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**Roots of Resistance: What Fuels Change Cynicism and Its Impact in Malakand Division's Public Sector Universities**

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**Abstract**

Organizational change is essential for the survival and success of any institution. This study examines the role of change communication in facilitating the implementation of organizational change across various universities in the Malakand Division. Data were collected through a questionnaire from the employees working in these universities. The findings indicate a positive relationship between change communication and the successful implementation of organizational change. Additionally, the results reveal that employee commitment serves as a full mediator between change communication and change implementation. However, this study is limited to a single sector, and future research should consider diverse samples and adopt a longitudinal study design. Overall, the study highlights the critical role of change communication in driving organizational change while emphasizing the strong commitment of employees during the process.

**Key words:** Change Communication, Commitment, Change Implementation.

**Introduction**

The higher education sector has been suffering marvelous changes and challenges during the last two decades, including increased competition for students, declines in financial funds, and questioning from government for good governance of higher educations (Kok & McDonald, 2017). Consequently, the higher education institutes need to cope the ever shifting educational environment. The higher education institutes face such kinds of changes, the initiatives on the part of higher education commission for improving quality of education and research and recently implemented universities model Act in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) show dire need for successful change implementation. Once the change initiatives interrupt the inherent educational environment, employees assert to react negatively and not committed to change (Thacker, 2020). For instance, several researchers have mentioned that the organizational practices as “organizational slogans”. It is suggested the word organization as “expand the sound between teaching and administrative staff” and the predominant responses of employees toward universities lead to distrust and hostility (Ma, 2022). Organizational leader really attempt to manage, support and coping the organizational changes, these changes need to improve employee’s behaviors and attitudes that has positive impact on organizational commitment (Turgeman-Lupo, Hilo-Merkovich, & Biron, 2022).

The change communication is an important factor in order to implement successful organizational changes (Alqudah, Carballo-Penela, & Ruzo-Sanmartín, 2022). The change communication is a technique to inform and encouraged employees to accept organizational changes. In fact, the

collaboration of employees is important during the change process till their real behaviors that bring organizational change implementation (Falcão da Palma Ferreira & Costa, 2022). Currently the organizational leaders assume that the employees not only to cope and implement the changes but also to initiate the changes themselves (Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2018). Consequently, the vital role of a leader in sharing of information about organizational changes and the role of employees during coping to effective implementation of organizational changes become awful. During the last decade the relationship exists between organizational change and change communication has been the focus of researchers and practitioners. Frequently, researchers have identified that change communication and organizational change is an area of interest that need to be developed (Verčič, 2021). In this regard, the research have shown the change communication has been the subject to examine and conclude theoretical models guiding the study (Romadona & Setiawan, 2021). Previous research on change communication tends to information's that satisfy the employees higher needs (Bansal & King, 2022). However change communication share high level of information's and purpose of the change program, communication of change distributes information on the extent and consequences of change, nurtures constructive attitudes of employees, and encourages a sense of belonging (Zagelmeyer, Sinkovics, Sinkovics, & Kusstatscher, 2018), it gives information about employee sense of insecurity. For instance, lacking in change communication lead to negative feeling of employees (Li, Sun, Tao, & Lee, 2021). If the information is delivered to the employees so they will be committed towards the change. The main purpose of the current study is to fill the gap by examining and evaluating change communication approaches toward the research conducted on organizational changes. Especially, lack of communication lead to employees distress, insecurity and resistance to organizational change (Chow, Chan, & Micelotta, 2020). In contrast to this, if the adequate information about the change is properly shared, then the employees are more committed to change and have high level of job satisfaction (Aruldoss, Kowalski, & Parayitam, 2020) suggested turnover intention can be reduced through change communication (Oliveira & Najnudel, 2022).

### **Literature Review:**

The change communication is delivered before the initiating organizational changes; the employees in an organization are more committed toward the change. In this context, the change program is supported, accepted and implemented in organization. The organizational change can be defined as modifications in organizational measures, polices, and rules regulations (P. Xu & Wu, 2022). For instance, change is an important aspect of modern organizations globally to compete in competitive environment to gain advantage, and coping the changes is a requirement for survival. In this regard, every organization is trying to attain their desirable objectives. González, del Val, and Cano (2022), suggested that the change is an undesirable condition for employees, some employees cope changes and some resist to organizational change. Mostly employees dealing with uncertainty, resistance toward the change occurs, which can be described as “employee supposed hopelessness to estimate it precisely” (Castillo, 2022). Both the Errida and Lotfi (2021) reported that up to two third of the organizational change initiatives is successful and half may be perceived as unsuccessful and ineffective, which leads to low level of employees commitment toward the change, such as disbelief in organizational management, ambiguity toward change, inadequate information about the change program and insecurity. Employees' attitudes toward the change, the subsequent achievement is essential as to change itself to accept the change (Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022). Specially, lack in the communication leads to employees' distress and ambiguity and not to accept the change (Bansal & King, 2022). In contrast, if change communication is properly communicated to the employees of an organization then they are more committed to change then the employees are highly motivated to cope the changes (Mashhady, 2021) reduced the level of turnover intentions (Kaur and Randhawa , 2020). Hence, objectivity of

