The Roles of Managers and Acceptance of Change in the Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

Public sector plays a pivotal role in accelerating national development by progressively introducing and implementing series of change initiatives at all levels of public administration. In Malaysia, successful implementation of the change initiatives rest on the shoulder of the Administrative and Diplomatic Officers (ADO) whose managerial responsibilities cut across the most important administrative roles in the Malaysian Public Services (MPS). As their leadership roles continue to grow in significance, they constantly face various challenges in managing their subordinates towards achieving the common goals of the change initiatives. Thus, by having positive perceptions and attitudes towards change are crucial in promoting acceptance of change (AOC) behaviour among the ADO. However, negative perceptions and low attitude towards change would discourage the AOC, which would be detrimental to realizing the change initiatives in the public organizations. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the important roles of locus of control (LOC) and attitude towards change (ATC) in explaining the AOC behaviour among the middle managers in the MPS. A cross-sectional study was conducted by distributing self-administered questionnaires to a total of 400 respondents who were randomly sampled from the list of ADO. The findings revealed that the ATC indicated a statistically significant positive linear relationship with the AOC behaviour. However, the LOC was not statistically significant to explain the variance in AOC behaviour. This study provides new information for the Human Resource Development practitioner and can be used as input during change process in the context of public organisation. Several recommendations are briefly discussed to improve the AOC behaviour towards the end of this paper.

Keywords: Organizational Change, Public Administration, Locus Of Control, Attitude Towards Change, Acceptance Of Change Behaviour.

Introduction

Nowadays, public organizations often necessitate changes in the governance, design and public service delivery in today's challenging environment (Van der Voet, Kuipers & Groneveld, 2016). Changes in the public organization are slightly different from the private practices in the traditions they embody, direction and assignments they perform. Practically speaking, changes arise out of novel ideas, development in technology, innovation and progress, knowledge and

communication, as well as mergers, takeovers, layoffs, and downsizing (Abdullah, Mansor, & Hamzah, 2013). In one hand, organizational change positively affects the employees in terms of job satisfaction, commitment, self-actualization and extra-role in an organization (Samah, 2016). On the other hand, the changes may also influence an employee's career life.

The Malaysia Public Service has undergone numerous planned organizational changes since the Independence Day in 1957. As developing the country became more crucial and demanding, its scope and change initiatives grew larger in importance and broadened in the public sector. The planned organizational change initiatives in the 2000s had a huge impact on the Malaysia Public Service. The initiatives started with the enhancement of Information Communication Technology (ICT) usage in 2000, which continued until the enhancement of Service Delivery in 2005 (EPU, 2001). The Government Transformation Programme (GTP) is seen as the biggest planned organizational change initiative in the history of the country and it encompasses the vast area of the full public sector throughout 25 ministries, 141 departments and agencies, 127 Federal Statutory Bodies and about 1.4 million civil servants (Ali, Zain, Abidin, & Embi, 2015). Civil servants are now required to work more efficiently to respond to the new environment and to meet the demands of the stakeholders.

The biggest challenge to transform the public service in the present time is to foster an institutional culture among the civil servants that accepts and supports the new service delivery model for the goodness of the citizens. The trending philosophy in the context of Public Service Transformation (PST) requires the civil servants especially the Management and Professional Group as a change agent to be volitionally receptive, flexible and agile on the changes ahead (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam, 2014). Despite numerous implementations of planned organizational change initiatives by the government, the issue on acceptance of change among the civil servants is the main restraining force that explains the shortfall in the outcomes of some initiatives (PEMANDU, 2015)

The importance of employees' reactions towards change has been rigorously discussed over the last decades. Majority of the studies tended to examine employee's resistance or negative reaction as a dependent variable (Petrou, Demerouti & Schaufeli, 2016; Di Fabio & Gori, 2016). However, empirical studies on acceptance of change behaviour are also limited in Malaysia (Abdul Rahman & Aizat, 2008) and in the Asian context (Smithikrai, 2008). Similarly, various issues, such as measures to address acceptance of change, remain as challenges (Fu, Zhang, Li, Leung, 2016) in understanding the acceptance of change behaviour. Existing empirical evidence indicates inadequate investigation on the organizational change and the employees' reactions in public organization (Van der Voet, Kuipers, & Groeneveld, 2016).

