

The Role of Social Intelligence in Shaping Change Readiness Among Employees in an Educational Institution

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ABSTRACT

This correlational study investigates the role of social intelligence on employees' readiness for organizational change by utilizing the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale and a change readiness scale. The research evaluates how dimensions of social intelligence—social information processing, social skills, and social awareness—relate to change readiness traits including optimism, adventurousness, passion and drive, confidence, and tolerance for ambiguity. Analysis of 150 employees from a private higher education institution in the Philippines revealed that social skills ($r = .587$) were the strongest correlate of change readiness. Social awareness ($r = .414$) and information processing ($r = .367$) also exhibit significant associations. The results of the stepwise regression confirmed that social skills ($\beta = .424$) were the most significant predictors of change readiness, explaining 40.8% of the variance. These findings reveal the importance of social intelligence in facilitating employees' adaptability and engagement during organizational transitions. Thus, the results suggest that organizations invest in training programs to enhance social skills and awareness to improve change management effectiveness. Future research is recommended to use a more diverse sample and utilize additional data collection methods to generalize findings across different contexts.

Keywords: social intelligence, change readiness, organizational adaptability.

INTRODUCTION

“The only constant in life is change”—Heraclitus, as cited by ArapahoeTim (2020). When people are afraid of change, they tend to become irrational. They cling to the past and avoid moving forward, resulting in slow or no progress at all.

Managing change effectively is considered a major challenge for both organizations and individuals nowadays. Moreover, although the terms volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) may seem cliché, they still describe our fact-changing world (Turner, 2022). Attitudes of employees toward change are vital for the success of an organization in

implementing new policies (Elias, 2009, as cited by Repovš et al., 2019). For leaders to manage transformational change effectively, it is important to understand how the people in the organization react and adapt to change (Beasley et al., 2021). Thus, increasing the employees' readiness for change is considered an important initiative of an organization.

Higher levels of change readiness among employees, leaders, and organizations serve as an important element that will drive success with transformation. According to an article published by Harvard Business Review as cited by Abbas (2021), change readiness refers to the capacity of an individual or an organization to manage change effectively to gain the benefits, reduce risks, and maintain or improve performance. Change readiness describes both how a person's processes are set up, and how prepared, motivated, and capable they are (Brower, 2024). Individual readiness for change deals with how prepared employees are for change. This is shaped by one's beliefs, attitudes, and intentions. Furthermore, readiness is also influenced by the change itself, its context, the process of implementation, and the trait of the people involved (Goldman, 2009, as cited by Mahendrati & Mangundjay, 2019).

According to Krugh and Meyer (2018), human factors will remain important and adaptable in the future. Despite the increasing interest as an emerging topic in research and the long history of studying “human change,” the concept of “change readiness” is presented in a somewhat fragmented way in the literature (Duradoni et al., 2024).

It is in this regard that this correlational study is conducted to determine other factors that influence individual's readiness for change among employees from a private sectarian higher education institution in the Philippines. Particularly, this study focused on the role of social intelligence and its dimensions, namely social information processing, social skills, and social awareness (Silvera et al., 2001), to change readiness. While change readiness is quantified through optimism, adventurousness, passion or drive, confidence, and tolerance for ambiguity (Crispo, n.d.; Greer, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study dealt with determining the function of social intelligence and its components, which include social awareness, social skills, and social information processes, on change readiness. Change readiness is measured with the following indicators: optimism, adventurousness, passion or drive, confidence, and tolerance for ambiguity. This section presents a synthesis of literature in relation to these variables.

Change Readiness

Employees' level of change readiness is determined by how much they favor opinions toward the need for organizational change. It also refers to the acceptance of change and to the degree to which they think these developments will likely have significant impact on the organization as a whole and on every individual (Riddell & Roisland, 2017). This paper adopts the concept of Greer (2023); accordingly, there are seven traits of change readiness.

Resourcefulness is an important trait for dealing with change. The capacity to be resourceful is the ability to deal with challenging circumstances or uncommon problems. It refers to finding solutions to problems encountered and the ability to complete the tasks despite the limitations (Greer, 2023). The problem is solved by optimizing whatever is available, either by creating something new or simply considering how to work more effectively. It requires imagination, innovation, and persistence (Yale University, 2021). Optimism also plays a critical role in change readiness. Resourcefulness is important in adapting to change because resourceful people think creatively. Additionally, they are naturally curious and exhibit interest in things outside the box (California State University Monterey Bay, 2023). According to Ariella (2023), organizational leaders seek out resourceful employees because they approach problem-solving by demonstrating valuable qualities. They are more patient and creative, and they often take more initiative. They are beneficial to the organization of any industry as they exhibit confidence, build strong professional networks, and show interest in continuous learning.