change program is likewise significant (Borges & Quintas, 2020). The associations between the variables of the study, further established in the subsequent sections and relationship between them.

### **Organizational Change**

Organizational change is the factor that may affect both internal and external life of an organization (Fedor & Herold, 2004; Hite & McDonald, 2020; Strauss, Schatzman, Bucker, Danuta, & Melvin, 2017). Fernandez and Rainey (2006) suggested that before the implementation of organizational change, it is important for management of an organization that they should informed employees of such kind of changes that occur within organization.

### **Change Communication**

The change communication is defined as the adequate information provided to employees before initiating organizational change (Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2007; Quirke, 2017). If adequate information is provided about the change then employees will be more committed toward change (Kalyal & Saha, 2008; Oreg et al., 2007; Peus, Frey, Gerkhardt, Fischer, & Traut-Mattausch, 2009). Employees of an organization have a greater chance to stating their perspective about the change program through delivery of effective communication, then employees are more committed to change (Brown & Cregan, 2008; Cox, Arnold, & Tomás, 2010).

### **Commitment to Change**

It is the level of attachment of employees to accept, support organizational change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Shah, Irani, & Sharif, 2017). Previous research have shown that commitment to change is vital factor in implementing effective organizational change (Pitts, 2006). If employees have low level of commitment to change then they are not willing to accept the change. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002), proposed a construct of commitment, which include three extents, comprising of affective, normative and continuance commitment to change. Affective commitment describes employee feeling to support the change and normative commitment is a sense of employee accountability and duties to accept organizational change while continuance commitment if the employees' have the perception not to accept the change, it may cost them adversely.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

The purpose of current research is to explore the role of change communication in implementing organizational change. A lot of researches have underlined the importance of communication during effective implementation of change, (Hein, 2022). Specially, the research will adopt Social Information Processing theory to examine informational and social side. Social Information Processing employed because it describes the change communication influencing job related attitudes, and this theory has gotten rock-solid empirical provision (Williams et al., 2006). The present study takes both informational and relational aspects into consideration. The variable change communication entails the informational side. The social side consists of two variables commitment and implementation of organizational change.

Figure 1 show the conceptual framework of this study. The quality of change communication is independent variable (IV), commitment to change is mediating variable (MED) and organizational change implementation is dependent variable (DP). If the information about the change is delivered to employees of an organization and the employees are committed toward the change then it is easy to implement successful organizational change.



*Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study*

### **Effects of Commitment on Organizational Change Implementation**

The commitment toward change is the perception of employee's willingness with particular course of action, and it is important for the employees to implement organizational change (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021). The researchers have suggested that organizational commitment of employees is an important element for successful change implementation (Pitts (2006). During implementing of change, the employees have shown negative attitudes to accept the change. Commitment of employees in implementing change reduces the employee resistance to change as suggested by Busari, Khan, Abdullah, and Mughal (2019). If the employees have positive feeling toward organizational change program, then it considered that employees are more committed toward organizational change (Nadeem, 2020). If there is low level of employee's commitment toward the change program, then it has negative effect on organizational change implementation (Onyeneke & Abe, 2021). According to Bouckenooghe, Devos, and Van den Broeck (2009) it has been recognized to check and prove commitment to change within organization is relatively a newly construct. In the context of this construct it contains three magnitude such as affective, normative and continuance commitment to change. Affective commitment is the desire of employees to support the organizational change program whereas normative commitment is the responsibility or duty of employees to support the change program and continuance commitment entails if the employees do not support the change it may cost them adversely (Jaros, 2010). The three magnitudes of the construct, the Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, and Topolnysky (2002) have suggested three module of commitment to change. In the said context, Aslam (2021) have proposed that commitment to change of employees is an important element of successful change implementation.

H1: Commitment to change has positive relationship with change implementation.

