

## **RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ORGANIZATION'S COMMITMENT, TRUST TOWARDS MANAGEMENT AND COLLEAGUES, AND EMPLOYEES' WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT CHANGES -THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

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**Abstract-** Events and phenomena arising from the COVID-19 pandemic have technically frozen major norms, masses, and activities in Malaysia. Almost all activities, ranging from economies, industrials' manufacturing and production, transportation, and tourism to education have come to a grinding halt. These norms have opened up new chapters in the methods of management in any organization. In curbing the pandemic, the Malaysian Government has enforced a movement restriction order, known as Movement Control Order (MCO), with effect from 18 March 2020 to curtail the spread of the virus. Faced with limited norms in both movement and activities, various alternatives have been applied by institutions of higher learning to ensure that the critical operations can be resuscitated, continued uninterrupted, and executed out in a smooth and timely manner. These included putting in place both internal and external communication methods to communicate with all parties, implementing online lectures, introducing students' final assessment components (without any face-to-face examinations), controlling and monitoring of health and safety of academic staff, employees, and students, maintaining facilities and equipment, ensuring internet accessibility, and introducing various contingency plans in the event of extensions of the MCO. Technology has played a crucial role in supporting both teaching and learning continuity during this lockdown window. In addition, the learning institution's mission and vision aspirations to achieve excellence in the future also saw the introduction of various performance indexes to measure new achievement being part of the institution's long-

term strategic plans. This preliminary study research was initiated to examine the relationships between an organization's commitment, trust towards management and colleagues as well as employees' willingness to accept changes made arising from the new norm. This study was performed through a quantitative approach in collecting the data, where researchers randomly distributed questionnaires to employees of Malaysian private institutions of higher learning and few non-educational respondents. Questionnaires were distributed through online platforms where a total of 172 respondents (86%) participated in this study. Data feedbacks were analyzed using the SPSS Software Version 21. The results of the study showed significant and positive relationships between the organization's commitment and trust towards management and colleagues, with that of employees' willingness for these organizational changes. The study outcomes are crucial to any organization in ensuring whatever changes made by the management, the latter should be made known of the changes planned and be able to maintain the momentum of implementation. This can be achieved by management disseminating the advantages of making changes, the benefits accrued, and for the best interests of the organization. These should be shared and communicated immediately for the knowledge of employees so that they would understand, appreciate, and are sensitive to the proposed changes to be made.

**Index Terms**— Change Management, Private Institutions of Higher Learning, Organizational Commitment, Trust in Management and Colleagues, Willingness to Change Among Employees, COVID19 pandemic and Movement Control Order (MCO).

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Employees will typically support any changes planned by management if they are able to comprehend and are willing to accept these changes. The willingness on part of the employees to accept changes also depends on their organization, whether they are ready to execute the changes for the betterment of the organization and employees or otherwise. As an example, when there was a COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Malaysia from February 2020, where movement almost came to a standstill, there were drastic changes made to the operations, management, and teaching and learning needs in institutions of higher learning, initiated from both public and private institutions. In curbing the spread of this highly infectious disease, the Malaysian Government has implemented a movement restriction known as the Movement Control Order (MCO), to prevent the disease from spreading further. The MCO restricted opening or conducting of physical classes in institutions of higher learning. As a result, these institutions needed to apply some form of alternative teaching mechanism to reach the students. An online learning method was found to be the most aptness mechanism suitable for all courses offered, in absence of students' physical attendance. Elsewhere, various

methods of recording attendance and daily works online have been introduced to enable employers to record the daily work activities of their employees. According to [1], employee readiness has a positive and significant impact on employee commitment, and secondly, the organizational support provided affected employee readiness on employee commitment itself. So, in this regard, organizational support is very important in guiding and encouraging employees' willingness to changes.