An individual is an important change agent within a public organization and proves to be difficult in dealing with their uncertainties. It is thus crucial to understand the individual's characteristics towards acceptance of change behaviour. There are two individual-related factors associated with the acceptance of change behaviour *viz.* locus of control and attitude towards change. Having the correct set of locus of control and positive attitude towards change are crucial in maneuvering the public organizations towards the planned changes. Reasonably, this study aims to investigate the important roles of locus of control and attitude towards

change in explaining the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO in the Malaysian Public Service organisations.

This paper is structured as follows. This paper begins with an overview of the literature by discussing the acceptance of change in the light of an organizational change process. It is then followed discussing an individual's characteristics as manifestations of the acceptance of change behaviour. Next, factors of acceptance of change behaviour are explained in details, which emphasize on the individual-related factors *viz.* locus of control and attitude towards change. Third, methodology is discussed followed by results and findings. Discussion and conclusions are presented towards the end of this paper.

Understanding Acceptance of Change

The concept of acceptance of change behaviour in the recent years has generated high interest among organizational researchers because of its pervasiveness in organisations. Acceptance of change has also been investigated under various terms such as readiness of change (e.g., Beer, 2011; Burnes, 2004; Mckay, 2012; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), openness and commitment to change (e.g., Chawla & Kelloway, 2004; Nordin, 2011) and change-related skepticism and resistance (e.g., Abdullah, Mansor, & Hamzah, 2013; Barrett, 2006; Bringselius, 2010; Krummaker & Vogel, 2012; Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011; Pieterse, 2012; Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005).

Acceptance of change behaviour consists of positive and negative behaviours. Also known as constructive acceptance, positive acceptance of change includes behaviours that management does or does not authorise, but assist in reaching the organisational objectives (Appelbaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007). Apart from that, Spritzer and Sonenshein (2004) described the positive acceptance of change behaviours as the intended actions that depart from the norms of the organisations, but it is done in an honourable way. Examples of such behaviours are inventive, not cooperating with dysfunctional instructions and criticising inefficient managers, which contribute to the organisational competitiveness (Appelbaum et al., 2007; Krau, 2008). Other examples of acceptance of change behaviours are supportive to change, participative in the change process, committed to change (Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006; Holt et al., 2007). In contrast, negative acceptance of change behaviours involves resistance to change, act negatively (overtly or covertly) towards the changes, spreading negative rumours (Oreg, Vakola & Armenakis, 2011), and other types of negative behaviours that bear negative implications to the organisation and its associates.

Employees experience different change processes. All employees who enter the organisations are likely to face the situation to accept the changes when there are any relocation of employees, restructuring, job redesign, downsizing (Holt et al., 2007; Lee & Peccei, 2007), technological change (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005), continuous improvement (Lok, Hung, Walsh, Wang, & Crawford, 2005) and merger (Kiefer, 2005). Some employees welcome organizational change, viewing it as a chance to benefit and to improve their status, whereas others are bothered by the change and tend to continue their working practices as before or perceive it as a threat and formulate negative attitudes towards it (Judge et al., 1999). Acceptance of change behaviour is basically a catchall phrase and it has been potentially seen

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as a matter that runs the enthusiasm of the organisation (Erwin & Garman, 2010; Smollan, 2011).

However, resistance is also a part of the natural process of adapting and accepting the change. It is a normal response for an employee who has a strong, vested interest in maintaining their perception of the current state and guarding themselves against loss (Samah, 2016). In addition, resistance towards change behaviour is always seen as negative in the organisations. Indeed, managers perceive this behaviour in employees as hurdle to the planned organizational change. Nevertheless, at the point when this unreceptive behaviour is viewed as a normal response in the planned organizational change process, it can similarly be seen as an initial move towards acceptance of change (Georgalis, Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2014; Smollan, 2011; Samah, 2016).

Theoretically speaking, when the acceptance of change is high, the employees are more likely to initiate change, exert greater effort, exhibit greater persistence, and display more cooperative behaviour, which results in a more effective implementation of the proposed change (Weiner, Lewis & Linnan, 2009). Conversely, when the acceptance of change is low, the employees are more likely to view the change as undesirable and subsequently avoid, or even resist, not participating in the change process which may lead to organizational and interpersonal deviance behaviour.