Optimism also plays a crucial role in dealing with change. It looks at opportunities and possibilities instead of focusing on obstacles. Optimist people show more enthusiasm for accepting change (Greer, 2023). Optimistic employees are proactive and engaged. They consider challenges with persistence and use them as motivation. They are eager to adopt new methods and establish groups with confidence. Even in undesirable circumstances, they exhibit commitment and high energy. They are also able to build networks, reduce stress, and effectively handle feedback as a chance of growth. Being optimistic enables employees to thrive and contribute positively even during tough times (Choi, 2020).

Adventurousness includes the willingness to take risks and explore the unknown. It contributes to effectively managing change. People who are adventurous usually excel in making initiatives and embracing change (Greer, 2023).

According to an article published by Upskilable Team, being adventurous in the workplace is vital in developing a dynamic and forward-thinking environment. Employees are adventurous and act as catalysts for innovation by accepting creative thinking and innovative solutions. Additionally, they are willing to calculate risks, which can lead to bold decisions and new opportunities for growth. Their natural curiosity enables them to seek out new challenges, promoting both professional as well as personal growth (*Why Is Being Adventurous Considered Important in the Workplace?*, 2024).

Passion and drive are also important in sustaining effort through change. They reflect an individual's intensity and determination. Passion can fuel success and encourage resilience (Greer, 2023). Moreover, harmonic passion enables the prevention of negative feelings at work. It provides a positive, personal boost (Cabrita & Duarte, 2023). Thus, employees are often encouraged to “pursue their passion” at work because it leads to better performance by motivating and driving them forward (Wang et al., 2022).

Adaptability includes flexibility and resilience. It allows individuals to adjust their goals and recover effectively from setbacks. Yet, too much adaptability may lead to a lack of commitment to specific goals (Greer, 2023).

Individual adaptability is the capacity of an individual to adjust to changes in the organization and work situations. Being adaptable is seen as an important mental resource, especially vital for newcomers in unfamiliar environments (De Luna & Encio, 2023).

Confidence is also crucial for adapting to change. High levels of confidence, both situational and self-related, are linked to a wrong sense of self-esteem and effectiveness (Greer, 2023). The study of Gyllensten and Palmer (2014) asserted that increased confidence leads to greater involvement in the organization, which helps employees feel more engaged and satisfied. This can result in improvement in how they are perceived by the organizational leaders.

Lastly, ***tolerance for ambiguity*** helps handle uncertainty of change. It refers to the ability to remain calm and functional in situations faced by uncertainty, vagueness, or lack of direction. People with high levels of tolerance for ambiguity are generally flexible and open-minded. They are able to adopt to their expectations and make plans for any circumstances (Greer, 2023).

These texts assert that change readiness is determined by an individual's attitude towards organizational change. These include their acceptance of its impact and significance. Key traits of change readiness are resourcefulness, optimism, adventurousness, passion, and adaptability. These traits collectively improve an employee's ability to manage and thrive amid change.

Social Intelligence

Social intelligence refers to the ability to understand and manage both one's self and others in social situations. It involves effectively navigating and handling social interactions and environments (Lathesh & Avadhani, 2018). In this study, social information processing, social skills, and social awareness were utilized as indicators of social intelligence (Silvera et al., 2001).

According to Şenol and MetiN (2021), *social information processing* is a concept that refers to how people explore social interactions through six steps. These steps include encoding social cues, interpreting these cues, clarifying goals, constructing responses, deciding on a response, and enacting and evaluating the response. This cyclical process uses cues to develop solutions, choose reactions from memory, and assess their actions.

Social skills help individuals assess others' strengths, powers, and weaknesses. Those who possess these skills can effectively handle positive criticism and feedback from different

sources. Furthermore, they are more equipped in managing and reglating stress (Sanwal and Sareen, 2022).

Social awareness involves recognizing the challenges, crises, and needs of others, and it helps individuals manage conflicts and build positive relationships (Sanwal and Sareen, 2022). Moreover, it is the ability to understand and consider the perspectives of others and use that understanding in their interactions (Botelho, 2023).

