

# The Effects of Perceived Leadership Styles and Emotional Intelligence on Attitude toward Organizational Change among Secondary School Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to investigate the relationships of perceived leadership styles and emotional intelligence on attitude toward organizational change in Malaysian secondary school context. The study involved a total of 360 teachers chosen randomly from five secondary schools in Selangor. The study was conducted based on the three-stage planned change from Lewin's (1947). This study only focuses on the unfreezing stage as a guide to study the potential relationships of the three research variables. In this study, the leadership styles were derived from Bass and Avolio's (2000) model of transformational and transactional leadership, while emotional intelligence has been referred to Wong and Law's (2002) theory. However, the dependent variable of attitude toward organizational change was referred to Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cummings & Pierce (1989). The conceptual framework of this study proposed an impact of leadership styles and emotional intelligence on the attitude toward organizational change. The correlation analysis shows that leadership styles and emotional intelligence are positively linked to attitude toward organizational change. Basically, the findings have practical implications toward the improvement of principals' leadership and enhancement of emotional intelligence of teachers. Besides, it also has implications on the attitude toward organizational change in Malaysian education system.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Styles, Organizational Change

## 1. Introduction

There are a number of factors contributing to the occurrence of organizational change such as globalization, liberalization and information technology. For example, the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) has become common in an organization which includes learning organizations (Aziz, Seman, Hashim, Roslin, & Ishar, 2019). All these factors require the involvement of both the private and public sectors. Normally, such changes happen in the aspects of organizational structure, strategies, policies, procedures, technology or work culture to reduce costs, and to remain competitive. When an organization experiences change, it faces various responses from the employees especially concerning attitude toward the organizational change either positive or negative reaction (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). According to Lines (2005), attitude toward organizational change is an overall

evaluation by a person of the change with some degree of positive or negative reaction. Even though the purpose of change in organization is to bring goodness to the organization and its employees, the employees may show negative responses toward the change. This kind of response is due to the mounting pressure, stress and uncertainty brought together by the organizational change (Aslam, Ilyas, Imran, & Rahman, 2016). In fact, negative attitude is one of the major contributors to the high rate of organizational change failure as found in many various studies (Kuipers, Higgs, Kickert, Tummers, Grandia & Van der Voet, 2014; Vakola, 2014, Ministry of Education, 2013, Hallinger, 2010)

Normally, organizational change plans are treated with a negative attitude due to the lack of the unfreeze process (Walker, Armenakis & Bernerth 2007). The concept of “unfreeze” is rooted from Kurt Lewin (1947)’s three-stage planned change process model. There are three stages to follow in order to succeed in implementing organizational change namely, unfreezing, moving and refreezing. This model can guide the organization to plan and execute the organizational change appropriately. The first stage requires the transformation of the old attitude that already exists to adapt to a new attitude. It is the most important stage, known as the unfreezing. Otherwise, new behaviour cannot be implemented if the old behaviour is unlearned. Behaviour is determined by behavioural intention which is strongly influenced by attitude (Ajzen, 2012). Omitting the first stage to make the process faster is a serious mistake that can initiate devastating impact which will slow the progress of change momentum and eventually hinder the change (Kotter, 2012). Hence the unfreeze stage is about creating the right conditions in order to facilitate and navigate the organizational change through coping with negative attitude and creating positive attitude towards change to convince people to move from a quasi-equilibrium state. In order to reach that state, Lewin (1947) has made some suggestions and guidance to include leadership and emotion as the key ingredients to make the unfreeze stage successful.

To date, several studies have been conducted to unveil the factors that contribute to successful organizational change (Burke, 2008; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Gordon & Hinnings, 2003) and some only focus on certain aspects of organizational change such as transformational leadership behaviour (Bommer et al, 2005; Higgs & Rowland, 2005), attitudes of employees towards change (Tai & Omar, 2015; Devos, 2007), and emotional consequences of organizational change (Kirsch, Parry & Peake, 2010). However, all these studies were done in isolation and the interplay between all these variables are yet to be identified. It is important to note that as to date there has been scant empirical research to investigate the interplay between these three variables namely, leadership styles, emotional intelligence and attitude toward organizational change particularly in Malaysian context and global settings as well.

