and the workplace of the employee. Based on Visagie and Steyn's (2011) findings, the degree of commitment among the employees toward their organization has a significant impact on their ability to achieve the company's goals. It is important to note that employee commitment is a controversial topic. Hence, the change managers in the organizations must keep their employees committed to their change management processes.

The Connection Between Employee Commitment and Organizational Change

Many theories in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) inferred that if an employee gains more benefits from their work environment, the more he/she remains committed to the workplace. For instance, Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) selected three dimensions for employee commitment and these are normative commitment (failing of obligating to accept the change), affective commitment (support to change because they expect to benefit), and continuous commitment (the feeling of losing more if they do not support the change). Both forms of commitment were noted as having an instrumental positive role in boosting long-term commitment levels in organizations. According to Shin et al. (2015), despite both normative and continuous commitment being vital in change management, affective commitment was discovered as having a greater positive effect on effective management.

Hechanova et al. (2018) highlighted that organizations are part of human systems; therefore, any change in the organizations will be affected by how individuals working in those organizations react. Practical evidence tells us that employees feel uncomfortable toward upcoming change due to what comes with change such as loss of jobs, extra responsibility, difficult tasks, replacing new employees, and bad experiences (Shin et al., 2015). In addition, Sharon et al. (2011) established that employees' normative commitment to the process of change positively affects their attitude in support of change. In light of the above discussions, the following study hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis one: Employee commitment has a positive effect on organizational change management.

Change Management in the Higher Education Sector

In general, like other organizations and institutions, the universities too need reforms and changes in their instructor strategy, policy, and process to sustain in the competitive market. This is because the universities face internal challenges in the form of financial and non-financial activities (Mahdi and Almsafir, 2014) and external challenges such as the competition with other universities (Middlehurst, 2013). Besides, all the universities strive to occupy the lead position in the market than the rest of the universities (Taka, 2010). In this scenario, the aim of is to achieve sustainable goals (Taylor, 2013). The roadmap to reach the goals of the universities is to link the universities and the market. Today, the universities are strongly associated with the concepts of entrepreneurship, industry, and economics.

According to Nureev et al. (2020), the modernized higher education sector is characterized by continuous reforms and changes. This is due to the strong influence of the socioeconomic, market economy, and planned economy concepts in developed countries. In response to the continuous developments in a general environment, Olorube and Olorube (2017) hinted that a comprehensive change can be accomplished in the Nigerian universities through an appropriate implementation of the change management practices that promote the right attitudes and perceptions. Van Hoek (2020) also made similar considerations and cited that an effective change management must deal with potential risks and supervise the total cost of the ownership. It must cater to the suppliers' interests since it is the key aspect in fostering the right attitude, approach, and response to COVID-19-related change management. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the universities started adopting effective teaching learning processes through hybrid and online mode. This is a fine example for an effective information and awareness program (Sandars et al., 2020).

According to Skribans et al. (2013), the role of the first generation university was to train highly-qualified specialists, whereas the second generation university aimed at developing the research activities. However, the third generation tries to be the center of innovation, transfer, and implementation process. In light of the above explanation, if universities do not update themselves and change their work system, they cannot participate in the development of the modern communities, especially when change is rapidly occurring in all the sectors of the community (Nureev et al., 2020). Nureev et al. (2020) concluded on the concept of change management that change can significantly affect the

academic institutions. However, Ekechi and Umar (2020) underscored the importance of a clear vision and the need to motivate the employees so as to achieve the desired change outcomes in the planned change. This implies that similar benefits can be obtained in the academic institutions, if a clear vision coupled with effective motivational strategies which are made available.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

After reviewing the studies conducted earlier, the authors developed a research framework for the present study and is shown in Figure 1. The framework shows the relationship between the independent variable (employee commitment) and the dependent variable (organizational change) used for the current quantitative study. The data were collected from three public universities located in Kurdistan region, Iraq such as the Salahaddin University, Koya University, and the Garmian University. The study focuses on public universities since the employee turnover is high. The possible reasons are linked with low employee commitment and change management programs as opposed to the private universities. The conceptual framework, developed for this study, is used to implement the methodological procedures.

