Communicating Change: The Five Sentiments of Change Perspective

(Komunikasi Perubahan: Perspektif Lima Sentimen Perubahan)

Norhafezah Yusof
Rosna Awang Hashim
(College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia)
Jamaludin Badusah
(Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)
Mohd Majid Konting
(Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia)
Chan Kok Kian
(College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia)

ABSTRACT

This research investigated the reactions of agents and recipients of change toward the introduction of a new co-curriculum model in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Malaysia. The Five Sentiments of Change framework was used to interpret this introduction of change in the HLIs. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with two groups of participants. The first group consisted of eight experts playing the role of change agents, and the second group was comprised of 13 directors of co-curriculum centers. The latter were the target recipients of the change process. Data collected was categorized into themes, and the findings revealed significant contrasting reactions toward change between newly established and older universities. The present study is one of the few attempts to explain the impact of change on recipients in local HLIs.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti reaksi agen dan penerima perubahan terhadap pengenalan model baru ko-kurikulum pada peringkat institusi pengajian tinggi (IPT) di Malaysia. Kerangka Lima Sentimen Perubahan digunakan untuk mentafsir perubahan yang diperkenalkan di IPT. Temu bual bersemuka dengan dua kumpulan telah dijalankan. Kumpulan pertama terdiri daripada lapan orang pelatih (pakar) rasmi yang memainkan peranan agen perubahan manakala kumpulan kedua pula diwakili oleh 13 orang pengarah pusat ko-kurikulum. Kumpulan kedua ini merupakan penerima sasaran yang terlibat dalam proses perubahan ini. Data yang dikutip dijeniskan mengikut tema dan dapatan kajian memperlihatkan reaksi yang berbeza yang signifikan terhadap perubahan. Perbezaan reaksi yang ketara dapat dilihat antara universiti yang baru ditubuhkan dengan universiti yang sudah lama ditubuhkan. Kajian ini merupakan salah satu usaha yang dibuat bagi memperincikan dampak perubahan terhadap para penerima perubahan di IPT tempatan.

Keywords : Communicating Change; Sentiments Change

INTRODUCTION

In response to global debates on the 'characteristics' of the 21st century workforce highlighted in education, communication and management fields (Karoly & Constantijn 2004), the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has introduced a new policy on Holistic Student Development under the Ministry's Critical Agenda Project (Ministry of Higher Education 2011). This policy is part of the macro policies of Malaysian Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) aimed at establishing the country as an international educational hub (Ministry of Higher Education 2011). The desired outcome of this policy is to produce human capital (*modal insan*) for the nation, a holistic individual who has academic rigor and in addition, is morally sound. The challenge to develop an ideal prototype of human capital appears to be difficult. It has been argued that

present graduates are lacking in soft skills, even though they have excellent academic records (Roselina 2009). Thus, for all stakeholders concerned, the priority issue is: how do we respond to this seemingly insurmountable challenge? The MOHE introduced a special agenda to tackle this problem, which seeks to empower the country's undergraduates with the necessary soft-skills through co-curriculum courses. It is a top-down reform initiative. However, it is not to be construed as purely straightjacket enforcement by the MOHE.

Interestingly, universities in Malaysia have autonomy in managing their academic affairs. Thus, even though the MOHE introduced the policy, university management has the final say in whether or not to accept the change. The MOHE can attempt to persuade HLIs in Malaysia, but it cannot force the policy to be implemented as the universities are autonomous in matters to do with academic curriculum. This interesting situation is one

of the more challenging aspects of introducing change within HLIs in Malaysia.