Generally, acceptance of change behaviour shows the extent to which changes have affected on something significant to the employees and the organisation (Saksvik & Hetland 2009). Organisations that have the capabilities to cultivate the higher level of acceptance towards change behaviour among their staffs will have a competitive advantage (Huff & Kelley, 2003), reduces dysfunctional engagement (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998), and improves membership between subordinates and managers (Mishra, 1996). In addition, teams and individuals function more effectively in an atmosphere of acceptance (Turner, 2010). Without such capabilities, the organisations would not be able to achieve the planned organisational change if its employees do not accept the change and make the change "work" (Burke, Lake, & Paine 2008).

Schein (2004) argued that many organizational change initiatives are primarily proven ineffective due to the organizational failure to infuse readiness for change. It should be noted that during the process of organizational changes, both employees and employers must work hand in hand while assuring the acceptance of the change initiatives by the employees. However, resisting workers, who have conditioned their minds and believed that the changes will not work or refuse to innovate, will paralyze the organization's expansion and hamper adaptation to change.

Many factors must be considered when studying employee behaviour during the process of organisational change including the predictors that lead a person to accept the change. Past studies indicated that personal perspectives are one of the vital components when implementing change. Linstone and Mitroff (1994) cited from Abdul Rashid, Sambasivan and Abdul Rahman (2004) argued that people are the most significant reason that explains change behaviour and most difficult to manage in an organisation. According to Vakola, Armenakis and Oreg, (2013) and Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis (2011), individual, who has low confidence in

their abilities, tends to underperform in change initiatives. However, little is known about what employees can do by themselves to facilitate their adaptation to organisational change (Petrou, Demerout & Schaufeli, 2016). In addition, overseeing the organisational members appears to be a difficult task in dealing with change processes as it embodies values, preferences, and attitudes toward a particular activity (Carnall, 1990). He further added that attitudes, for instance, potentially prevent the people to change from their usual learning grounds as a result of stereotyping, fear of taking risks, intolerance to ambiguity, and possibly the need to uphold tradition. Thus, more studies are indispensable in gathering more conclusive findings to characterise the relationship between individual factors and acceptance of change (Straatmann, Kohnke, Hattrup & Mueller, 2016).

Individuals and Acceptance of Change

An individual is an ultimate key towards accomplishing change initiatives, thus, understanding an individual's characteristics is important. Reasonably, by learning more about how individuals might be helpful in achieving success, and how individuals become willing to support and aid the initiatives, organizations should be better able to plan and execute the change initiatives successfully. Accordingly, this study timely responded to a need for more research on the micro-level, people-oriented perspective on change (Judge et al., 1999; Neves, 2011; Wanberg & Banas, 2000), more specifically on how perceptions and individual differences might contribute to increased understanding of attitudes towards organizational change.

The facet of receptive behaviour is also one of the most salient and influential personality constructs among the Big Five personality (Laursen, Pulkkinen & Adams, 2002). Individuals with this trait could get along with others (Laursen et al., 2002), compliant, modest (Lee, Ashton, & Shin, 2005), show good team work, satisfied with his or her job (Judge & Bono, 2001), cooperative, considerate, trusting, (Barrick, Mitchell, & Stewart, 2003) participative, contribute to interdependence, and provide cohesion in a work group (Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Gibson, 2004).

Moreover, an individual with acceptance behaviour is always willing to assist others because of his or her helpful behaviour. It has been a habit for change-acceptance people to create a positive relationship with peers. They will not go against the organisation's rules, will avoid conflicts or will do things that will bring negative impacts to the organisation (Erkmen, 2006). Apart from that, highly change-acceptance people are less likely to create problems and difficulties at the workplace. They could control their negative actions and emotions, such as anger, when it comes to handling a conflict. They also follow the nature of behaviour, norms and attitude in the workplace (Graziano, Bruce, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007).