According to Northouse (2015), leadership style is a determining factor to motivate employees towards goal achievement, it provides direction to implement plans successfully. However, a leader who possesses lack of experience can negatively influence the organizational climate and often will result in ineffective organizational change (Ancho & Rosario, 2020). Hence, employees need encouragement from a leader to accept organizational change at the unfreezing stage. This encouragement should be provided under effective leadership style (Cummings and Worley, 2014). The leadership styles varied from a person to another and the styles are always related to the situational need (Anderson, & Sun, 2017). Among all the leadership styles theories, transformational and transactional leadership styles are most crucial for organizational change (Nordin, 2011). Of the numerous theories of leadership, the transformational and transactional leadership styles (Avolio & Bass, 1991; Bass & Avolio, 1999), are among the most commonly used and well-validated leadership conceptualization ((Kroes, 2015; Ahmad, Abbas, Latif & Rasheed, 2014), thus it has become the focus of this study. This perceptual measure of the principal’s leadership styles from the view of secondary school teachers in Selangor could provide better assessment since these subordinates basically are having daily contact with their leaders and have ample opportunities to observe their leaders (Chen et al. 2015).

Undeniably, the organizational change process is a painful process at the unfreezing stage to generate several specific psychological responses that are crucial to be analysed (Lewin, 1947). A study revealed that organizational change does affect the emotions of the employees (Stavros, Nikolaos, George, & Apostolos, 2016). Indeed, organizational change could trigger emotional impact due to experience, anticipates losses and gains (Ashkanasy, Zerbe, Charmine & Hartel, 2012). There are a number of

researches that have identified organizational changes to stimulate an expansive range of emotions (Hughes & Wearing, 2016; Jordan, 2005; Vakola, Tsaousis Nikolaou, 2004). Undeniably, organizational change is able to create opportunity and challenges that will encourage positive emotions like enjoyment, passion and creativity as asserted by Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2013). However, change can also be a threat that will lead to negative emotions such as anger, fear, angst, cynicism and withdrawal (Leithwood & Beatty, 2007). However, it is proven in an array of studies that workers with high emotional intelligence have shown higher scores in positive attitude towards change (Ashkanasy, Zerbe, & Hartel, 2016; Huy, 1999). Relatively, high emotional intelligence individuals have the ability to manage change effectively in comparison to low emotional intelligence ones (Goleman, 2009; Carmelli, 2003; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Hence, people with proper emotional skills are required to address these emotional issues.

Past research has indicated that attitude toward organizational change consisted of cognitive reaction, affective reaction and behavioural reaction (Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cummings & Pierce, 1989). Cognitive reaction is about beliefs on the importance of organizational change. Meanwhile, affective reaction to change is about feelings toward the change such as pleasantness, excitement, enthusiasm and happiness. Also, negative emotions may appear as anger, resentment, frustration, anxiety, stress or fear. Behavioural reaction to change is about actions taken by employees whether to support and initiate change or to go against it. Apparently, in order to make organizational change plans to succeed, employees' attitudes needed to be understood. Obviously, human behaviour can be predicted through attitude (Sanghi, 2016). According to Ajzen (2015), attitude will strongly influence human behavioural intention and determine human behaviour. When the attitude is managed to be changed, then the behaviour can be influenced easily (Conrey & Smith, 2007). When the attitudes of employees toward organizational change are able to be detected, suitable measures can be taken to execute a well-planned organizational change.