The goal of the MOHE is to introduce outcome-based learning in the nation's public universities. This initiative is in line with the framework of the 21st century workforce, which focuses upon the idea of the holistic individual as the desired outcome of a tertiary education. Outcome-based learning is performance-based learning in terms of design (Fitzpatrick 1995; Furman 1994), attempting to capture the intended outcome of the learning process through systematic performance indicators (Aldridge et al. 2006). This type of learning design is seen as closely associated with a student-centred approach, as opposed to the conventional learning process consisting of chalk and talk. Many studies have shown that outcome-based learning is fundamental in moulding and developing the characters of learners through innovative learning styles (Aldridge et al. 2006; Coker 2009; Cumming & Ross 2007; Palés et al. 2008; Smart et al. 2009). Most universities in Malaysia are still practicing the conventional learning styles, especially in co-curriculum subjects. Hence, it is high time, from the perspective of the MOHE, to embark on outcome-based learning approach in all university curriculums, and, particularly in the context of this article, in co-curriculum subjects. In the context of this paper, there are three institutional bodies struggling in the change cycle: the MOHE, the universities and the experts. From the perspective of the researchers, this transformational change is not embraced fully by top management at the universities due to their "autonomous nature". The experts, on the other hand, have to fight an uphill battle in trying to introduce the change to the directors who are representatives from the universities as advocated by the MOHE.

Change literature points out that successful change demands mutual understanding and full cooperation from both parties, i.e., change agents and the change recipients to embrace the change (Leonard & Grobler 2006). It becomes imperative to outline strategic communication plans to ensure that change is accepted or at least acknowledged by the receivers. Vuuren and Elving (2008) propose that in leading organizational change, management needs to be aware of their role in formal and informal communication when introducing a change to fellow members in the organization. They argue, from the perspective of uncertainty reduction theory, that informal communication will play a major role in filling up the gap when the members in an organization are not fully informed regarding the change. This means that uncertainty will lead to more information searching to stabilize the uncertainty state of mind. Some scholars argue that perhaps by delineating several communication principles, change will be embraced successfully (Kitchen & Daly 2002). Ironically, the change process is as complex as managing human emotions, as it is never rigid and always evolving.

To kick start the project, several experts from public universities were identified to help design and develop a new syllabus for co-curricular courses in line with the MOHEs move to an outcome-based model. These experts were from various disciplines, including sports science, public speaking, volunteerism, entrepreneurship, innovation, community services and leadership. The training of the trainers (henceforth, TOT) covered five zones in Malaysia, namely the Klang Valley zone, Northern zone, Southern zone, East Coast zone and Sabah and Sarawak zone. During this TOT, all public HLIs were invited to send their staff to participate in the training. The outcome of this training was to develop new modules for co-curriculum subjects and train the trainers in sharing and disseminating the new knowledge via grassroots strategies, i.e., by introducing new curriculum in co-curricular subjects. In short, it was reflective of the general process of institutionalizing a new paradigm in place of current practices in HLIs in Malaysia.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The following section focuses on the literature review. This is followed by a section on methodology and another section on results and discussion. Finally, the paper ends with a section on limitation and implications on future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The extant literature on change has emphasized the significance of a change on recipients (Armenakis & Harris 2009). However, studies on understanding resistance also need to be explored, especially in the Asian context (Armenakis & Harris 2009; Armenakis et al. 2007a). The need to understand resistance to change has been made extremely clear in the meta-analytical study by Armenakis and Harris (2009). One of the suggestions is to focus on examining the relative importance of the five sentiments of change.

Debates in the literature on change resistance and organizational communication tend to focus on two key perspectives, namely Foucauldian and non-Foucauldian (Contu 2008; Fleming & Spicer 2008). Change from a Foucauldian perspective argues that office workers or subordinates would be monitored and controlled by the standard rules and regulations of the organizations (Contu 2008). Viewed from such a Foucauldian perspective, the change advocated by the MOHE is not Foucauldian in nature since the universities have the autonomy in academic issues. However, with the implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF), an initiative by the MOHE to align higher education curriculum with the principles of outcome based learning, top management in universities have to justify their alternative proposals if they think their co-curriculum framework is better than the one advocated by the Malaysian Qualifications Accreditation (MQA) standards.