A simple random sampling method was used in this study to distribute the questionnaires so that each and every employee of the three universities get an equal chance of participating in the survey. The collected data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics, whereas the proposed hypothesis was tested using independent t-tests using the SPSS program (version 20). More than 75 questionnaires were distributed among the faculty members of the public universities. A total of 59 questionnaires were received, out of which 54 completely-filled correct questionnaires were selected for conducting the analysis. Both reliability and the validity of the data were tested and the results are shown in Table 1.

ANALYSIS AND RESULT

The present study was conducted to examine the relationship between employee commitment and the organizational



Figure 1: Conceptual framework

change management in tertiary institutions, especially public universities. The data were analyzed using the SPSS software (version 20) and the findings are presented in Tables 1-3.

Table 1 shows the frequency tabulation for the collected dataset. Out of the study samples, 25 employees (46.30%) agreed and 23 individuals (42.60%) strongly agreed to first and second questions, respectively (Refer the questionnaire attached in the Appendix 1 & 2). This denotes their consent regarding the role played by employee commitment in fostering the change management process. On the contrary, 16 employees (29.60%) strongly disagreed to the 21st question. This brings concerns about the role and effectiveness of employee commitment in fostering the change management. The outcomes demand that the universities must enact novel strategies to improve such aspects. On the whole, most of the employees agree that employee commitment plays an important role in fostering the change management process. Therefore, it can be inferred that the strategies aimed at promoting the employee commitment are essential and should be implemented in tertiary institutions to promote an effective change management.

Table 2 displays the correlation outcome (0.430) between employee commitment and the change management. The results infer the presence of a moderate positive correlation between employee commitment and the change management. To be precise, this translates into the fact that the moderately positive correlation between the variables is significant. Hence, any changes in the employee commitment variable impacts the change management practices applied in the universities, too. Therefore, the study hypothesis is accepted since the probability value of 0.01 is <0.05.

Table 3 shows that the employee commitment has a positive significant effect on the organizational change management (0.609 and t-value = 1.557). Thus, the study hypothesis is accepted. This inference reiterates the importance of implementing a sound and an effective strategy that is capable of boosting the employee commitment levels in educational institutions.

DISCUSSION

The present study has discussed the concepts of change management in tertiary institutions. The aim of the study is to find the degree to which the change management responds to the changes in employee management processes. It is obligatory for an organization to adapt to the changes and update its systems by matching the needs

Table 1: Demographic information of the respondents

	Count	Table, N %	Cronbach's alpha if item deleted	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
What is your gender?						
Male	38	70.4	0.438	1.30	0.461	0.212
Female	16	29.6				
How old are you						
20–30	35	64.8	0.451	1.35	0.482	0.232
31–40	19	35.2				
What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed						
Undergraduate/Bachelor	38	70.4	0.457	1.56	0.883	0.780
Institute/Diploma	2	3.7				
Postgraduate	14	25.9				
How many years of experience do you have in university						
0–2	16	29.6	0.474	2.04	0.931	0.867
3–5	26	48.1				
6–9	6	11.1				
10+	6	11.1				
What is your position/level in university?						
Regular employee	33	61.1	0.454	1.44	0.604	0.365
Supervisor/Manager	18	33.3				
Head/Director	3	5.6				

Table 2: Correlation coefficient test results

	Correlations	
	Employee commitment	Organizational change management
Employee commitment		
Pearson correlation	1	
Sig. (2-tailed)		
N	54	
Organizational change management		
Pearson correlation	0.43**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	
N	54	54

of the market and meet the strategic objectives. However, change management is a challenging process and it includes a number of obstacles. The employees who are not committed to their company increase the chances of change management failure as investigated in this study. Meanwhile, the organizational change management helps the institutions to achieve specific positions, according to their existing plans.