### **Relationship between Change Communication and Change Implementation**

Change is an important for every organization to survive globally in the modern competitive environment (S. Xu, Stienmetz, & Ashton, 2020). Van den Heuvel, Schalk, Freese, and Timmerman (2016) have suggested validated research on organizational change implementation with employee's performance. There are various kinds of change activities such as procedure change, technological changes, long term changes and operational changes (Imran, Rehman, Aslam, & Bilal, 2016). In incorporating of procedure changes, effective implementation of change program is very significant (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). The implementation of change is a state where the employees are performing well and doing everything good as earlier (Wang, Olivier, & Chen, 2020). The organization change implementation is influenced due to a lot of reasons, for example cynicism about organizational change, employees feeling towards the change, change manager and quality of change communication (Imran et al., 2016). However, the employees' having negative feeling toward the change is negatively affecting organizational change implementation (Krauss & Vanhove, 2022). A lot of studies have shown that effective delivery of change communication has a significant association with employee positive work attitudes, i-e job

motivation and readiness to change program. While the information received by the employees is very important and helpful than no information's (Haumer, Schlicker, Murschetz, & Kolo, 2021), research studies have proposed that quality of change information directly affect the employee's attitudes towards the organizational change implementation. In this regard, lack in quality of change communication lead to resistance to change and effective delivery of information decrease employees resistance toward the change, it lead to employee acceptance of change program (K. I. Miller & Monge, 1985). Employees within an organization face high degree uncertain situations during implementation of organizational change. Effectiveness in change communication decrease ambiguity during the change implementation, and when the employees are well informed of organizational change then easily cope with the changes that are implemented.

H2: Change communication has a positive relationship with organizational change implementation.

### **Mediating role of Commitment between Change Communication and Organizational Change Implementation**

The change communication play a vital role in influencing employees in the organization (Roundy & Bayer, 2019), as well as their feelings toward the change (Raitis, Harikkala-Laihinen, Hassett, & Nummela, 2018). The change communication is important during implementation of organizational change (Barrett, Ford, & Zhu, 2021), also it assist the employees deal with ambiguity and increase adoptability toward change. In this regard the change communication should smart and provided it to employees through different mode of communication (Bansal & King, 2022). In contrast to this insufficient information about the change lead to uncertainty and reduced the level of commitment to change (Angwin, Larson, Mattu, & Kirchner, 2016). However, earlier studied have shown that quality of change communication is important for ensuring favorable and positive organizational environment during change implementation (Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022). The aim of this paper is to determine the importance of change communication during change implementation. When the management of organization ensures effective quality of change communication, it lead to commitment to change and reduced the negative effects of change during its implementation (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). To enhance the negative feeling of employees toward change implementation, quality of change communication must be provided (Hussain et al., 2018; Qian & Daniels, 2008; Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005). The existing literature presents that if employees of an organization are more committed towards the change, then it is easy for employees to accept the change and play an effective mediating role of commitment to change between the quality of change communication and organizational change implementation. The employees of an organization can be facilitated to see the things from their own and management perspective by providing them adequate information (Brown & Cregan, 2008; Doppelt & McDonough, 2017; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000). During the implementing organizational change and the information's perceived by the employees, than they becomes more committed towards the change and ensure teamwork and reduced resistance toward organizational change implementation (Oreg et al., 2007). In the said context, the association between quality of change communication and commitment to change plays an important role in successful organizational change implementation (Peus et al., 2009). Commitment to change describes the emotive relationship of organizations and their employees. When the employees of organization are more committed to organizational change implementation and them willing to realizing organizational goals, such as employees motivation, faithfulness, and optimistic sentiment towards an organization (Uygungil & İşcan, 2018). Employees committed to change, ready to participated actively in the activities of an organization and become loyal during organizational change implementation (Guzeller & Celiker, 2019). The commitment of employees is an essential element of employees' readiness to accept the change. The employee commitment lead to change implementation as suggested by various studies (Pitts, 2006). The commitment of

employees is the level of bond towards organization to accept and implement the change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). The relationship between commitment to change with other variables that employee motivation, job satisfaction (Benevene et al., 2018), employee engagement and organizational environment, (Ho, 2006), change leadership and management decision (Benevene et al., 2018). Franco-Santos and Doherty (2017), suggested currently a lot of the researchers have described the relationship of commitment to change and with other meaningful variables. Much of the extent literature in academia has found that the management of an organization have realized the relationship of employees and organization. The commitment to change has positive effects on both employee and organization, recently it has got the attention of academia and researcher, (Meyer & Maltin, 2010). Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) have described the three dimensions of commitment to change, such as affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment refers to employees desire to support the change, normative commitment is based on sense of duty and responsibility toward the change and continuance commitment is to support and accept the change program that there is no other option as the cost them. Lawler and Worley (2009) have suggested that employee commitment to change is essential component for effective change implementation. In this regard it is concluded from the above literature that commitment to change plays the mediating role between communication and change implementation. If the information about the change program is effectively utilized and employees are committed to organizational change, so the change can be easily implemented within organization.