In light of the particular context of this study, the researchers argued that to elaborate on the process

of change, Kurt Lewin's change theory is a suitable framework with which to proceed with the investigation of resistance. This change theory explores the change process in terms of the following three main phases: unfreezing, moving, and freezing (Burnes 2004; Ford 2009; Medley & Akan 2008). Many writers have challenged Kurt Lewin's theory of change on the grounds that it is simplistic (Cronshaw & McCulloch 2008; Saksvik et al. 2007). However, according to Burnes (2004) and Schein (2006), the parsimonious principle of the theory in elucidating the change process has made it a pragmatic theory that can be applied to the particular change phenomena.

Unfreezing is the first stage of any change process. This stage refers to analyzing why a change needs to be introduced into the organization. Thus, the norms associated with the old practice need to be revamped before any change could be implemented. Moving is the second stage, whereby after identifying the various types of needs for change, the implementation process takes place. At this stage, change agents will implement the change. Finally is the freezing stage, where after the change has taken place, there is the need to maintain the new practice norms in the organization.

A considerable amount of research has been published on these three phases of change (Adams & Whelan 2009; Ford 2009; Wooddell 2009). However, the present research only attempts to contribute to the literature on unfreezing and moving. Although this approach may be seen as a limitation of the study, it may also be considered as strength. The researchers will attempt to provide insight into the critical processes during the unfreezing and moving phases in change management.

Unfreezing indicates an expectation of change (Armenakis & Harris 2009; Ford 2009), with change agents tending to anticipate and plan change as a positive move for the organization (Ford 2009). This stage involves preparing the change recipients with positive outlooks of change. In the unfreezing phase, the emphasis is on how communication channels are opened to disseminate change messages to the targeted subjects, which in this case are the recipients of change. In conducting the TOT sessions described in the present study, the experts were basically trying to facilitate the process of change – of developing new modules in the co-curriculum courses being offered by the participants.

Moving refers to the implementation of change. In this stage, the targeted recipients are being prepared for, and trained to, implement change. In the case of a top-down change process, recipients have less space to negotiate the ways in which change is to be implemented (Adams & Whelan 2009; Ford 2009). On the other hand, a more open approach in effecting change suggests to the recipients that there is room for negotiation regarding the extent of change, if not opportunity for the rejection of change in some instances. (Adams & Whelan 2009; Ford 2009).

Even though the decision to make the change is up to the participants and their respective institutions, these two stages represent the first bold attempt by the MOHE to persuade the participants and their respective departmental directors to adopt a new module that will prepare university graduates to become the desired 21st century workforce.

This research investigated the reactions of the experts and directors involved in introducing change to the co-curriculum design in HLIs. The Five Sentiments Approach (Armenakis et al. 2007a) provides the framework for analyzing the data collected for this study. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reactions of the agents and recipients of change?

2. How can the Five Sentiments Approach explain the reactions in the context of communicating change?

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

There were two main categories of research sites. Firstly, the research participants were drawn from 13 public universities in Malaysia and secondly, the training sites were located in five designated zones in the country. The training venues were high-end hotels that were able to accommodate all the university representatives selected to attend the training sessions.

There were two key groups of participants. The first group consisted of experts who were appointed by the MOHE to conduct training for university representatives in the five different designated zones. The second group comprised the directors of co-curriculum centres from 13 public universities in Malaysia.

The first group had eight respondents who were experts in their subject areas, namely sports science, public speaking, volunteerism, community service, leadership, entrepreneurship, and innovation. All of them were Malay Muslims and between the ages 33 and 55 years at the time of the study. The group was comprised of five males and three females. They were considered experts on the basis of their academic qualifications and professional credentials in their respective fields. Each team consisted of two trainers. For the purpose of this study, each field was represented by the lead expert; and for data concerning entrepreneurship, both the lead and co-lead were interviewed.