Conversely, individual with low acceptance of change behaviour are more argumentative, difficult to get along within group settings (Lounsbury et al., 2004; Erkmen, 2006), mistrust and have a low regard for others, self-centred, lack of cooperation, inconsiderate, vengeful, cunning, tend not to adhere to rules and disrespectful (Goldberg, 1999), personality conflict (Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcolm, 2003; Erkmen, 2006), violent and have tendency for vandalism (Heaven, 1996), distant and lack of trust feelings (Erkmen, 2006). Therefore, it is not surprising that low acceptance individual produces negative attitude, which

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consequently turns an individual's preference to resist the change (Krohn, Lizotte, & Hall, 2007; Xu et. al., 2016).

Factors of Acceptance of Change Behaviour
There are two individual-related factors associated with the acceptance of change behaviour, which are derived from the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, 1975). According to Anderson and Bushman (2002), individual-related factors represent personalities, beliefs, and inherited predispositions. Previous empirical studies suggested that individual differences or individual's psychological predispositions are important factors in explaining various ranges of behaviours (e.g. Lau & Woodman, 1995; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Oreg, 2006; Berry et al., 2007; Martinko, Gundlach, &Doughlas, 2002; Ng & Feldman, 2008; Spector & Fox, 2005; Xu, Payne, Homer & Alexander, 2016). In this study, the individual-related factors were represented by the locus of control and attitude towards change. This study highlighted two important factors *viz.* locus of control and attitude towards change to explain the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO in the Malaysian public services.

Locus of Control
Locus of control (LOC) was a spin-off concept from the social learning theory (Rotter, 1954). It specifically arose from the examination that certain individual's cognitive appeared to ignore or were immune to reinforcement contingencies (Phares, 1976). Conceptually, locus of control refers to how far the individuals believe that they are in charge of the events that affect them or not. Locus of control is also considered as an important aspect of personality (Chatfield & Wooten, 2012). Nevertheless, one should carefully observe a fine line in understanding the concept of locus of control from the different workplace perspectives as they imply distinct individual's characteristics.

There are two types of locus (*plural*: loci) of control *viz.* external and internal. The individuals are thought to hold generalized expectancies that their actions in their work would not lead to desired rewards or avoidance of punishments. Thus, such individuals are said to have an *external* locus of control as they believe they have little or no control over events and personal circumstances. Conversely, individuals having an *internal* locus of control perceive a high degree of control over their surroundings, and are thought to attribute the responsibility for such events to themselves, thus, effectively internalizing the responsibility. According to Campagna, Wilson, Callahan and Jason (2015), individuals with a high internal locus of control believe their own "active agency" in that event in their life is primarily due to their own actions whereas individuals with a high external locus of control believe life outcomes can be attributed to the outside factors.

In the workplace context, locus of control is able to differentiate employees who believe they can exercise control over their work and their environment through their own actions. In other words, the employees are more or less self-reliant. In addition, the difference in the belief of personal control between internals and externals will affect the level of employee's work performance. For instance, employees with internal locus of control are more active in seeking information concerning their situation. Besides, they work hard to acquire knowledge, skills and

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abilities. In contrast, people with external locus of control tend to be negative and easily give up (Chatfield & Wooten, 2012).

However, in the workplace management, Chatfield and Wooten (2012) found that employees with high external locus of control found to be more compliant followers or subordinates than the internals. Reasonably, employees with high external locus of control would probably be easier to supervise and more likely to follow direction or, sometimes, tend to be compliant with social demands of co-workers, which may potentially create conflict with the management. Conversely, employees with low external locus of control (in other words, high internal locus of control) have a tendency to control everything. As such, they are often perceived as being arrogant and less socially oriented (Runyon, 1973).

Based on the above deliberation, we hypothesized that:

H1: *There is a significant positive linear relationship between locus of control (LOC) and acceptance of change behaviour among the Administrative and Diplomatic Officers in the Malaysian Public Service.*

Attitude towards Change

According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), attitude towards change refers to the degree to which an individual has a good or poor evaluation on a particular behaviour. Later in 1998, Petty and Wegener defined the attitude towards change as a person's overall evaluation of the change and a psychological tendency by evaluating the change with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Lines, 2005). It is practical to anticipate that employees will respond correspondingly to the process of change, which includes learning based on the Social Cognitive Theory. When the employees respond, it is crucial to recognize the manifestations (learned behaviour) of their responses and the reasons behind them (Wittig, 2012). As stated by Elias (2009, p. 39), "*when employees possess a strong, positive attitude towards change, they are likely to behave in focused, persistent, and effortful ways that support and facilitate the change initiative being implemented*".