Many factors influence the effectiveness and success of the change management process among which employee commitment is an important factor. Employee commitment denotes the degree of loyalty of an employee to his or her workplace or job. The organizations need to provide opportunities for the employees to apply their knowledge and use their skills. This is because the organizational commitment can influence the employees' behavior during

Table 3: Hypotheses results

Hypothesis	Intersection	Beta	Hypothesis testing		t-value	Decision
			99% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
			Lower	Upper		
H1	Employee commitment – > organization change management	0.609	–0.0912	0.357	1.557	Supported

the change process. Moreover, the attitudes and the degree of employee commitment define the connection between the employees and the organization. It can influence the employees' satisfaction level as well. The present study investigated the influence of employee commitment on organizational change management in universities. For this study, the authors developed the questionnaires, distributed it and a total of 54 employees' responses were used to conduct the analysis. Quantitative analysis was conducted and the outcomes revealed that employee commitment can positively influence the organizational change management. The following conclusions are arrived at the end of the study.

- High levels of employee commitment can increase the success of the organizational change management. This stems from the fact that any minor increase in the employee commitment can increase the organizational change management too.
- The level of commitment among the university employees is high due to the positive perspectives toward the entire change management process and a commitment to change.
- The university employees are effective and committed to their respective institutions. This causes a high level of effectiveness within the universities.
- There exists a connection between the need to change and the commitment to change.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the outcomes achieved, the following recommendations are made:

1. Both compensation and benefits paid to the university staff must be revised to reflect their skills and experience levels.
2. A sophisticated recruitment process is significant at the universities for recruiting the best-qualified candidates who are flexible enough toward the organizational change.
3. The university staff must regularly participate in training programs, according to their work requirements. These training programs boost their commitment levels toward

the change management processes and the organization as a whole.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The present study is a sector- and country-specific research study and the findings are applicable only in the context of public universities in Iraq. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized to other sectors or countries. In addition, dynamic data analysis methods should be applied to test the nature and the significance of the relationship between employee commitment and change management to enhance the robustness of the study results. Hence, the future studies can incorporate highly-advanced data analysis methods such as the regression analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach. In addition, the factors that influence the change management process should be incorporated to build an integrated model that can be applied in two or more sectors.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Any conflicts of interest are not declared in this study.

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APPENDIXS

Appendix 1: Research questionnaire

Questionnaire Form

Part 1: Demographics

1. Gender: ----- Male----- Female
2. Age: ----- 20-30----- 31-40----- 41-50----- More than 50
3. Education level: ----- High school ----- Institute/Diploma ----- Undergraduate/Bachelor ----- Postgraduate
4. Years of experience: ----- 0-2 ----- 3-5 ----- 6-9----- 10+
5. Position/level: ----- Regular employee ----- Supervisor/Manager ----- Head/Director

Part 2: Questions

#	Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Employee commitment						
1	I attend office early and/or stay late without compensation to finish a task.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I help my coworkers who have some difficult tasks even though it is not my responsibility.					
3	My university provides me appropriate benefits to keep me in the university.					
4	In general, I am satisfied with University's culture and its work environment.					
5	I perform all the tasks which are given to me without delay.					
6	I am usually quick in understanding and taking new tasks and responsibilities.					
7	I am satisfied with my supervisor or manager's way of treating me.					

(Contd...)

#	Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
8	I find my office comfortable to achieve the highest results.					
9	My commitment to my job helps University to improve its effectiveness and achieve its goals.					
10	The more I commit to my job the newer ideas University will have.					
	Organizational change management					
11	My manager always informs me why change is needed precisely.					
12	During change, my manager acts as a supportive leader instead of just giving order.					
13	Effective communication is available to eliminate any fear between my manager and I that appears due to change.					
14	During any change process in University my roles and duties are clearly defined due to effective communication.					
15	University creates opportunities for my personal development through positive involvement of its employees.					
16	University encourages me to achieve more than what I would in the same position but in another company.					
17	University has training available for me to support the change process.					
18	University conducts training need assessments to find out what I lack and need.					
19	I accept change only if I make sure I can perform my tasks properly after the change.					
20	I don't accept change if the change is a threat to my benefits.					
21	I accept change as a highly committed employee.					
22	Unlike me, uncommitted employees will increase the likelihood of change implementation failure.					
23	University needs changing, and I know the importance of why change is required.					
24	I believe the requirements for change will bring in positive outcomes in university					