The second group was comprised of 13 directors of co-curriculum centres at the 13 universities. Their academic qualifications ranged from bachelors' degrees to doctoral degrees. All of them were Malay males and between the ages 40 to 55 years old at the time of the study. They were the recipients of the 'transformational

change' designed to align the present curriculum with the new curriculum. All the 13 participating universities were public universities and could be divided into two main categories, namely established universities (n=7) and newly established universities (n=6). The categorization was based on the number of years they have been established. Newly established universities were universities that had been established since 2000, and established universities were universities that had been established prior to 2000.

DATA COLLECTION AND VALIDATION

This study used a qualitative research methodology. Structured interviews were conducted with the two groups of participants. For the first group, the interviews took place after the completion of the training sessions at the five training zones. As for the second group, the interviews were conducted at the end of the five-month training.

The interview protocol embodied the five fundamental change questions in Armenakis et al. (2007a). They were as follows. 1) How would you describe your role? 2) What are you having successes with and why? 3) What are you struggling with and why? 4) What changes do you think need to be made? 5) Do you have any final comments?

Interviews were tape recorded and in cases where tape recording was not practical, notes were taken with the interviewees' permission. Right after the interview sessions, the researchers immediately went over their notes of the interview. For the duration of the research with the first group, the researchers obtained feedback regarding the training from the experts. This was due to the fact that the experts had the opportunity of facilitating a different set of participants in each zone, and this, in turn, presented a different set of challenges. For the second group, the researchers visited each of the participating universities and conducted the interviews with the 13 directors. On average, each interview session took approximately 45 minutes. All sessions were videotaped and transcribed with the help of five research assistants.

ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

The data collected were thematized to focus on the phenomena of unfreezing and moving. Drawing from the data, the principal author identified emerging concepts that help to elucidate the change process as the result of the introduction of the new curriculum module to the change recipients. In relating the data to a theoretical framework, the researchers employed Kurt Lewin's unfreezing and moving paradigms as the analytical lens in which to understand and explain the observed change processes peculiar to the present study. In addition, the five dimensions of discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support and valence, as suggested by

Armenakis et al. (2007a, 2007b) proved to be valuable analytical tools in interpreting the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As pointed out in the previous section, the data in this study were analyzed using the framework of the five sentiments of change (Armenakis et al. 2007a, 2007b). The sentiments of change are discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support and valence.

Discrepancy refers to the presence of any instance of deviance from the norms of the institution. *Appropriateness* can be defined as whether the new co-curriculum module (the change) introduced by the researchers is in line with the institutional culture or situation (situation based). *Efficacy* can be described as having confidence in adapting to change. *Principal support* refers to the leaders' support of organizational change. *Valence* here refers to the individual's perception of his/her respective benefits and losses as a result of the proposed change.

DISCREPANCY

Introducing the new curriculum to the participants was an uphill task. At first, the researchers had expected low resistance from the participants, especially when the researchers had obtained strong backing from the top management at the HLIs and top officials of the MOHE to carry out the high priority project.

Many scholars have argued that the Malaysian community is closely associated with values of collectivism (Gudykunst & Lee 2003; Hofstede 1984; Staples & Zhao 2006; Song & Fiore 2008). Collectivism refers to the belief system in which individuals are respectful of authority and always conform to community values (Goncalo & Staw 2006; Gudykunst & Lee 2003). On the other hand, many studies about change in organizations in Western cultures have also found resistance from employees and other stakeholders when change was introduced (Vakola & Wilson 2004; Vermeulen, Puranam & Gulati 2010; Wooddell 2009). However, in the present study, when the change process was initiated, participants were faced with the dilemma about whether they could implement the change or not. This was because some universities have their own guidelines in implementing the modules for the co-curricular course.