In relation to the contextual background of the study, Malaysia has reshaped and restructured its education system to meet the nation's aims for over the past decades. Currently, the Ministry of Education has been implementing Malaysia Education Blueprint from 2013 to 2025 as an intensive effort to prepare young Malaysian students holistically in order to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as to fulfill international demands for the local workforce. Therefore, a quality education becomes the ultimate goal of transforming Malaysian education system for the purpose of human capital development (Ministry of Education 2013). Thus, in order to enhance the quality of education, school is the most effective organization to be focused on due to the reason that school is a platform of producing workforce to the country. Teachers can be considered as one of the major contributors to the school effectiveness (Hall & Hord, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Nijhof, Jong & Beukhof, 1998). Teachers play an important role in shaping the next generation to produce balanced individuals in the aspects of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, physical and personal development (Ramlee, 2015; Tajulashikin, Fazura & Muid Burhan, 2013; Yusof, 2012).

However, when the government of Malaysia introduced new policy to the education system, issues and challenges arise especially concerning the teachers' attitudes (Kin & Omar, 2016; Cheah, 2010; Noor & Sahip, 2010; Tan, 2010). Their reactions range from quite positive and supportive to quite negative and very resistant. Hence, the main issues of interest in the investigation of the present study are related to Malaysia daily secondary school teachers' attitudes toward organizational change, specifically on the Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013-2025) and the role of principal's leadership styles and emotional intelligence in influencing the attitudes of teachers toward the change. Hopefully, the findings of this study will contribute to the corpus of knowledge in the area of change management, educational management as well as work-related behaviour and also to provide meaningful information and guidance for improvement of practices in educational institutions. On that note, the research objectives of this study have been crafted as follow:

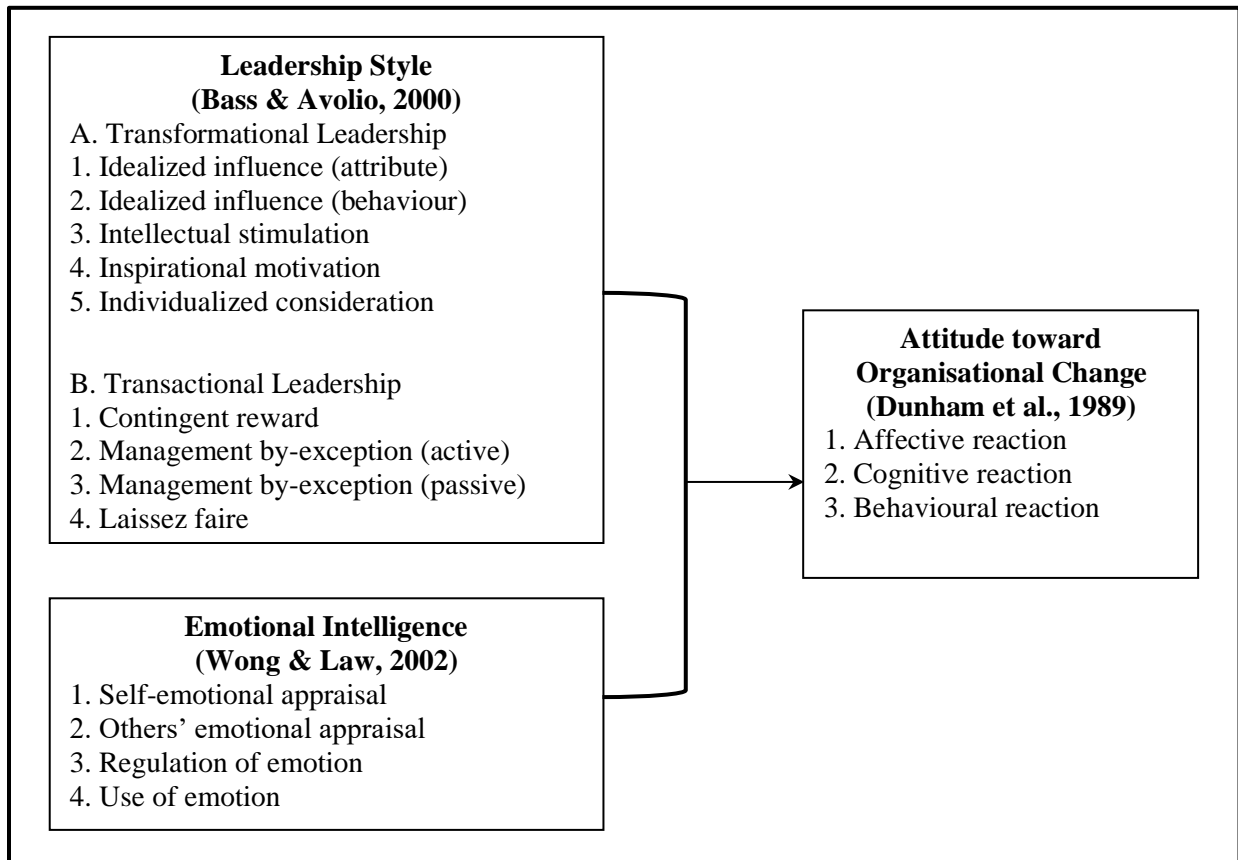
1. To examine the levels of attitude toward organizational change among secondary school teachers in Selangor.
2. To examine the levels of leadership styles of the principal as perceived by secondary school teachers in Selangor.

