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THE EFFECT OF TALENT DEVELOPMENT AND DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION ON CHANGE READINESS

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Abstract

In response to volatile business environments, organisations increasingly pursue frequent change to remain competitive. This eventually led to higher uncertainty, associated with increased employee resistance. Organisations can mitigate employee resistance by inducing a change readiness mindset, which is critical for successful organisational change implementation. Therefore, this study examines the link between talent development, dialogic communication, and change readiness. Using a sample of employees in the Malaysian civil service, hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping technique in SmartPLS software. The results revealed that talent development is positively significant to change readiness. Conversely, dialogic communication is not a predictor of change readiness. This study's outcome provides essential theoretical and practical insights for managing organisational change and fostering a change-ready state of mind through organisational investment in human resources. By prioritising structured talent development programs, public sector organisations effectively prepare their human capital to navigate structural transformation. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that comprehensive skill enhancement and continuous learning serve as primary drivers of psychological readiness during organisational shifts, ensuring long-term institutional agility and operational continuity.

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Keywords: Change readiness, talent development, dialogic communication

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1. Introduction

Organisational change is in high demand in today's dynamic business world, but implementing it can be a huge challenge. Successful change requires a high level of determination and commitment from the organisation and its employees, as numerous reports indicate that most change efforts fail (Alrasheedi et al., 2022). Studies have shown that staff attitudes and behaviour are critical to the outcome of change efforts (Nguyen & Broekhuizen, 2022). However, inconsistencies and a lack of empirical evidence have shown that there is no clear framework for successfully managing organisa tional change. For instance, employees' reactions towards organisational change depend on how they perceive its effects. Typically, employees display negative responses due to anxiety, fear and stress, which requires organisations to take more effective change strategies (Oreg et al., 2018). In fact, this raises the question of what measures organisations must take to develop a change-ready employee who can act proactively prior to change implementation.

Employee readiness for change has been identified as a key component in all transformation or change programmes (Rimita et al., 2020). However, this essential element has often been overlooked in previous studies, with a focus on employee behaviours that help or hinder the implementation of change attempts. The researchers emphasised that studying employee readiness in the pre-implementation phase is crucial, as positive attitudes lead to more effective acceptance (Neiva & Amorim-Ribeiro, 2022). Employees are more open to change when adequate resources and assistance are available (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Previous studies have shown that workplace relationships can foster employee support for organisational change. When workplace relationships meet their needs, employees are more open to change. The interaction between an organisation and its employees, in meeting each other's needs, creates workplace relationships (Leana & Barry, 2000). In other words, relationships are formed when organisations support their employees in completing tasks that have a positive impact on productivity and performance. Digitisation and remote working are the new norms in today's workplace, resulting in a reduction in face-to-face interaction. In this regard, the new era of workplace relationships involves fairness and mutual exchange (North & Jensen, 2018). With reciprocity of readiness for change, employees benefit from organisational rewards and aids, such as talent development and dialogic communication.

Prior research has shown that employees are concerned about their ability to implement change, which escalates the fear of failure and job insecurity, ultimately harming the change process (Fløvik et al., 2019). Additionally, employees are likely to resist and become cynical. Accordingly, reciprocity in the form of talent development has been found to improve employees' readiness for change (Maheshwari & Vohra, 2015). Specifically, talent development interventions, such as training and development, which involve both formal and informal learning, can enhance employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities (Kashif Khan et al., 2020). Previous studies have described how employees become more confident about organisational change, especially when it involves digital technology, by providing opportunities for talent development (Oberländer et al., 2020). More precisely, talent development ingrains employees' readiness, resulting in organisations being more successful in their change efforts (Ford et al., 2018). Contrary to the literature, organisations spend more money on technology than on employee development when preparing for change (Kark et al., 2020). Thus, further exploration of talent development and its impact on employees' change readiness is necessary, as both are essential for achieving high productivity and maintaining

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competitiveness (Brynjolfsson, 2009). Furthermore, employees are the most valuable resource in an organisation, and it is critical to find ways to improve their capabilities and competencies (Ubaldi et al., 2021).