As argued by Mr. Iskandar, an innovation expert, the autonomy given to the universities in determining the curriculum framework had caused the conflict in this matter. Most of directors from the established universities felt disheartened to pursue the training as they argued the new curriculum module must adhere to the existing framework of the respective university or else it would be pointless. Mr. Iskandar was not alone in expressing his concern on this matter. Ms. Pansha, an expert in

public speaking, also addressed her concerns regarding this conflict. From her experiences in handling various sessions with the directors from established universities, she noted that in some established universities, where they have hundreds of existing co-curriculum courses, the directors anticipated that the adoption of a new module would be a huge task. They argued that restructuring the whole curriculum was not a simple task. The process demands time, energy and human resources, which. from their viewpoint. was burdensome.

Another expert, Mr. Kamal, who has been involved in volunteerism, suggested that in order to ensure smooth transition from the existing curriculum to the new one, the MOHE needed to convince the decision makers in the universities about the vital impact of the new change on the universities' respective visions and missions.

In this study, most of the experts were rather apprehensive when providing their responses. The majority of them had voiced their concerns on the implementation of the recently developed co-curriculum at their respective universities. The most frequently cited challenge was the administrative misalignment of the decision makers in the universities and the officially stated mission of the MOHE. The majority of the experts argued that if the universities' highest authorities were open to change, the aspirations of the MOHE would be achieved. However, if there was misalignment, all the training efforts would be a waste.

Interestingly, in contrast to the experts' perspective, the directors had the opposite view on the implementation of change in the universities. The majority of the directors believed that there was no discrepancy issue in introducing the change, except where the senate members of the universities disagreed. Interestingly, a director from an established university mentioned that he had no problem in adjusting to the new changes introduced by the MOHE. In contrast, another director from another established university was concerned that there were senate members who were not convinced about the change. Thus, it would be harder for the university to adapt the new module if the senate members disagreed with the change.

APPROPRIATENESS

The timing of this project was another controversial issue from the perspective of the experts. This was due to the fact that there was a gap when the MOHE introduced the new module, which emphasized generic skills as part of the policy. Based upon the interview data, we were informed by the experts that some established universities had implemented their own version of curriculum modules, which they claimed were aligned with the aspirations of the MOHE. This phenomenon created tension and dilemma among the experts during the training sessions.

Nonetheless, the above views appear to describe the general situation in the established universities. The majority of the experts agreed that participants from the newly established universities were among the most receptive to change. This was due to the fact that most of the newer universities possessed neither a co-curriculum centre nor strong co-curriculum courses.

The experts' reflections on the responses of directors can be summarized in two principal manners. First, for established universities, the change was not positively accepted by the directors due to time-and-energy consuming considerations, as they would have to create new modules. Second, for newly established universities, the responses were positive. The proposals for change appeared to be timely as they were beginning work on the design and development of their own co-curriculum curriculum. Most of the newer institutions did not have an established co-curriculum centre.

As for the directors, they too appeared to be drawn into two different standpoints with regard to the introduction of change in the co-curriculum curriculum. Those who were from established universities saw the introduction and implementation of change as an unnecessary hassle, as they would have to revise their respective curriculums to suit the official recommendations of the MOHE. Moreover, the staff needed to undergo the re-training program before they could adopt the new curriculum. On the other hand, the directors from newly established universities welcomed the efforts of the MOHE to streamline the curriculum, as they needed the guidelines to establish and strengthen their own co-curriculum syllabi.

Resistance towards change is not uncommon in the change literature, as no organization wants to take any unnecessary risks if the outcome may result in negative impacts on the recipients (Wooddell 2009). Emerging crisis is unwelcome in any organization. Severe crisis must be avoided. As has been documented in past research, the anticipation of crisis plays a role in most change process in organizations (Armenakis & Harris 2009; Vermeulen et al. 2010).

