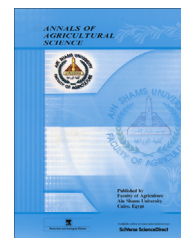




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Readiness for change, change beliefs and resistance to change of extension personnel in the New Valley Governorate about mobile extension



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Abstract This study aimed to find out how readiness for change, change beliefs and resistance to change exist between extension personnel in the New Valley governorate about mobile extension, and to determine which of the two proposed models fit with the current study. Data were collected from 103 personnel or 85.1% of the total number of extension personnel in this governorate (121 Personnel) by questionnaire. The three scales used in this study pointed out that the respondents are ready for implementing the mobile extension initiative, they have the adherent beliefs for this change, and their support to the change is greater than their resistance to it. The various indices of overall goodness of fit lent sufficient support for the results to be an acceptable representation of model (1), which indicates that the respondents develop change beliefs around what they perceived about the change (readiness), then they form their behavior of either support of or resist to the change.

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Introduction

Change, the process of moving to a new and different state of things is a constant for organizations in order to survive and stay competitive. Managing organizational change is, in very large part, about managing the “people” aspects of that process. It is people who make up organizations and it is they who are the real source of, and vehicle for, change. They

are the ones who will either embrace or resist change. Ultimately, for an organization to change, it is essential that the employees of that organization also change. Thus, employee cooperation with organizational change efforts is connected to either the ultimate success or failure of a change initiative (Hendrickson and Gray, 2012: 50).

Organizational change is explained as an alteration of an organization’s environment, structure, culture, technology, or people (Iqbal, 2011: 87). Although, planned change is intended to make the organization more effective and efficient, resistance from members of the organization is expected, this negative reaction is largely because change brings with it increased pressure, stress and uncertainty for employees

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(Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999: 295). Therefore, Organizations are increasingly required to improve their ability to enhance employees' support or acceptance for change initiatives through their readiness and beliefs about the change (Choi, 2011: 479). Consequently, it is important that employees hold positive views about the need for organizational change, and they should believe that such changes are likely to have positive implications for themselves and the wider organization (Armenakis et al., 1993: 682; Jones et al., 2005: 362).

The rise of the mobile phone has been one of the most stunning changes in the developing world over the past few decades. The increasing ubiquity of mobiles in developing countries presents both opportunities and challenges, especially for critical sectors such as agriculture (The World Bank, 2011: 50). Mobile technologies are often seen as a game changer in agriculture (Brugger, 2011: 4).

Mobile phone penetration in the developing world now exceeds two subscriptions for every three people, driven by expanding networks in Asia and in Africa. The ability to purchase a low-cost mobile phone is complemented by the expansion in telecommunications infrastructure; most countries now have more than 90% of their population served by a cell phone signal, including coverage in rural areas (The World Bank, 2011: 5). In Egypt, mobile subscription reached 97.47 million subscriptions during September 2013 with 4.04% annual growth rate (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, 2013: 3). This increasing penetration of mobile in Egypt presents an opportunity to make useful information more widely available.

Agricultural extension systems in most developing countries are under-funded and have had mixed effects like the defect of employees/farmers ratio. Much of the extension information has been found to be out of date, irrelevant and not applicable to small farmers' needs, leaving such farmers with very little information or resources to improve their productivity (Meera et al., 2004: 1). Mobile phone access has the opportunity to help extension employees for delivering services to numerous small and marginal farmers (Cole and Fernando, 2012: 8).

In June 2011, a pioneering initiative for using mobile in Egyptian agricultural extension was announced by a cooperation protocol among the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Vodafone Egypt and Quick Serve. The project is designed to provide farmers with agricultural news and information using SMS, in addition to contacting with the specialists in the agricultural research center through direct calls, SMS and voice messages (Central Administration for Agricultural Extension, 2011). According to extension personnel in the New Valley governorate, the above mentioned services are not provided yet, and the initiative is not executed practically till now as it has been announced.

Based on the previous discussion, it is clear that mobile extension represents a forthcoming change in agricultural extension organization, and it is very important to assess employees' readiness, beliefs and resistance regarding this change. Therefore, this study aimed to find out how these three important issues (readiness for change, change beliefs and resistance to change) exist between extension personnel in the New Valley governorate about mobile extension, and to determine which of the two proposed models most fit with the current study.

Literature review

Readiness for organizational change

Readiness for change is the extent to which an individual or individuals are cognitively inclined to accept, embrace, and adopt a particular plan to purposefully alter the status quo (Rafferty et al., 2012: 6). Readiness is the cognitive precursor to the behaviors of either resistance to, or support for, a change effort. At its core, change readiness involves a transformation of individual cognitions across a set of employees (Armenakis et al., 1993: 682). It is the people who are the real source of, and the vehicle for change, because they are the ones who will either embrace or resist change. Therefore, it is vital to assess individual's readiness perception prior to any change attempt (Susanto, 2008: 51).

Readiness is thought to be a critical precursor to successful organizational change because organizational members seek to maintain a state of affairs that provides them a sense of psychological safety, control, and identity. When organizational readiness for change is high, experts contend, organizational members are more invested in the change effort, expend greater effort in the change process, and exhibit greater persistence in the face of obstacles or setbacks—all of which contribute to more successful change implementation (Weiner et al., 2008: 382).

By assessing readiness for change, change agents, managers, human resource management professionals, and organizational development consultants can identify gaps that may exist between their own expectations about the change effort and those of other organizational members. If significant gaps are observed and no action taken to close those gaps, resistance would be expected and change implementation would be threatened. In essence then, assessment of an organization's readiness for change can serve as a guide as a strategy for implementing organizational changes is developed (Holt et al., 2007: 290).

Conner (2005) developed the organizational change readiness scale (O CRS) as a diagnostic tool that can be used to determine the overall acceptance level of an organizational change. It comprised of 23 statements; each statement is followed by two phrases that depict opposite ends of the readiness continuum (five points for each phrase). The employee's viewpoint of a particular organizational change is evaluated by splitting five (5) points between the two alternatives. The perceptions that facilitate the change are called "Opportunity Forces." Those that inhibit the change process are called "Danger Forces." In any situation in which the potential for change exists, both "Opportunity" and "Danger" forces are always present. Successful organizational change takes place when an imbalance occurs between these two forces in the direction of the intended change. Calculating the readiness score is gained by the next formula:

$$\text{Readiness for Change} = \frac{\text{Danger Score}}{\text{Opportunity Score}}$$

To determine the overall state of change readiness, Conner's scale proposed five possible states of change readiness (high opportunity, moderate opportunity, caution, moderate danger and high danger) according to the readiness for change score as shown in Fig. 1.

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