Appendix 2: Descriptive analysis and reliability tests

Q	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Natural		Agree		Strongly agree		Cranach's Alpha if item Deleted	Validity	Mean	Standard deviation	Variance
	Count	Table, N %	Count	Table, N %	Count	Table, N %	Count	Table, N %	Count	Table, N %					
1	1	1.90%	4	7.40%	16	29.60%	25	46.30%	8	14.80%	0.46	0.007	3.65	0.894	0.798
2	0	0.00%	2	3.70%	6	11.10%	23	42.60%	23	42.60%	0.437	0.142	4.24	0.799	0.639
3	3	5.60%	5	9.30%	11	20.40%	27	50.00%	8	14.80%	0.436	0.203	3.59	1.037	1.076
4	5	9.30%	6	11.10%	12	22.20%	27	50.00%	4	7.40%	0.422	0.316*	3.35	1.084	1.176
5	0	0.00%	1	1.90%	8	14.80%	26	48.10%	19	35.20%	0.424	0.291*	4.17	0.746	0.557
6	1	1.90%	0	0.00%	4	7.40%	26	48.10%	23	42.60%	0.412	0.433**	4.3	0.768	0.59
7	1	1.90%	4	7.40%	16	29.60%	28	51.90%	5	9.30%	0.426	0.273*	3.59	0.836	0.699
8	3	5.60%	6	11.10%	13	24.10%	24	44.40%	8	14.80%	0.401	0.488**	3.52	1.059	1.122
9	2	3.70%	12	22.20%	14	25.90%	24	44.40%	2	3.70%	0.397	0.474**	3.22	0.965	0.931
10	1	1.90%	6	11.10%	15	27.80%	26	48.10%	6	11.10%	0.415	0.363**	3.56	0.904	0.818
11	3	5.60%	10	18.50%	13	24.10%	25	46.30%	3	5.60%	0.43	0.250	3.28	1.017	1.035
12	8	14.80%	13	24.10%	9	16.70%	20	37.00%	4	7.40%	0.408	0.405**	2.98	1.236	1.528
13	3	5.60%	8	14.80%	11	20.40%	21	38.90%	10	18.50%	0.458	0.633**	4.06	4.168	17.374
14	1	1.90%	1	1.90%	11	20.40%	25	46.30%	16	29.60%	0.407	0.433**	4	0.869	0.755
15	0	0.00%	1	1.90%	15	27.80%	27	50.00%	11	20.40%	0.427	0.251	3.89	0.744	0.553
16	1	1.90%	3	5.60%	13	24.10%	30	55.60%	7	13.00%	0.459	0.017	3.72	0.834	0.695
17	3	5.60%	13	24.10%	17	31.50%	15	27.80%	6	11.10%	0.443	0.221	3.15	1.089	1.185
18	1	1.90%	1	1.90%	16	29.60%	26	48.10%	10	18.50%	0.416	0.361**	3.8	0.833	0.694
19	0	0.00%	3	5.60%	9	16.70%	28	51.90%	14	25.90%	0.43	0.280*	3.98	0.812	0.66
20	9	16.70%	14	25.90%	12	22.20%	13	24.10%	6	11.10%	0.424	0.308*	2.87	1.275	1.624
21	1	1.90%	16	29.60%	15	27.80%	15	27.80%	7	13.00%	0.398	0.479**	3.2	1.071	1.146
22	4	7.40%	5	9.30%	6	11.10%	20	37.00%	19	35.20%	0.461	0.083	3.83	1.225	1.5
23	5	9.30%	9	16.70%	3	5.60%	21	38.90%	16	29.60%	0.457	0.133	3.63	1.322	1.747
24	1	1.90%	1	1.90%	6	11.10%	24	44.40%	22	40.70%	0.45	0.107	4.2	0.855	0.731