H3: Commitment to change mediates the association between the change communication and change implementation.

## **Methodology**

There are seven public sector universities in the Malakand Division. In the existing scenario, all these universities are facing organizational change implementation to Universities Model Act Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-2020 (Amendment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Universities Act-2012) to address governance of universities. In this study, the data was collected from the employees of the University of Malakand, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, University of Swat and University of Buner to examine the role of change communication during organizational change implementation role of mediating variable commitment to change.

## **Measures and instrument development**

In this research the tool of data collection a self-administered questionnaire was used, and it is adopted from the previous studies developed by validated research. The Delphi approach was used to adopt the scales from previous studies and discussed it with academic experts. For the purpose of data collection, a self-administered questionnaire consists of 39 items with five-point Likert scale ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The first part of the instrument provides the demographics of the respondents, and the second portion of the instrument represents the data items of measuring variable under the study. For measuring the constructs, the following valid scales were adopted from previous studies. For measuring communication, the seven items adopted scale used by V. D. Miller, Johnson, and Grau (1994) was used. The sample item of the scale Quality of change communication “The information I have received about the change has been useful.” For measuring the construct of organizational change implementation, the 13 items scale was adapted from Bess, Perkins, and McCown (2010), Cole, Bruch, and Vogel (2006), Madsen, Miller, and John (2005), Doll, Xia, and Torkzadeh (1994) and Qian and Daniels (2008). As the sample of an item of the scale Organizational change implementation, “I believe that the

administration has a “agenda” in promoting this change”. For the construct of commitment to change, it is mostly cited and its validity is assessed mostly in Meta-analytic research (Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckennooghe, 2014). It has 18 items that were adopted by Herscovitch and Meyer (2002). The construct contains three sections like affective, normative and continuance commitment to change. Each section includes 6 items. The sample item of commitment to change “I believe in the value of this change.”

### Sampling procedure

The stratified random sampling is used to achieve appropriate representative sample for the analysis with the help of Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Hence the 130 questionnaires were distributed in different universities of the Malakand Division. The participants of the study were 130, Jones, Comfort, and Hillier (2005) has recommended that six weeks, time frame is suitable to gain response from respondents of the study. The 115 valid questionnaires were received within the given time.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 present the descriptive statistical analysis details. Descriptive statistics include mean and standard deviation (S.D) while correlation is carried out to determine the strength and association among the parameters of the study. The mean values of the entire data reflect positive tendency shows positive curve or normality of the data. The S.D indicates the abnormality of the data as shown nearly to 01 from the mean that is normal in the statistical data. There is moderate and strong association between the variables of the study using Pearson correlation Cohen (2013).

*Table 1: Descriptive statistics*

| Details of Parameters                | Mean | S.D  | 1    | 2    | 3    |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Quality of change communication      | 3.47 | 1.29 |      |      |      |
| Commitment to change                 | 3.43 | 1.32 | .469 | .387 |      |
| Organizational Change implementation | 3.39 | 1.16 | .700 | .458 | .597 |

Note: Correlation values ranges, 1to 5, level of significance at .01

### Hypothesis Testing, Regression

Table 2; determine the regression to examine acceptance or rejection of H1, H2 and H3. Positive association can be seen between change communication (CC) and organizational change (OCI). When the P-value is less than .01, the model is significant at 98% confident and significance of  $R^2$  determines 63% difference shown in organizational change implementation due change communication. Moreover, the value of ANOVA is acceptable where the F-value is 97.99. The analysis show that change communication is effective in implementing organizational change ( $\beta = 0.63$ ,  $t = 11$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), in relationship with commitment to change ( $\beta = 0.18$ ,  $t = 2.98$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Table 2: Regression

| Details                       | C2C.CC& OCI |           |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| R <sup>2</sup>                | 0.52        |           |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> value | 0.53        |           |
| Model significance            | 0.00        |           |
| F value                       | 97.99       |           |
|                               | CC & OCI    | C2C & OCI |
| Standardized Beta             | 0.63        | 0.18      |
| T -Value                      | 11          | 2.98      |
| Significance Value            | 0.000       | .005      |

C2C= Commitment to Change, CC=Change Communication, OCI= Organizational Change Implementation, Level of Significance, P<0.01