3. To examine the levels of emotional intelligence of secondary school teachers in Selangor.
4. To identify any significant relationships of leadership styles and emotional intelligence on attitude towards organizational change.

## 2. Methodology

The three-stage planned change model from Kurt Lewin (1947) was adopted in this research and specifically focused on the first stage of the model namely, unfreezing stage to have a better understanding of the organizational change process. The study focuses on the unfreezing stage and uses the conceptual framework as illustrated in Figure 1 as a guide to identify the potential relationships of the three variables that have been suggested by Lewin (1947) (Figure 1). In this study, a survey research survey using quantitative methods was used. The teachers' perceptions and responses on attitude towards organizational change were investigated based on cognitive reaction, affective reaction and behavioural reaction components as suggested by Dunham et al. (1989).

Since the leadership styles were referred to Bass's (1985) theory namely, transformational and transactional leadership theory, hence, the instrument developed by Bass and Avolio (1995) namely, multifactor leadership style questionnaire (MLQ) was used. Meanwhile, emotional intelligence was measured using Wong and Law's (2002) scale which has four components namely, self-emotional appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, regulation of emotion and use of emotion. This study employed the two-stage cluster sampling design to select the respondents from the schools and then select the teachers. A total of 360 teachers from 5 daily secondary schools in Selangor have been selected and participated in this study. Seven-point Likert-scale was used in the research instrument to engage the respondents' response. The options ranged from strongly disagree =1 to strongly agree = 7. An inferential statistical technique of Pearson's Product – Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength and direction of the leadership styles and emotional intelligence relationships on the attitude toward organizational change in this study.



**Fig 1** Conceptual Framework of the Study

### 3. Results and Discussion

The results in Table 1 showed the score of the overall component of attitude toward organizational change. It could be interpreted that most teachers showed a moderate (33.1%) to a high level of the attitude toward organizational change (66.9%). Relatively, teachers did not show any low score of the attitude towards organizational change. Obviously, a small standard deviation has been observed from the results when the scores were clustering around the mean value. The overall mean value score for the attitude toward organizational change was 5.38, signaling that teachers showed a very high positive attitude toward organizational change.

Comparatively, in reference to Tai and Omar (2015) on teachers’ attitudes at the mediocre school, the total mean score was 4.03 compared to the current study with a mean score of 5.38 which was categorized as high. It can be inferred that the teachers who are working at secondary school in Selangor had paid enough attention to the Malaysia Education Blueprint, thus, it indicated that the change process is well established at the first wave of Malaysian Education Blueprint.