Some studies further suggested that organizations identify measures to lessen the negative impact of change by providing training, concentrating on leadership capability, and strengthening employee-employer relations (Armenakis et al. 2007a, 2007b). The challenge of introducing a change in this study was that there was the anticipation of being further burdened with more work and responsibilities by the participants from established universities, compared to their colleagues in the newly established universities. Furthermore, there was a misalignment of aspirations of decision makers in universities with the vision espoused by MOHE in realizing co-curriculum implementation in the universities.

EFFICACY

During the training sessions, the experts encountered various positive and negative responses from the participants concerning the effectiveness of the newly

developed courses. Nonetheless, even though the majority of the experts reported that the participants were generally not well-versed about certain matters in their respective fields, they appreciated the great effort shown by the participants. The experts were also concerned about the issue of consistency in implementing the change advocated by the MOHE. Three experts from volunteerism, public speaking and innovation kept emphasizing the importance of monitoring after the training. They asserted that without constant monitoring, the whole effort would potentially be wasted, as no one would know whether or not the new module was actually implemented.

The task of introducing and implementing change was challenging for both parties i.e., the experts and the directors. The experts played their roles as change agents to first introduce and then construct the new modules with the participants. However, the fact of the matter remained that the implementation of the modules was not compulsory for universities. On the one hand, the participants were sent on the basis that they were experts in their respective fields. On the other hand, to a great extent, their hands were tied as they would still have to implement the version of the curriculum imposed by their respective universities. The participants from the newly established universities did not experience this dilemma. It is worth nothing that there is a need to take a serious view of the dilemma faced by the participants because this dilemma clearly highlights the mismatch discussed earlier, especially at the different levels of decision making at the universities and the MOHE.

On this issue, the majority of the directors agreed that the introduction of the new curriculum and its implementation were actually in line with the vision of the nation Although a few of the directors argued that this change demanded a lot of work from their respective teams, they acknowledged that the time had come for universities in Malaysia to embrace such change.

PRINCIPAL SUPPORT

As was discussed in the foregoing section on the element of *appropriateness*, support from top management in implementing change was not always present as expected. Top management from newly established universities supported the changes; in contrast to top management from established universities, who proved resistant to the idea of change. Hence, the support from the latter was also less than the former. This resistance became obvious from the views shared by directors from established universities during the informal discussions that could not accept the call for change as their immediate superiors wanted to maintain the status quo, staying the course with their emphasis on the existing curriculum.

As stated earlier, support from top management varied between universities. In several universities, the senate members argued that the change was unnecessary as the present curriculum was able to produce excellent graduates. In contrast, in some other universities, the top management was supportive of the change and mobilized the academics to adopt the guidelines from the MOHE.

VALENCE

Valence refers to what one perceives as benefit or loss when change occurs. As was pointed out in several foregoing discussions, most directors from established universities could not see how the proposed introduction of change might benefit them. Experts faced tough challenges from participants from established universities during the training sessions. Teams from the established universities were the most vocal, repeatedly making arguments concerning the necessity of the change and questioned almost every suggestion from the experts.

In contrast, the newly established university directors seemed to be more appreciative of the changes suggested. As mentioned previously, the process of change was timely as it coincided with their recent efforts to establish their own co-curriculum centres, as they were at the stage of constructing their own syllabi for many courses. Thus, the change was rather positively embraced by them.

The issue here was the ownership of the project. When the researchers started the project, the MOHE fully supported it. However, when it came to introducing and implementing the change, most of the directors from the established universities were resistant to the change. In contrast, directors from the newly established universities held different views. Arguments on *valence* from the viewpoints of the directors were rather complex. Most of the directors believed that the change would benefit the universities. Some directors argued that if the change led to an increase in the workload of the academics and the administration staff, perhaps the universities would have to reflect on their abilities to cope with demands.