Equally important during organisational change is communication between management and employees (Banjongprasert, 2017; Blackman et al., 2022; Giauque, 2015). Clear communication about the change's purpose and benefits can reduce employees' resistance to change and encourage change readiness, which is especially critical in the early stages of the change process (Hasanaj & Manxhari, 2017; van den Heuvel et al., 2016). Moreover, numerous researchers and practitioners agreed that providing valuable and relevant information can increase employees' trust, which in turn establishes employees' readiness for change (Bayraktar & Jiménez, 2020; Wang & Kebede, 2020). As such, information availability, participation, transparency, and dialogue are essential components in organisational communication (Hameed et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021; Men & Stacks, 2014). Management and employees can establish mutuality and openness through two-way dialogic communication (Yang et al., 2015). However, these components were studied separately using either the transparency or the internal communication construct, which leads to an incomplete conclusion. Indeed, it is highly likely that conversations between senior management and employees will lead to changes in employee intention (Blackman et al., 2022). As a result, dialogic communication is effective in promoting a change-ready mindset.

As mentioned above, identifying factors that induce employees' readiness for change is crucial. A higher level of readiness will reduce employees' resistance and lead to change-supportive behaviour. Therefore, this study addresses the following two research questions: (a) Does talent development affect employee readiness for change? and (b) Does dialogic communication affect employee readiness for change? Based on this, this research aims to examine the linkages between talent development, dialogic communication and employees' readiness for change.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

2.1. Change Readiness

Change readiness refers to employees' responses to change, reflected in their attitudes, beliefs, and intentions regarding the necessity for change and the organisation's capacity to implement it effectively (Armenakis et al., 1993). It involves an individual's cognitive and emotional preparation to navigate a specific change (Holt et al., 2007). Additionally, Bouckenooghe et al. (2009) describe readiness as a mindset characterized by beliefs, feelings, and actions that support the acceptance of change initiatives, particularly during the initial stages of a proposed change. Employees who recognize the need for change and have the ability to execute it can induce this positive reaction (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999).

Employees' readiness for change is influenced by various organisational factors, including organisational justice, leadership style, communication, and organisational culture (Engida et al., 2022; Kebede & Wang, 2022; Rahi et al., 2022). These factors interact to establish an environment where employees feel empowered, supported, and motivated to embrace change initiatives. Furthermore, the concept of organisational support has been linked to employees' readiness for change. Employees who perceive that their organisation values and supports their well-being and development are more likely to

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feel prepared and motivated to engage in change processes (Riyanto et al., 2020). This is because when employers offer supportive organisational resources, employee resistance toward organisational change decreases dramatically (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Ultimately, organisations that prioritise creating a readiness culture, provide support, and foster positive attitudes towards change are more likely to achieve successful change outcomes.

2.2. Talent Development and Change Readiness

Talent development is an intervention program designed to enhance specific skills and capabilities, thereby supporting employees' personal growth and career success. Providing employees access to training and development activities is key when it comes to preparing them for organisational change initiatives (Chaudhuri et al., 2018). Through training activities, employees become more self-aware of their strengths, weaknesses, interests and challenges, allowing them to assess their current roles better and identify areas for further development. In addition, this intervention allows employees to learn about new procedures or protocols in a personalised setting and, subsequently, become more comfortable with any potential changes, including disruptive events from external sources or political events that have necessitated sudden operational adjustments (Tamunomiebi & Worgu, 2020). Talent development can enhance employees' self-efficacy (Song et al., 2018) and positively influence employees' performance, work attitude, and behaviours, leading to higher productivity and better work outcomes. On the other hand, training activities are negatively related to stress and turnover intention (Sher et al., 2021). By enhancing employees' knowledge and skills, they feel that the work is becoming more interesting, especially when challenges arise from new processes.

Talent development tailored to employees' needs and capabilities effectively prepares them to participate in and lead change efforts (Chaudry et al., 2017). Similarly, employees can integrate specific training activities designed to help accelerate familiarisation with new processes under the new conditions. From this, employees see organisational changes taking place as a natural progression rather than something unforeseeable or unfavourable. Therefore, talent development is expected to induce employees' readiness for change. Thus, we hypothesised that:

H1: Talent development has a positive effect on change readiness.