**Mediation Analysis**

**Mediation Test (Organizational Change Implementation, Change Communication, Commitment to Change)**

Table 3 enlists the mediation analysis of commitment to change (C2C) between the change communication (CC) and organizational change implementation (OCI). One time test of mediation was carried out between the parameter of the study, which follow the Preacher and Hayes (2004) technique. The outcomes of A-path1 determine a positive association among C2C and OCI ( $\beta = 0.691, t = 13.45, p < .001$ ). Moreover, the B-path1 determine a optimistic association between CC and OCI with ( $\beta = 0.253, t = 4.45, p < .001$ ). Further C-path1 also determines the mediating effect of C2C on OCI ( $\beta = 0.589, t = 13.57, p < .001$ ) and C' -path1 determine the effect of mediation C2C ( $\beta = 0.407, t = 7.22, p < .001$ ). In contrast of C and C' path1 the beta value is marginally reduced when mediation is confirmed that indicate of low mediation. All the effects were favorable, having R-square value is 53% and the value of ANOVA is 109.97.

Table 3: Mediation Test (C2C, OCI, CC)

| Statistical details     | A-Path <sup>1</sup><br>X-M | B-Path <sup>1</sup><br>M- X- Y | C-Path <sup>1</sup><br>X-Y | D-Path <sup>1</sup><br>X-M-Y |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Un-standardized Beta    | .691                       | .253                           | .589                       | .407                         |
| P-value                 | .000                       | .000                           | .000                       | .000                         |
| T-value                 | 13.45                      | 4.45                           | 13.57                      | 7.22                         |
| R <sup>2</sup>          | .532                       |                                |                            |                              |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> | .536                       |                                |                            |                              |
| Significance value      | .000                       |                                |                            |                              |
| F value                 | 109.97                     |                                |                            |                              |



Note: X= CC, Y= OCI, M= C2C, Note: P value is less than 0.05.

**Mediation Test (Change Communication, Commitment to Change, Organizational Change Implementation)**

Table 4 describes all the assumptions of mediation analysis. The A, B and C-path2 are in accordance with Preacher and Hayes, (2004) standards. The outcomes determine the indirect effect of CC on OCI and C2C. The beta and t value of C- path2 determine low mediation [ $\beta = .191$ ,  $t = 4.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ] ( $\beta = 0.362$ ,  $t = 7.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The model was significant during analysis having the value of  $R^2 = 0.47$  and the value of ANOVA 81.22.

*Table 4: Mediation Test (C2C, OCI, CC)*

| <b>Statistical details</b> | <b>A Path<sup>2</sup><br/>X-M</b> | <b>B Path<sup>2</sup><br/>M X Y</b> | <b>C Path<sup>2</sup><br/>X-Y</b> | <b>D Path<sup>2</sup><br/>X M-Y</b> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Un-Standardized Beta       | .363                              | .464                                | .362                              | .191                                |
| P-value                    | .000                              | .000                                | .000                              | .000                                |
| T-value                    | 6.11                              | 9.67                                | 7.11                              | 4.34                                |
| R <sup>2</sup>             |                                   |                                     | .47                               |                                     |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>    |                                   |                                     | .46                               |                                     |
| Sig value                  |                                   |                                     | 0.00                              |                                     |
| F value                    |                                   |                                     | 81.22                             |                                     |

Note: X= Change Communication, Y= Organizational Change Implementation, M= Commitment to Change, the value of P is less than 0.05, 0.01.

## Discussions and Conclusion

The outcomes obtained from this study are based on the following types of mechanism, such as direct, mediating and indirect effect. There is a direct effect of C2C on OCI consists of H1, H2 and H3; that determine that employee's C2C and CC make easy OCI. The results of the study describe that the employee C2C is more effective as compared to CC to implement OCI. The C2C lead to job satisfaction, employee's performance and successful organizational change implementation (Boxall, Hutchison, & Wassenaar, 2015; Davidescu, Apostu, Paul, & Casuneanu, 2020; V. D. Miller et al., 1994) that support H1 of the study. Previous research studies highlight the significance of CC during OCI. Change communication is effective to facilitate employee's readiness, commitment to change and organizational change implementation (Elving, 2005; Luo & Jiang, 2014). Previous study has shown the positive relationship of commitment to change and organizational change implementation as discussed earlier in literature review of current study. Quality of change communication reduce the negative feeling of employees toward OCI and increase the level of C2C as suggested by Oreg et al. (2007). Both the OC and C2C have positive and favorable association with OCI, (Kalyal & Saha, 2008; Oreg et al., 2007; Peus et al., 2009) that support hypothesis of the study. When the information about organizational change is properly delivered to address employees interest then employees are more committed to organizational change implementation (Sagie, Elizur, & Koslowsky, 1996; Sun, Li, Lee, & Tao, 2021) that support H2 and H3 of the study.

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