The attitude towards change is considered important in explaining the acceptance of change behaviour in the change process (Swarnalatha, 2014). Early in the change process, organizational members tend to form their own beliefs about change based on the given information that will influence their attitude (Lines, 2005). These beliefs concern with issues, such as how the change will affect the characteristics of their job and whether the change is compatible with their values (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Vakola et al., 2004). Dunham (1984) and Carnall (1990) found that people's attitude is difficult to change as they are generally more comfortable with what they have learned or known due to stereotyping, fear of taking risks, intolerance to ambiguity, and possibly the need to maintain tradition.

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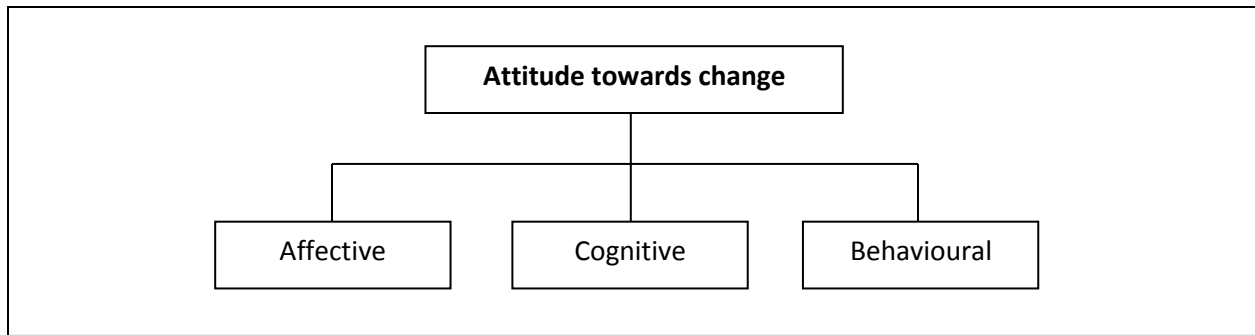
Source: Dunham et al. (1989)

Figure 1 Types of Attitude towards Change

Dunham, Grube, Gardner, Cumming and Pierce (1989) further divided the attitude towards change as illustrated in Figure 1. The *affective* type consists of the feelings a person has towards an attitude object, which involves evaluation and emotion, and is often expressed as like or dislike for the attitude object. The *cognitive* type, on the other hand, consists of the information a person possesses about a person or thing, which is based on what the person believes is true. Finally, the *behavioural* type concerns with the way a person intends to behave towards an attitude object. Abdul Rashid, Sambasivan and Abdul Rahman (2004) argued that the cognitive attitude towards change is highly important. During a change process, the employees will acquire adequate information and gain vast knowledge in achieving the planned change initiative. Thus, their feelings towards the change may favour the change initiatives during the change process. This so-called cognitive process will eventually lead to the positive behaviour, such as acceptance of change among the employees.

Based on the above deliberation, we hypothesized that:
H2: *There is a significant positive linear relationship between attitude towards change (ATC) and acceptance of change (AOC) behaviour among the Administrative and Diplomatic Officers in the Malaysian Public Service.*

Methodology
Population and Sampling
The target population for the current study referred to the Malaysian Public Service organizations while its accessible population was the Management and Professional Group (Grade 41 – 54) of Administrative and Diplomatic Officers (ADO) currently serving in the Malaysian Public Service organizations. Currently, there are 6,904 ADO in the Malaysian Public Service across 25 ministries. The Prime Minister's Office has the highest number of ADO across its 40 agencies. However, only seven agencies are regarded as the important backbones of the Prime Minister's Office i.e. JPA, ICU, EPU, MAMPU, SPA, BPH and BPA. Out of 6,904 ADO, 400 respondents were randomly sampled. The simple random sampling technique was employed and its process was performed by using Microsoft Excel. Each ADO was assigned with a random number generated by the software, thus, ensuring equal chance of being sampled in this study.