2.3. Dialogic Communication and Change Readiness

Dialogic communication refers to a two-way communication approach based on the dialogic principle, which emphasises mutuality and openness. The approach has been suggested as an effective means of communication in managing change (Lee, 2022). Through mutuality, both management and employees work together toward shared goals by responding to other parties with respect and empathy (Yang et al., 2015). Moreover, management action in sharing information with employees without restriction depicts commitment to transparency, resulting in trustworthiness. When employees trust their management, they are more open to new ideas and collaborate with their colleagues during change (Bordia et al., 2004; Rafferty & Minbashian, 2019; Ramanan & Mohamad, 2020). Additionally, when management communicates effectively, employees can better understand the reasons for the change and what they need to do to support it. This makes employees feel prepared for the changes and less likely to go against them.

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Therefore, organisations must establish dialogic communication through open dialogues among their members. To this end, leaders must create an environment that fosters meaningful dialogue and promotes active listening. Simply speaking, one-sided conversations are no longer sufficient in today's digital era, forcing management to practice active listening skills, particularly when addressing employee feedback and concerns, as this helps build trust across the board and reduces uncertainty.

Dialogic communication is a form of communication that has been noted for its ability to enhance employee readiness for change by engaging in active dialogue to reach a shared understanding. Moreover, the opportunities to discuss any potential worries, concerns and different views enable them to develop trust in one another, thereby preparing employees better for successful organisational changes (Ahmad Fadzil et al., 2019). For instance, dialogue allows diverse perspectives on a proposed change to be shared without judgment or critique, thus creating ample space for understanding while concurrently facilitating employees' transition into a new work setting. Dialogic communication emphasises mutuality rather than superiority or information transfer, which effectively fosters readiness among employees for imminent change (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Accordingly, the dialogic approach helps to reduce the natural resistance to change, resulting in employees being more open and responsive to change initiatives and more likely to accept them (Simoes & Esposito, 2014). Most importantly, employees who received dialogic communication from the management were more likely to adjust their attitudes to accept changes than those who received non-dialogic communication (Frahm & Brown, 2004; Kim, 2018). Engaging employees in a two-way exchange of information about the change can increase their awareness of the issues and provide them with a greater understanding of the organisation's objectives and goals. Thus, we expect that employees will be more ready for organisational change if dialogic communication is practised within the organisation. On that note, we propose the following hypothesised relationship:

H2: Dialogic communication has a positive effect on change readiness.

The research model for this study is shown in Figure 1.

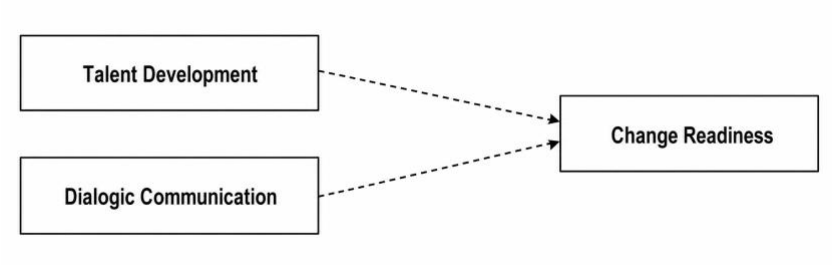


Figure 1. Research model

3. Methodology

The study was conducted among Administrative and Diplomatic officers working at the ministry in Malaysia. Data were collected using an online questionnaire, which was emailed to the respondents. A disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to collect 370 valid responses, ensuring that the sample accurately represents each ministry, which varies in size. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure change readiness, talent development, and dialogic communication.

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Change readiness was measured by an individual's state of mind, reflecting beliefs, feelings and actions toward change efforts through three subscales: cognitive, affective, and intentional. A 9-item scale measured this construct, developed and validated by Bouckenooghe et al. (2009), with each subscale having three items. The rating scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item from each subscale is 'Plan for future improvement will not bring substantial impact' (cognitive); 'I am willing to put energy into the process of civil service change' (affective); and 'I find the change in civil service refreshing' (intentional).