Showing understanding and empathizing with others can significantly improve employee relationships, leading to stronger connections and more efficient workflow. By fostering social awareness, conflicts are reduced, communication is improved, and addressing issues is properly done. Social awareness further aids in lowering discrimination by cultivating respect for diverse perspectives and backgrounds, ensuring that employees are valued and treated fairly (*Developing Social Awareness: Enhancing Empathy and Understanding in Relationships*, 2023).

These literatures prove that social intelligence is a crucial competency that includes the ability to understand and manage oneself and others effectively. Cultivating social information processing, social skills, and social awareness can significantly enhance workplace relationships, improve communication, reduce conflicts, and lower discrimination through the creation of a respectful and inclusive environment. Thus, a strong foundation in social intelligence leads to a more productive organizational atmosphere.

Social intelligence and change readiness

Despite the importance of social intelligence and change readiness in the workplace, there is a scarcity of studies determining the relationship between these variables. As of this writing, the researcher has found only one article dealing with social intelligence and its effect on performance (Mohamed, 2021). Additionally, in the research study conducted by Saban et al. (2023), social intelligence and change readiness were both considered as correlating to quality of life. Nonetheless, this is the first analysis conducted to establish the role of social intelligence to change readiness.

METHODS

This correlational study collected data from employees at a private higher education institution, including administrators, faculty, and staff who had been employed for at least six months. An invitation to participate, along with a link to the research questionnaire on Google Forms, was sent to employees' institutional emails. After six weeks, 150 employees responded, comprising of 74 faculty members, 51 staff, and 25 administrators and associates in the administration. The study used the Tromsø Social Intelligence Scale and a change readiness scale to explore the relationship between social intelligence and change readiness. Ethical considerations were upheld, ensuring data confidentiality. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation and stepwise regression techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlation Between Social Intelligence and Change Readiness

Table 1 presents a correlation matrix illustrating the relationships between various dimensions of social intelligence and change readiness. The correlations are denoted using Pearson coefficients, with significance level indicated by asterisks (*). This matrix helps to identify how different aspects of social intelligence are related to an individual's readiness to adapt to change, revealing significant associations that provide insights into the interplay between these factors.

The table provides a detailed analysis of the relationships between the variables. The key dimensions of social intelligence are social information processing, social skills, and social awareness. On the other hand, change readiness is collectively quantified by optimism, adventurousness, passion or drive, adaptability, confidence, and tolerance for ambiguity.

The data reveals that notable associations between these variables were established. For instance, social skills have a strong positive correlation with change readiness ($r = .587$), suggesting that individuals with better social skills are more prepared to embrace change. Social information processing ($r = .367$) and social awareness ($r = .414$) also correlate positively with change readiness, though to a lesser extent. Collectively, social intelligence strongly correlates with change readiness ($r = .629$). Overall, the table underscores the integral role of social intelligence dimensions in enhancing an employee's readiness for change.

When it comes to the dimensions of change readiness, social information processing is significantly correlated with resourcefulness ($r = .551$), passion or drive ($r = .381$), and confidence ($r = .515$). Additionally, social skills are significantly associated with resourcefulness ($r = .427$), optimism ($r = .416$), adventurousness ($r = .188$), adaptability ($r = .300$), and confidence ($r = .515$). Lastly, social awareness is significantly associated with optimism ($r = .462$), adaptability ($r = .455$), and tolerance for ambiguity ($r = .310$).

Table 1
Correlation Matrix of Social Intelligence Dimensions and Change Readiness