In order to obtain feedback regarding the willingness of employees to changes in the strategic decisions made by the top management of an organization, researchers will usually get answers related to employees' trust in the organization and friends, and organizational commitment to employees through distributed questionnaires. These factors have a significant impact on employees' willingness to changes in the organization. [2] in their studies stated that organizational commitment and trust in colleagues are significant with employee willingness to changes. The employer's commitment to planning the changes in the organization depends on the extent to which the employer is closed to his employees. This means that systematic changes are crucial and important and in accordance with the ability of staff in the organization so that the planned changes are well understood and can be implemented by employees. Employers who can spend and take the time to assist the employees in understanding the benefits and advantages of proposed changes to be made seems to be the best method. This is because employees will be more motivated in the process of understanding the changes in the organization that have been proposed. [3] stated that there are several factors that influence the willingness of employees to changes, including management support, appropriateness of change, acquiring new experience, and readiness.

Past studies on this topic have been extensively conducted in international organizations, which examined the relationship between factors influencing employee readiness for organizational change [4], but less conducted in developing countries [5]. According to [6], the success of changes in an organization is influenced by several specific factors, such as individual factors, which include the individual's commitment to changes according to the planning set by the management. Nevertheless, there are differences in the findings of a study conducted by [7] where they found out that corporate support is not the dominant variable in determining employees' commitment towards changes in the organization

## 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The intention of any organization to implement a program, policy, or practice change, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, needs to be coherent with the actions of

managers or leaders in the organization towards the willingness and readiness with these changes. If all the staff and management in an organization are ready for the proposed changes, eventually the staff in the organization will be more competitive, initiative, contribute excellent efforts, and will demonstrate willingness in attitude to work together. In [8], employees will show high motivation and commitment if they are prepared for the changes that will take place. Past studies on this topic have emphasized and focused more on employee's readiness for the changes that have been made by the organization, whereas the organization's commitment and readiness for the changes that will be made are still lacking in research studies. According to [9], organizational readiness is positively related to the willingness to accept changes. Therefore, further research on the readiness of the organization for the changes that will be made in the organization, especially in the private sector, needs to be explored further, and any outcomes should be able to enrich past findings of the study in a similar field.

### **1.1 Organizational Commitment**

Organizational commitment to the readiness of changes in any organization is important because these proposed changes will involve implementing critical and important decisions, such as risks in implementing the changes, having a lesser commitment in implementing changes, and the difficulty of employees in accepting and understanding the changes to be made, are few obstacles that need to be overcome. According to [10], the process of changes in the organization involves a concerted commitment among all employees and management in the organization towards changes. The level of readiness of all employees and top management for changes in the organization includes the willingness to accept changes in any organizational structure, technology, policies, systems, or procedures. [11] stated that the relationship between organizational commitment and employee willingness to change in their study is significant

In addition, job satisfaction among employees is also highly dependent on the organization's commitment to change. According to [12] in his study of the readiness of civil servants in Jordan towards the use of a new accrual accounting system (accrual accounting), discovered a significant relationship between the Jordanian government's commitment and the willingness of civil servants to accept changes in this new accounting system. In addition, the said study also found that organizational commitment is positively related to the job satisfaction of civil servants. In Sri Lanka, a study conducted by [2] found a significant relationship between organizational commitment and the willingness of employees in the export-based business sectors in the country. Congruent results were obtained by [13] demonstrating the readiness of employees to change the use of a new system of accounts is significant with the

organization's commitment towards the changes to be made.

Henceforth, the first hypothesis in this study is:

(H1: Organizational commitment has a positive relationship towards employee's readiness for management change)

## **2.2 Trusts in Management and Work Colleagues**

Changes are inevitable and those changes made by management in any organization are at times certainly unpredictable without positive outcome certainties. If carefully planned and executed, changes could be for the betterment of the organization or if otherwise, could be detrimental. The widespread COVID-19 pandemic from February 2020 in Malaysia has abruptly changed the working culture norms of almost all organizations, which necessitated business continuity and concerned on safety factors for the sake of the employees and stakeholders of these organizations. There exist various factors that influence employees to trust their management in the organization and these are related to their readiness for the changes. According to [14], work stress, innovation, and transformational leadership by leaders in the organization are prime factors that have significant relationships with employees' confidence and willingness to changes. In other words, the above study also states that management in organizations that provide a conducive working environment can increase staff readiness for organizational changes. In a study conducted by [15], work practices implemented in the organization and their relationships with the willingness of employees to changes depend on 3 main factors, namely trust in management, communication, and organizational commitment. As discussed above, these factors have a positive impact on changes planned by the management.