Talent development was measured by activities that build employees' capability and competencies required for business processes. A 7-item scale was used to measure this construct, which was developed and validated by Chami-Malaeb and Garavan (2013). The rating scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item from the scale is 'Learning and development programmes are available at least once a year'.

Dialogic communication was measured by the communication approach used in an organisation to announce, inform and exchange information through two subscales: mutuality and openness. A 14-item scale was used to measure this construct, which was developed and validated by Lee (2022). The rating scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). An example item from each subscale is 'Management is sensitive to employees' need' (mutuality); and 'Management can take criticism from employees' (openness).

4. Results

The measurement and structural model of the study were assessed using SmartPLS Version 4.0 software. Following the two-step process, the measurement model was first evaluated, followed by the structural model.

4.1. Measurement Model

The evaluation of the measurement model was related to the goodness of measure criteria: reliability and validity. Therefore, Table 1 shows the item loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted for all the latent variables in the study. The analysis showed that the loading for item DCM5 was 0.151, hence the item was automatically removed. Additionally, a few items fell below the recommended level of 0.708, including TD1, DCM6, and DCO1. However, the items were retained since the internal consistency reliability of the measures has been achieved. The constructs in the study were considered reliable, as the composite reliability values ranged from 0.86 to 0.95. These values indicated that the measurement was good since it exceeded 0.8 (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). Subsequently, the study established convergent validity, as the AVE value for all constructs was recorded to be greater than 0.5, specifically ranging from 0.562 to 0.905.

The discriminant validity was evaluated based on AVE and latent variable correlations. The findings in Table 2 show that the values of the AVE square root in the diagonal are greater than the squared correlations with other constructs in the off-diagonal, indicating that discriminant validity is achieved. The

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proposed research model demonstrated adequate indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 1. Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Items	Loading	CR	AVE
Talent Development	TD1	0.528	0.898	0.562
	TD2	0.719		
	TD3	0.783		
	TD4	0.803		
	TD5	0.801		
	TD6	0.777		
	TD7	0.795		
Dialogic Communication	DCM1	0.771	0.950	0.905
	DCM2	0.847		
	DCM3	0.820		
	DCM4	0.827		
	DCM6	0.692		
	DCM7	0.795		
	DCM8	0.792		
	DCO1	0.638		
	DCO2	0.814		
	DCO3	0.877		
	DCO4	0.859		
	DCO5	0.855		
	DCO6	0.822		
Change Readiness	CRC1	0.778	0.860	0.675
	CRC2	0.876		
	CRC3	0.907		
	CRA1	0.897		
	CRA2	0.945		
	CRA3	0.962		
	CRI1	0.820		
	CRI2	0.936		
	CRI3	0.879		

Note: CR stands for composite reliability, and AVE stands for average variance extracted.

Table 2. Discriminant validity

Construct	Talent Development	Dialogic Communication	Change Readiness
Talent Development	**0.750**		
Dialogic Communication	0.602	**0.951**	
Change Readiness	0.382	0.432	**0.821**

Note: The values in the diagonal (bolded) represent the square root of the AVE, while the off-diagonals represent the correlations.

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4.2. Structural Model

The next step was to ascertain the effect of talent development and dialogic communication on change readiness. This was achieved by assessing the structural model. The bootstrapping procedure was used to determine the significance of structural path coefficients with 10,000 subsamples. Table 3 presents the results for the path coefficients, observed t-statistics, and effect sizes for the proposed hypotheses. The results shown in Table 3 supported Hypothesis 1, which states that talent development is a positive and significant predictor of change readiness ($\beta = 0.117$, $p = 0.012$). In contrast, no significant relationship was found between dialogic communication and change readiness. Moreover, talent development appeared to have a moderate effect on predicting change readiness, as indicated by an effect size of $f^2 = 0.23$ (Cohen, 1988). Overall, the explained variance, R^2, for change readiness is 0.391, indicating that 39.1% of the variance in change readiness can be explained by talent development.