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Questionnaire development and measurement

The questionnaires consist of four sections and were developed as illustrated in Table 1. Section A collected responses based on the respondent's demographic background. Sections B, C and D, on the other hand, collected responses according to the respective variables under investigation. The respondents were also required to rate their perceptions based on the five-point Likert's scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree).

Table 1 Questionnaire development

Section	Variable	Source	Number of items/dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha
A	Demographic	n/a	6	n/a
B	Acceptance of change behaviour	Bouckenooghe, Devos and van den Broeck (2009)	9	0.84
C	Locus of control	Spector (1988); Nik Mat (1995)	16	0.72
D	Attitude towards change	Vakola et al. (2003); Antoni (2004) Walker et al. (2007); Mansor et.al (2013).	10	0.57

Source: Author's compilation. n/a = not available.

Questionnaire distribution

In view of Murray (2006) on the suitability of quantitative survey and its advantages, this study employed survey to gather primary data from the respondents. Primary data for this study were collected based on the responses collected from the field survey via self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed to 420 ADO across ministries in the Malaysia Public Service organizations whose distribution was aided by the Human Resource Department. The completed and valid questionnaires were personally collected resulting in a response rate of 95.2%, which is equivalent to 400 completed questionnaires.

Data Analysis

By using IBM-SPSS version 22, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted to examine the correlations between individual-related factors and acceptance of change behavior. Next, multiple linear regressions were performed to determine any linear relationship between the individual-related factors and acceptance of change behaviour, and to identify the individual-related factor that best explains the acceptance of change behavior among the ADO in the Malaysian Public Service organizations. The hypothesized relationships between the individual-related factors and acceptance of change behaviour can be expressed as follows:

$$AOC = f(LOC, ATC)$$

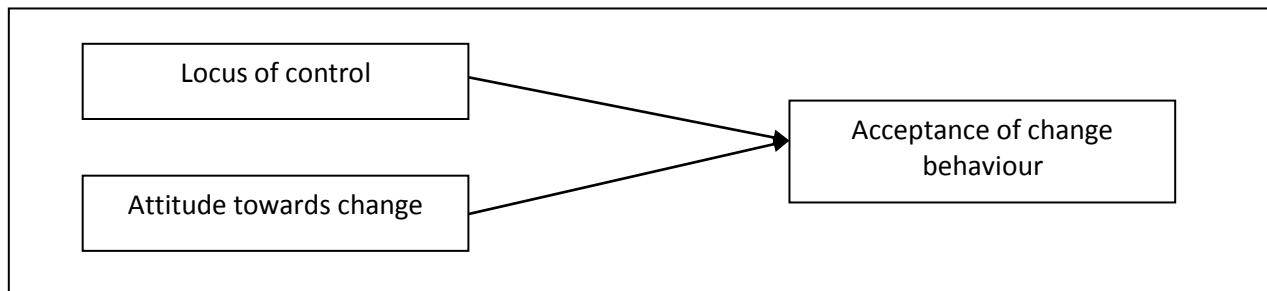The hypothesized relationship can be illustrated as in Figure 2.

Figure 2 Theoretical Framework

Results and Findings

Table 2 presents the demographic background of the respondents who participated in this study.

Table 2 Demographic background of the respondents

Demographic variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	158	39.50
Female	242	60.50
Age group (years)		
20 – 30	59	14.75
31 – 40	257	64.25
41 – 50	73	18.25
51 and above	11	2.75
Marital Status		
Single	105	26.25
Married	295	73.75
Educational Level		
Bachelor's Degree	257	64.25
Master's Degree	139	34.75
PhD Degree	4	1.00
Grade Level		
41 – 44	203	50.75
48	104	26.00
52	55	13.75
54	38	9.50
Tenure (years)		
1 – 5	81	20.25
6 – 10	169	42.25
11 – 15	108	27.00
16 and above	42	10.50

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Source: Author's compilation. n=400.

Table 3 presents the mean, standard deviation and Pearson's correlation coefficient matrix of the variables investigated in this study. Based on Table 3, locus of control (X_1) and acceptance of change behaviour (Y_1) indicate a weak, negative association (r = -0.005). Similarly, locus of control (X_1) and attitude towards change (X_2) indicate a weak, negative association (r = 0.180). However, there is a medium, positive association between attitude towards change (X_2) and acceptance of change behaviour (Y_1).