DISCUSSION

In practice, when facing an uncertain event, individuals will attempt to reduce the uncertainty by searching for more information about the phenomenon. This is the foundation of the Uncertainty Reduction Theory proposed by Berger and Calabrese (1975). This theory emphasizes the importance of being up to date relative to the demands of the situation. In the literature on change, researchers in organization and communication have argued that change creates instability and instability, in turn, will lead to a feeling of uncertainty among the members of an organization (Elving 2005; Vuuren & Elving 2008). To manage this state of affairs, the scholars argue that members of an organization will respond by seeking out new knowledge to reduce the feeling of uncertainty about the situation. In change literature specifically, this theory contributes to an understanding

of the processes of communication that relate to the attempts to rationalize the socialization of members in the organization during the introduction of change (Vuuren & Elving 2008).

The findings presented here indicated that to introduce change, communication acts as stimulus to ensure the continuity of the planned project. The management and the staff need to agree on a similar vision and pursuing the similar work plan. The communication process is iterative and the flow will be maintained until the solution is found. When resistance occurs, the management needs to realign the mission and this is where reflection of the change implementation needs to be conducted. Studies indicate that resistance occurs when the individuals feel uncertain with the new environment. in the management of future goals and adapting themselves to the such goals (Elving 2005; Contu 2008; Armenakis, Brown & Mehta 2011).

In relation to Kurt Lewin's unfreezing and moving phases, the researchers employed Armenakis's Five Sentiments to understand the interpretation of the informants regarding aspects of discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support and valence. With respect to this study, the two groups of respondents sometimes had different interpretations of the change introduced by the MOHE in each of the five dimensions. In terms of *discrepancy*, the experts found that some of the directors were reluctant to embrace the change due to the hassle they had to undergo to introduce and implement the change. In contrast, the directors claimed that they knew it was a high time to introduce this change, but implementation would result in different difficulties being faced by different universities regarding implementation, as some universities might be positive about the change, while others might not be. In terms of *appropriateness*, both groups had similar ideas on the issue of appropriate timing in introducing and implementing the change. The view was that change needed to be planned carefully and implemented accordingly.

As for *efficacy*, the experts found that some participants were not confident in accepting the change. This was because the change was not in line with the stand taken by the top management in their institutions. On the other hand, the majority of the directors were confident that the universities could accept the change, unless a few senate members went against the introduction of change in the universities. In terms of *principal support*, both groups believed that support from top management varied from one university to another. They claimed that if the top management agreed with the proposal of the MOHE, implementing the change would be easier. Problems only arose when there were parties that were against the recommendation for change espoused by the MOHE. As for *valence*, both groups indicated that the staff would be overburdened with work once the universities had decided to implement the change. Nonetheless, it would not be an issue for newly established universities as they welcomed the idea of change; it would be in line with their own ongoing preparations to design and develop the framework for their respective co-curriculum curriculums in their institutions.

Studies using the Five Sentiments of Change have indicated the significance of the five elements (discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support and valence) in analyzing change phenomena in organizations (Armenakis et al. 2007a; Armenakis et al. 2011; Oreg et al. 2008). However, very few studies have applied the Five Sentiments of Change in Malaysia. One of the studies was conducted on resistance of teachers and students towards change in selected schools in the northern regions of Malaysia (Norhafezah et al. 2011). In this study, the findings revealed that all five dimensions needed to be addressed in order to introduce change in the selected schools. The results indicate there was high resistance from the teachers and the students towards the introduction of Project Based Learning approach, due to the blatant exam-oriented culture within Malaysian educational institutions. A second study was a comparative study between India and Malaysia, where the results indicate that discrepancy, principal support and personal valence contributed to a positive change process in the organizations (Rashid 2008). Other than the stated studies, no published study on the Five Sentiments of Change for comparative purposes exists. In the context of analyzing the change from the perspective of the Five Sentiments of Change, the findings could be interpreted as partially Foucaudian in nature. This is due to the fact that even though on paper the universities in Malaysia have the autonomy to make their own decisions on their future directions, the MOHE wields enormous power, as it decides on the annual allocations for all public universities. From the findings of this study, the MOHE clearly has the upper hand in ensuring that its recommended reform initiative to introduce and implement change in the HLIs in the country will be well received by all parties concerned. At the end of the day, even though the MOHE cannot force the universities to accept the change totally, the management of the respective universities will come round to accepting the change. This may be the reason why the universities complied with the invitation to send their representatives for the national training program. In addition, as shown by the findings on *efficacy* and *discrepancy*, the directors have stated that they would not face any obstacles in introducing and implementing the desired change in their respective universities. Based on the Five Sentiments of Change analytical framework used in this study, the researchers have concluded that all Five Sentiments had contributed substantially to the responses of agents and recipients of change involved in embracing and resisting change during the unfreezing and moving phases.