**Table 1:** The mean level of overall attitude towards organizational change of teachers

<i>Level</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	Percentage
Low (1.00 – 2.99)	-	-
Moderate (3.00 – 4.99)	119	33.1
High ( 5.00 - 7.00)	241	66.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Mean = 5.38    Min = 3.28    Max = 6.78    SD = 0.79</b>		

The results in Table 2 showed the overall score of the transformational leadership style component. The findings indicated that the minimum rating was 2.30 while the maximum rating was 6.20 with a range of 3.90. In addition, the mean value for the total score was 4.66. Based on the results observed, the teachers believed that their principals were practicing transformational leadership style in a moderate way such as in inspiring or motivating the teachers.

**Table 2:** The mean level of overall transformational leadership style score

<b>Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Low (1.00 – 2.99)	20	5.6
Moderate (3.00 – 4.99)	196	54.4
High ( 5.00 - 7.00)	144	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Mean = 4.66    Min = 2.3    Max = 6.20    SD = 0.94</b>		

The results in Table 3 showed the overall score of transactional leadership style. The results showed that the minimum rating was 2.25 and the maximum was 5.88 with a range of 3.63. While the mean value for the total score was 4.30. Based on the results, teachers were found to perceive that their principals’ transactional leadership style at moderate level. The findings for both leadership styles suggested that the

majority of teachers perceived their principals as showing a moderately transformational and transactional leadership styles. However, the mean score of transformational leadership style was slightly higher than the mean score of transactional leadership style indicated that the principals' transformational leadership style is more visible to the teachers. In comparison to the previous studies, the current study has similar results showing that transformational leadership was more recognizable than transactional leadership style (Cohen, 2015; Rehman et al. 2012; Habib & Zaimah, 2012; Aarons, 2006). A principal with a strong belief and value system is more effective, and able to exhibit a greater longevity, and receives more valuable support from the community. On the other hand, principals who lack integrity, avoid responsibility, and blame others lack acceptance from their employees and the community. Furthermore, poor leaders tend to create an environment of neglect, mismanagement, escalation of crises, and continuation of unacceptable behaviours and relationships throughout the school, and poor leadership in any field can lead to failed programs as well (Plummer, 1995).

**Table 3:** The mean level of overall transactional leadership style score of teachers

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low (1.00 – 2.99)	20	5.6
Moderate (3.00 – 4.99)	314	87.2
High ( 5.00 - 7.00)	26	7.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100</b>

**Mean = 4.30    Min = 2.25    Max = 5.88    SD = 0.64**

Table 4 displays the levels of emotional intelligence scores. The findings indicated that the majority of the teachers' emotional intelligence scores were 89.2% (321). This could be inferred that the respondents have high emotional intelligence competency. The data also showed that only 10.8% (39) of the respondents were reported to have moderate emotional intelligence scores and none of the teachers showed low emotional intelligence scores. Based on the seven-point Likert scales used in the survey instrument, the minimum rating is 3.63 and the maximum is 7.00, showing that the range of total scores was between moderate and high. The small standard deviation of 0.65 indicates that most of the scores were clustering around the mean value. The mean rating for the level of emotional intelligence is 5.59 implying that the level of emotional intelligence scores was high. Comparatively, there were significant differences found between mean scores for the current study and previous local study conducted by Yoke & Panatik, (2016) on the school teachers' emotional intelligence and its relation to job performance. The total mean score in the previous study indicated a 4.08 mean score which was slightly lower than the current study with a 5.59 mean score. Thus, it could be predicted that if the teachers are having higher emotional intelligence ability, then they tend to obtain higher positive outcomes.

**Table 4:** The mean score of overall emotional intelligence of teachers

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low (1.00 – 2.99)	-	-
Moderate (3.00 – 4.99)	39	10.8
High ( 5.00 - 7.00)	321	89.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>100</b>

**Mean = 5.59    Min =3.63    Max =7.00    SD =0.65**

All in all, the results imply that teachers in this study strongly agreed that they have a very high ability of emotional intelligence. The highly emotional intelligence people are able to increase work performance and influence positive work attitude because highly emotional intelligence individuals are good at managing their emotions (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004; Lopes, Grewa, Kadis, Gall & Salovey, 2006), so they

have a tendency to achieve goals and missions of the organization (Mayer, Salovey and Caruso, 2016). Definitely, emotional intelligence is vital to facilitate a positive attitude towards organizational change.