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Social information processing	37.03	5.19											
2. Social skills	33.91	6.17	.392**										
			.000										
3. Social awareness	32.48	6.38	.086	.411**									
			.294	.000									
4. Social Intelligence	34.48	4.33	.628**	.833**	.721**								
			.000	.000	.000								
5. Resourcefulness	23.03	3.53	.551**	.427**	-.016	.414**							
			.000	.000	.844	.000							
6. Optimism	18.63	3.51	.123	.416**	.462**	.473**	.106						
			.134	.000	.000	.000	.196						
7. Adventurousness	13.57	3.68	-.104	.188*	.300**	.195*	-.161*	.365**					
			.204	.021	.000	.017	.049	.000					
8. Passion or Drive	20.69	3.54	.381**	.126	-.133	.146	.609**	-.095	-.265**				
			.000	.126	.106	.074	.000	.248	.001				
9. Adaptability	16.70	3.58	-.018	.300**	.455**	.359**	-.177*	.303**	.535**	-.282**			
			.824	.000	.000	.000	.030	.000	.000	.000			
10. Confidence	22.38	3.00	.515**	.396**	-.022	.383**	.641**	.164*	-.243**	.419**	-.152		
			.000	.000	.787	.000	.000	.044	.003	.000	.064		
11. Tolerance for Ambiguity	14.63	3.54	-.145	.148	.310**	.164*	-.280**	.443**	.426**	-.513**	.478**	-.151	
			.077	.071	.000	.044	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.066	
12. Change Readiness	18.52	1.67	.367**	.587**	.414**	.629**	.491**	.685**	.525**	.240**	.531**	.456**	.436**
			.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.003	.000	.000	.000

Note. *p<.05, **p<.01. Note. *p<.05, **p<.01.

Predictors of Change Readiness

Table 2 presents the results from a stepwise regression analysis with the dependent variable being “change readiness”. The analysis aims to identify the contribution of the dimensions of social intelligence to change readiness.

There are three models that emerged from the stepwise regression results. The final model (Model 3) reveals important insights into the predictors of change readiness. The three dimensions of social intelligence were identified as significant predictors of change readiness, indicating their substantial role in influencing an employee’s preparedness for change.

Social skills emerge as the strongest predictors (Beta = .424), suggesting that the higher levels of social skills are associated with greater change readiness. This finding is supported by a highly significant t-value of 5.588 and a p-value less than 0.001.

The results also reveal that social awareness contributes significantly to the model. The extent of the association is lesser with Beta = 0.224 and a t-value of 3.194, with a p-value of 0.002. This means that employees with higher social awareness are more likely to be ready for change.

Social information processing, while still significant, has a smaller effect with a Beta = 0.181 and a t-value of 2.162, with p = 0.010. This implies that employees with higher levels of social information processing tend to be more acceptable to change.

The model’s R value of 0.639 and R² of 0.408 indicate that these predictors collectively explain about 40.8% of the variance in change readiness, highlighting a strong correlation and substantial explanatory effect. The increment R² change of .027 from the previous model highlights a meaningful improvement in the model’s fit due to the inclusions of these three dimensions of social intelligence. The overall model is statistically significant, as proven by an F-value = 33.600 and p < .001, confirming the relevance and significance of the predictors. These results lead to the regression equation change readiness = 10.536 + 0.115 (social skills) + 0.059 (social awareness) + 0.059 (social information processing).

Table 2
Stepwise Regression Analysis of Predictors of Change Readiness

Model 3	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	R	R ²	R ² Change
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t				
(Constant)	10.536	.914		11.522	.000			
Social skills	.115	.021	.424	5.588	.000	.587 ^a	.345	.345
Social awareness	.059	.018	.224	3.194	.002	.617 ^b	.381	.036

Social information processing	.0	.022	.181	2.612	.010	.639 ^c	.408	.027
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$F(3,149) = 33.600, p = .000$

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, SUGGESTIONS, AND LIMITATION

The study highlights the important role of social intelligence in enhancing employees' readiness for changes. The results of the stepwise regression analysis show that social skills, social awareness, and social information processing emerged as significant predictors of change readiness. These findings have significant implications for organizations aiming to improve their change management processes. Since social skills came out as the strongest predictor of change readiness, it is recommended that organizations should focus on developing these skills among their employees. As highlighted in Isaiah 43:19, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?" this readiness is crucial for recognizing and embracing new opportunities.

Training programs that enhance interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, and social problem-solving abilities could help in facilitating smoother transitions during the implementation of change in the organization. Moreover, implementing targeted interventions to foster social awareness can further support employees in adapting to change that can lead to enhancing overall organizational effectiveness. Regular assessments of employees' social intelligence and readiness for change can help in tailoring programs to address specific needs and challenges in the organization.

This research is limited to a single educational institution, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or cultures. Additionally, self-reported measures of social intelligence and change readiness serve as measures that can be subject to personal biases. Thus, future studies are recommended for a wider and more diverse sample and adapt additional methods of collecting data, which may include observational or peer assessments, to gather a more comprehensive understanding of how social intelligence influences change readiness across different settings.

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