The model's predictive power assessment involved examining the naïve benchmark, Q2predict, and following the steps of the $PLS_{predict}$ approach suggested by Shmueli et al. (2019). The assessment compared the root mean square error (RMSE) values of PLS-SEM against those of the linear regression model (LM) benchmark. For this study, less than 50% of the dependent construct indicators produced lower prediction errors; thus, the study model's predictive power is weak.

Table 3. Hypotheses testing

	Relationship	Standardised beta	Standard error	t-value	f^2	Decision
H1	Talent Development -> Change Readiness	0.117	0.052	2.244*	0.230	Supported
H2	Dialogic Communication -> Change Readiness	0.021	0.074	0.281	0.000	Not supported

*$p<0.05$ ($t=1.645$).

5. Discussion

Talent development is a significant predictor of change readiness. The result was consistent with previous studies, such as those by Alqudah et al. (2022), Austin et al. (2020), Bibi (2019), and Lubis et al. (2022). The majority of employees believe that talent development practice enables them to build their competencies, which helps prepare them for new challenges and transformation in the workplace. In emerging economies, talent development through learning and capacity building is essential to address changing skill requirements and align employees' skills with future organisational needs. Moreover, by fostering a culture of continuous learning and growth, organisations can ensure a smooth transition during times of change and uncertainty. Ultimately, talent development enables employees to thrive in an ever-changing business environment and strengthens the overall organisational capacity to respond to external market forces and industry trends.

The contradictory finding that dialogic communication is insignificant in change readiness could be attributed to inadequate communication skills among leaders or superiors. Effective dialogic communication requires the willingness to engage in dialogue and the ability to communicate clearly,

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empathetically, and persuasively. If leaders or superiors lacked the necessary skills to facilitate meaningful conversations, employees may have struggled to connect with the message or understand the rationale behind the proposed changes. In addition, bureaucracy and power distance in the civil service may cause communication to be perceived as one-sided or superficial, leading employees to feel that they are not truly involved or valued in the change process. Without genuine dialogue that creates a space for open and honest communication where employees feel heard and respected, their readiness for change can be significantly impacted (Men et al., 2020).

6. Limitations, Suggestions and Conclusion

This study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. First, all the data for this study were gathered at a single point in time. Hence, this study can only establish a correlation between the variables. Second, the study focused only on middle managers working at the ministry level, and the findings may not be representative of middle managers working at other levels or in different settings. Finally, self-reported and single-source data raised specific concerns about common method variance (CMV). However, the inclusion of the marker variable and comparison analysis indicated that CMV is not a threat to the results.

Earlier research has revealed a positive relationship between dialogic communication and change readiness (Ahmad Fadzil et al., 2019; Frahm & Brown, 2007; Simoes & Esposito, 2014). However, further investigation is warranted to explore this relationship across diverse organisational contexts, industries, and cultural settings. Additionally, future research could examine dialogic communication through the lens of public relations theory, assessing its applicability and effectiveness in organisational communication frameworks. A longitudinal study could also provide deeper insights into how sustained dialogic engagement influences long-term adaptability to change. By expanding the theoretical and empirical scope of this research, scholars can offer more nuanced strategies for organisations to enhance change readiness.

Finally, this study underscores the pivotal role of organisational factors in shaping employee readiness for change, presenting a framework that bridges theoretical and practical applications. The findings underscore the importance of talent development and dialogic communication in cultivating a change-ready workforce. For practitioners, this research serves as a foundational guide for designing interventions that facilitate smoother transitions, while for academicians, it opens avenues for further exploration into the interplay between communication, employee psychology, and organisational adaptability. Ultimately, organisations that prioritise these dimensions will be better positioned to navigate the complexities of modern business transformations successfully.

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Author Contributions

Author A.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft.

Author B.: Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing.

Author C.: Supervision, Validation.

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical Statement

This research does not require ethics approval since all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided their consent prior to participation. Data confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.

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