As such, the second hypothesis in this study reads as follows:

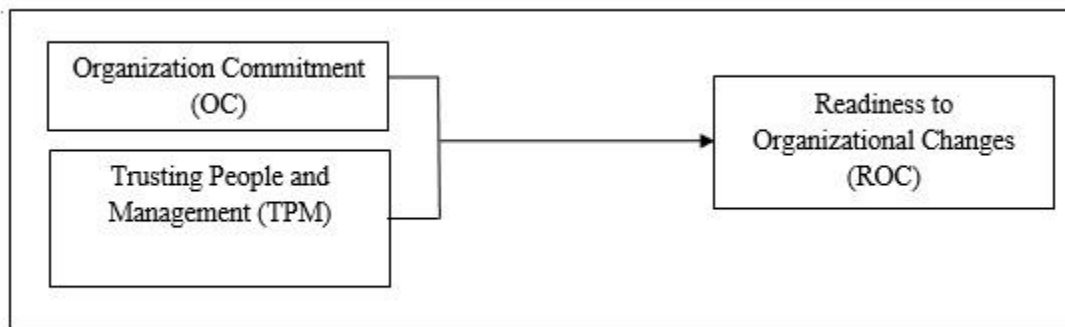
(H2: Trust in management and colleagues has a positive relationship with willingness to change)

## **3.3 Willingness to Changes among Employees**

The willingness of employees to accept changes in line with the policies set by the organization is very important. This forms the main pillars of success to changes made by management in organizations. According to [16], the three main phases in the successful implementation of changes by management include 1) readiness to change, 2) acceptance and 3) institutions. Thus, understanding the readiness of students regarding any changes in policy as implemented in coping with restrictions under the MCO in containing COVID-19, such as having online lectures greatly helps the management in the organization to determine the appropriate method of implementation of any changes. In [17] organizations need to focus on the emotional acceptance of employees as one of the methods to increase employees' readiness for changes in the organization. Furthermore, in the research study conducted by [18], leadership and

communications are important attributes in encouraging the readiness of participants in changes made by the management.

TABLE 1:  
RESEARCH MODEL



## 2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied a quantitative methodology approach and was conducted to answer the questions and objectives of the study that have been pre-determined. The scope of this study focused on private institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed randomly to respondents via google forms, but only 172 respondents gave back their written answers (86% of respondents). The questions for these questionnaires were taken entirely from previous studies by [2]. Each set of the questionnaire has several parts designed to test the relationships of both dependent and independent variables that have been developed for this study. The questionnaire has embedded a Likert's5-Scale answers for ease of replies ("Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Neutral", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree"). There are 3 sub-sections in each questionnaire, namely Part A (Demographics), Part B (Dependent Variables), and Part C (Independent Variables). Data were analyzed using the SPSS Software Version 21. This software is widely used in quantitative research studies to obtain data with respect to descriptive analysis and involving conducting both correlation and regression analyses.

### 3.1 Study Outcomes

The study involved feedbacks received from a total of 172 respondents (86%) out of 200 respondents who were given the questionnaires. All the respondents provided answers to the questionnaires through electronic channels. The data in this study have been seen analyzed according to several parts, namely demographics, descriptive

statistical analysis, correlation, and regression. Schedule 1 below depicts the demographic outcomes.

SCHEDULE 1:  
 DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

No	Items		Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Males	87	50.6
		Females	85	49.4
2	Age Group (years)	21-30	40	23.3
		31-40	75	43.6
		41-50	37	21.5
		51-60	17	9.9
		>60	3	1.7
3	Country	Malaysia	165	95.9
		Thailand	1	0.6
		Nigeria	1	0.6
		Others	3	1.7
		Not Indicated	2	1.2
4	Organization	KUIPs	100	58.1
		DRB HICOM	19	11.0
		Others	42	24.4
		Not Indicated	11	6.4
5	Family Status	Married	123	71.5
		Single	42	24.4
		Divorcee	6	3.5
		Not Indicated	1	0.6
6	Educational Level	Ph.D.	36	20.9
		Master's Degree	71	41.3
		First Degree	37	21.5
		Diploma	28	16.3
7	Professional Level	Lecturer/Administrator	39	22.7
		Lecturer	52	30.2
		Administrator	43	25.0
		Support Staff	38	22.1