**Table 5:** Correlation matrix analysis of attitude towards organizational change, leadership style and emotional intelligence of teachers

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Transformational Leadership	1			
2. Transactional Leadership	0.402**	1		
3. Emotional intelligence	0.396**	0.314**	1	
4. Attitude towards organizational change	0.348**	0.185**	0.656**	1

**\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2 tailed)**

The relationships between attitude towards organizational change, leadership style and emotional intelligence were examined using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation as presented in Table 5. As for attitude towards organizational change and transformational leadership, there was a moderate and positive ( $r = 0.348$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) linear relationship identified. While, the relationship between attitude towards organizational change and transactional leadership showed a weak but positive ( $r = 0.185$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) linear relationship. Meanwhile, the relationship between attitude towards organizational change and emotional intelligence was identified as a strong and positive ( $r = 0.656$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) linear relationship. Overall, emotional intelligence showed the strongest positive linear relationship with attitude towards organizational change ( $R = 0.656$ ), followed by transformational leadership ( $R = 0.348$ ) was considered as moderate positive correlation and finally the low positive correlation identified was transactional leadership ( $R = 0.185$ ). What is striking from the results seemed to be suggesting that the relationship of attitude towards organizational change with leadership style and emotional intelligence, were statistically significant.

The results of the correlational analyses showed consistencies in the directions and magnitudes of the *Pearson r* of transformational and transactional leadership styles, and emotional intelligence on attitude towards organizational change with previous studies. Thus, reflecting that the gap of knowledge in this study has successfully filled out as these empirical findings were aligned with the suggestions stated in the three-stage theory by Kurt Lewin (1947) which emphasized the interplay between leadership and emotion on attitude during the unfreezing stage to impact organizational change. Leadership styles and emotional intelligence were found to be positively linked to attitude towards organizational change at a significant level of 0.05. This indicated that positive attitude towards organizational change could occur in situations where (a) transformational and transactional leadership styles were provided by the leaders; and; (b) employees were able to use their emotion intelligently in order to create a positive attitude towards organizational change.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The results of this study showed the importance of leadership styles and emotional intelligence at the earlier stage of organizational change implementation process. The roles of these two independent variables in a change process at an earlier stage of organizational change requires creating momentum which involves the adjustment of attitude towards organizational change. Understanding staff attitudes is the initial step in understanding human behavior because when the attitude can be managed to be adjusted, then the behaviour can be influenced easily (Conrey & Smith, 2007). As a consequence, at a later stage, the direction of the change will become clear (Lewin, 1947). Obviously, what is needed during the unfreezing stage is for employees to follow the change momentum as well as the determined direction that has been suggested, consequently realizing the envisaged transformation. The findings confirmed the relationships

among these variables for intervention of implementing change. Furthermore, the current research also provides value-aided literature for these three variables.

In brief, the present study has several practical implications for managers, leaders and organizations who are facing organizational change. Perhaps, in creating a positive attitude toward organizational change, the management could establish policies and practices that could minimize the potential negative impact of planned change efforts. Firstly, the managerial implication is that if the higher learning institutions want to make their change effort successful, attention must be given to developing programs to enhance both the employees' emotional intelligence competency and the leadership styles of the principals. With that, the employees will feel secured, emotionally stable, and supported by the principal during the change process.

Besides, change leaders or managers also need to employ various strategies to help employees to adjust to the change process. Indeed, workers in the 21st century are required to be competent both in technical and soft skills. More importantly, developing employees' emotional intelligence competency such as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, adaptability and stress management techniques is also paramount in order to increase employees' ability to cope with the change. Last and not least, teachers who are involved in social interaction need emotional intelligence competency to work effectively in a social setting. Therefore, developing those competencies will definitely help the teachers to improve their work performance and maintain high academic standards in the classroom.

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