Table 3 Pearson's correlation coefficient matrix

	M	SD	Y_1	X_1	X_2
Acceptance of Change Behaviour (Y_1)	1.64	0.41			
Locus of Control (X_1)	4.80	1.08	-.005		
Attitude towards Change (X_2)	3.24	0.49	.302**	-.180**	

Notes: M = mean; SD = standard deviation.
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows the coefficient estimates for each independent variable. Based on Table 4, there is a significant linear positive relationship between attitude towards change and acceptance of change behaviour (β=0.311, p<.05). Sign of the coefficient is consistent with a priori. One-unit increase in attitude towards change will increase acceptance of change behaviour by 0.311. However, there is no significant linear positive relationship between locus of control and acceptance of change behaviour. Thus, we can conclude that attitude towards change is the best individual-related factor that can explain the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO in the Malaysian Public Services organizations.

Table 4 Coefficient estimates
Dependent variable: **Acceptance of change behaviour**

Variable	β	S.E.	t-statistics
Constant	1.970	.327	6.027**
Locus of Control	0.06	.056	1.046
Attitude towards Change	0.41	.064	6.396**

R = 0.306
R-sq = 0.093
Adj. R-sq = 0.0089
F = 20.461**

Note: β = beta estimates; S.E. = standard error.
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Discussions

Based on the multiple linear regression analysis, attitude towards change was found to have a significant positive linear relationship with acceptance of change behaviour. In other words, attitude towards change significantly influenced the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO. This finding could probably be explained by the openness attitude of the ADO in the Malaysia Public Service organizations, which reinforces their capabilities to accept the planned organizational change. According to Judge et al. (1999) and Elias (2009), employees with high openness attitude are usually more tolerant and possess curiosity towards any situation. Therefore, in the context of organizational change situation, such employees are more likely to accept and cope with the change process easily. Although employees usually have some reservations against a change initiative, often caused by fear or insecurity regarding the consequences of the initiative, or even irrational thoughts about the change (Oreg, 2006); Bovey & Hede, 2001), positive attitude towards change would encourage the employees to enjoy learning new experiences based on their work and job specifications and increase their receptive feelings towards any changes.

Nevertheless, this study found that locus of control did not significantly explain the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO. This finding could be attributable to the respondent's characteristics in this study. More than half of the respondents are considered as those born during Generation Y (Gen-Y) period, which can be defined as people born between the 1980s and early 1990s, and known as the generation of multitaskers. They usually do not favour staying too long on any one assignment. Reasonably, adapting or accepting change does not quite matter for them as long as they are clear with their new responsibilities and goals. Other than that, they are also branded as a self-centered and ambitious kind of person. Therefore, being dependent on luck, fate or other people's power (examples of external locus of control) did not significantly their acceptance of change.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to investigate the roles of individual-related factors e.g. locus of control and attitude towards change in explaining the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO within the Malaysia Public Service organizations. In this study, there was a statistically significant positive linear relationship between attitude towards change and acceptance of change behaviour. In other words, the attitude towards change plays an important role in explaining the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO within the public organization. Nevertheless, the study found that there was no statistically significant relationship between locus of control and acceptance of change behaviour. In short, the locus of control did not significantly explain the acceptance of change behaviour among the ADO within the public organizations. Reasonably, the ADO should strengthen their attitude towards change in their respective organizations. Such improvement can be done by providing psychological supports to the ADO such as organizing motivational camps, team building, leadership workshops and mentor-mentee programmes, which emphasize on strengthening confidence, building self-esteem and self-reliance within the ADO themselves.

This study also provides crucial information for policy development. The findings would enable the Human Resource personnel to develop policies and procedures that necessitate improvement in the work practices of Management and Professional Group of ADO not only in the Malaysia Public Service, but also in other public sectors. Thus, the study genuinely supports the call by the government to create an agile and efficient workforce as stipulated in one of the Public Service Transformations (PST), Strategic Reforms Initiatives (SRIs) and New Economic Model (NEM). Finally, the findings of the study will provide insights to future researchers on the AOC phenomenon in the Malaysia Public Service organisation context in terms of factors influencing the acceptance of change behaviour.

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