Moreover, the findings also suggested that the following three major factors might help to explain the resistance to the new reform: First, the existence of a misalignment between the aspirations reflected in

university decision making, especially among the more established universities, and that espoused by the MOHE. Second, even if the decision makers decided to accept the change, the directors would still feel apprehensive and eschew the anticipated heavy burden entailed in developing a new curriculum. Third, some universities still lacked the necessary experts in the various fields. Thus, if they wanted to implement the change, they would either have to consider hiring part-timers or start re-training their staff. These staffing needs would have further implications on the budget of the universities.

To implement a new education paradigm, such as outcome-based learning, it is vital to have the correct alignment at the top management level, i.e., between the MOHE and the university authorities. For example, in the fields of engineering and medicine in Malaysia, most universities have already embraced outcome-based learning as a learning approach. This is due to the fact that the universities running these programs are being monitored by professional bodies so as to ensure the quality of graduates produced are maintained (Azlinah et al. 2008; Roslan & Mokhtar Azizi 2009).

Interpreting the data with respect to the framework of the Five Sentiments of Change by Armenakis et al. (2007a) has revealed that there was a great resistance to change. Working on this project, the researchers realized that it was important to understand the reflections of the experts and the directors. The trainers who were playing the role of change agents experienced both positive and rather apprehensive responses from the participants during the TOT sessions. In addition, the directors were seen as the key change recipients who would lead the change in their respective institutions.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We acknowledged several limitations of the study. First, the participants interviewed were experts and directors of curriculum centres. We could benefit more if we could interview the other recipients of change, such as those who were involved in the trainings regarding the acceptance of the policy in their respective universities after the training. Second, the study could benefit from the observation of the acceptance of the policy among the facilitators and students who are involved in co-curriculum subjects.

Communicating change to the targeted respondents was rather challenging in this research context. Due to the special character of this new project, in which the determination of whether the change was accepted was a matter left to the respective universities, the participants, especially those from the established universities, were caught in a dilemma. Those who wanted to implement this change were afraid that their immediate superiors might not agree to the change, and, because of this fear, they had decided to stick to the present status quo curriculum.

Interpreting the data, using the Five Sentiments, can assist us in understanding the change process. Specifically, the sentiments can be used as a guide to manage the change processes in an educational organization. In addition, future research needs to consider conducting longitudinal studies on the prevalence of strong resistance from the change recipients of the policy, taking into account the misalignment of standpoints of top management with that espoused by the MOHE, or other related factors peculiar to the respective universities.

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Norhafezah Yusof (corresponding author)
College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010, Sintok, Kedah
E-mail: norhafezahy@hotmail.com, norhafezah@uum.edu.my

Rosna Awang Hashim
College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010, Sintok, Kedah
E-mail: rosna@uum.edu.my

Jamaludin Badusah
Faculty of Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600, UKM Bangi, Selangor
E-mail: drjamal08@gmail.com

Mohd Majid Konting
Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia
43400, Serdang, Selangor
E-mail: majidk@mohe.gov.my

Chan Kok Kian
College of Arts and Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia
06010, Sintok, Kedah
E-mail: victor@uum.edu.my