In total, there were seven (7) main items in this part, inter-alia gender, age group, country, organization, family status, level of education, and lastly on the level of professionalism @ education. On the gender item, the frequency and percentage of

Males were slightly higher than Females, represented by 87 frequencies (50.6%) and 85 frequencies (49.4%) respectively. The age group analysis comprised mainly of respondents who were over 20 years old. The highest frequency and percentage of the age group were in the range of “31-40” years, with 75 frequencies (43.6%). On the other hand, the lowest age group was those over 60 years, with 3 frequencies (1.7%). The respondents involved in this study came mainly from 3 countries, where the bulk of the respondents were local respondents (Malaysia), which accounted for a total of 165 frequencies (95.9%). In terms of organizations involved, the respondents came from local organizations such as KUIPs, DRB HICOM, and others, with few unspecified organizations, i.e. categorized under a “Not Indicated” column, referring to those who did not state the names of their organizations. These unspecified organizations had the lowest number of respondents, with 11 frequencies (6.4%). On the family status item, most respondents were married, with 123 frequencies (71.5%), followed by bachelors with 42 frequencies (24.4%) and divorcee/widower with 6 frequencies (3.5%). Next, on the education level, the demographic analysis recorded 71 frequencies (41.3%) having master's degrees, followed by 37 frequencies (21.5%) and 36 frequencies (20.9%) for bachelor's and PhD degrees respectively. The last demographic data involved the “Level of Professionalism”, which incorporated work professions such as administrative cum lecturers, lecturers, administrators, and support staff. The highest and lowest frequency and percentage in this category level were lecturers and support staff with 52 respondents (30.2%) and 38 respondents (22.1%) respectively.

SCHEDULE 2:

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

No	Item	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>OC</b>				0.745
1	If I get another job with the same salary, I will not accept that job.	3.44	1.018	
2	I feel proud to be a part of this organization.	4.13	0.757	
3	I get financial and non-financial benefits that meet my level of satisfaction.	3.45	0.969	
4	The organization offers promotion at the appropriate time without any differences between staff.	2.98	1.054	
5	The organization offers training and knowledge relevant to my work at the appropriate.	3.69	0.869	



<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>3.538</b>	<b>0.9334</b>	
<b>TPM</b>				0.756
1	My colleagues are emotionally prepared for any implementation of changes in the organization.	3.55	0.775	
2	When my organization has difficulties, employees always try to resolve them.	3.87	0.663	
3	I believe the management always makes the best decisions for employees.	3.74	0.805	
4	When difficulties occur, ideas and suggestions from employees are welcomed by the organization.	3.66	0.926	
5	I trust my colleagues to support me during the process of changes.	3.92	0.597	
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>3.748</b>	<b>0.7532</b>	
<b>ROC</b>				0.851
1	My willingness to participate in organizational changes.	4.01	0.662	
2	My willingness to support the process of changes in the organization.	4.05	0.633	
3	My willingness to learn something new.	4.33	0.562	
4	My willingness to improve my current position.	4.25	0.640	
5	My willingness to take responsibility in the process of organizational changes.	4.14	0.589	
6	My willingness to create new ideas.	3.65	0.706	
<b>AVERAGE</b>		<b>4.886</b>	<b>0.7584</b>	

The descriptive analysis showed the mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's Alpha for two independent variables (OC and TPM) as well as the sole dependent variable (ROC). Overall, all said three variables were highly acceptable, as evidenced by Cronbach's Alpha value exceeding a value of 0.7. ROC recorded the highest average with a mean of 4.886, followed by TPM of 3.748 and OC of 3.538.

In contrast, the highest standard deviation was recorded by OC with a value of 0.9334, followed by ROC (0.7584), and TPM (0.7532). In respect of the OC, the second item of "I feel proud to be a part of this organization." recorded the highest mean of 4.13 compared with other items. The lowest item for OC was the fourth item with a mean value of 2.98. In addition, for TPM, the mean values and standard deviations were evenly distributed. However, the fifth item had the highest mean, as in "I trust my employees to support me during the change process.", with a mean value of 3.92

and a standard deviation of 0.597. Similarly for ROC, the standard deviation was also uniform, but only the sixth item was seen to have a slight difference at a mean value of 3.65 and was the lowest item.

SCHEDULE 3:

CORRELATION

Variables	ROC	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2 Tailed)
OC	0.602**	0.000
TPM	0.599**	0.000

\*\* Correlation was significant at level 0.01 (2-tailed).

The correlation results showed that the two independent variables, namely OC and TPM, had significant relationships with ROC. As can be seen in the above table, the Pearson correlation values for OC to ROC was ( $r = 0.602$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and that for TPM to ROC was ( $r = 0.599$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

SCHEDULE 4:

REGRESSION

Model Formulation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Estimated Deviation	Std
1	0.649 <sup>a</sup>	0.421	0.415	2.438	

a. Forecast : (Constant), TPM, OC

ANOVA<sup>a</sup>

Model		Total Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	731.803	2	365.901	61.538	0.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	1,004.866	169	5.946		
	Total	1,736.669	171			

- a. Dependant Variable : ROC  
 b. Forecast : (Constant), TPM, OC

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Non-Standard		Non-Standard t		Sig.
		Coefficient	Std. Error	Coefficient	Beta	
	Variable	10.618	1.308		8.117	0.000
1	OC	0.344	0.080	0.357	4.290	0.000
	TPM	0.406	0.098	0.345	4.155	0.000

- a. Dependant Variable : ROC

The results of the regression analysis found that the value of R Square for the findings in this study was 0.421, meaning a 4.21% variance in ROC. This model is significantly related based on the ANOVA table as shown above (F = 61.538, p = 0.000). Thus, both variables are significant and have positive relationships with ROC. OC showed coefficient values of  $\beta = 0.357$ , T = 4.290, p = 0.000, while that of TPM, showing coefficient values of  $\beta = 0.345$ , T = 4.155, p = 0.000.

In conclusion, the two hypotheses developed earlier showed significant relationships to staff's readiness to changes as decided by the organization's management.

### 3 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study discovered that employees had good perceptions and willingness to make changes in their organizations based on planning from higher-level management. In other words, any changes made in the organizations as decided by the top management were well received by the employees. In addition, the results of the study showed that employees were ready with the changes in line with the changes initiated by top management in the organizations. Based on the outcomes of the above study it can be concluded that both the two hypotheses as mentioned earlier were significant. Organizational commitment and having trusts in work colleagues and management are

positively linked to employees' willingness to changes. The results of this study are similar to that of previous studies, where organizational commitment is significant with the willingness of employees to changes [19] and [20]. Furthermore, the level of employees' trust in work colleagues and organizations is also significant and the results of this study are parallel with the findings of a study by [21]. A trust exists when organizations and colleagues are constantly communicating with employees regarding information for changes in the organizations and are constantly being communicated using appropriate channels and guidelines to employees.

On the survey questions given to respondents regarding employees' perceptions of changes made in the organization after the outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic in their respective organizations, 6.6% of the respondents stated that their organization was "Very Successful", and the bulk of 58.8% respondents stated that their organization was only "Successful". The remaining respondents stated that their organizations were "Not Successful" or "Very Unsuccessful", with 4.4% or 0.5% respondents respectively, whilst 29.7 % of the respondents replied with "No comments" in this study question.

#### 4. Research Limitation

The main limitation of this research study was that the scope of respondents only involved private higher education institutions in Malaysia and confined only to the education sector. It should be expanded to cover other countries and/or covering other economic and non-economic sectors too. In addition, future studies on this topic should expand its focus on initiatives provided by organizations to employees' readiness in the changes introduced and also its impact on employees' job performance. Furthermore, researchers could also compare the results of the study of employees' readiness to manage changes in the organizations, which should encompass both the public and the private sectors as well.

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