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Ma. Regina Hechanova

*Ateneo de Manila University*, [rhechanova@ateneo.edu](mailto:rhechanova@ateneo.edu)

Emerald Jay D. Ilac

*Ateneo de Manila University*

Sarah Ellorencio

*Ateneo de Naga University*

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# Employee Readiness for Change Through the Lens of The Cultural Self-Representation Theory

Ma. Regina M. Hechanova

Emerald D. Ilac\*

Sarah B. Ellorencio

*Ateneo De Manila University*

Change is imperative in organizations. One fundamental tool in instigating innovation is change management. Employee engagement is seen as a primary ingredient in successfully triggering readiness to change. However, beyond change management, culture is important in influencing employee engagement and readiness to change. Research suggests that Filipino employees, who generally possess a collectivist cultural orientation, are more motivated when working in groups. Therefore, good working relations are important in eliciting engagement among them. This study hypothesizes that both change management and *samahan* (a Filipino concept on quality of relationships) is mediated by engagement, which brings about readiness for change. Furthermore, change management correlates to *samahan*. A survey involving Filipino organizations was conducted. The hypotheses were tested using structured equation modeling. Results revealed significant relationship between *samahan* and change management. Also, employee engagement mediated the relationships of both change management and readiness for change, and *samahan* and readiness for change. Furthermore, *samahan* predicted employee engagement more than change management. The study highlights the importance of quality relationships in employee engagement leading to readiness for change. Lastly, this study adds to the growing knowledge base of Filipino researches on the importance of understanding organization behavior using an indigenous concept.

*Keywords:* change management, readiness of change, *samahan*, Filipino culture

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\*E-mail: \*eilac@ateneo.edu

In this era of globalization, organizations need to innovate and change to survive. This is all the more important for organizations in a developing country such as the Philippines that is struggling to keep up with its Asian neighbors. The 2011-2012 World Economic Forum's Global Economic Report (World Economic Forum, 2011) ranked the Philippines 75<sup>th</sup> out of 142 countries in terms of global competitiveness. Specifically, the country ranked lowest in terms of innovation, infrastructure, institutions, and technological readiness. It is thus evident that change is necessary in order to make the Philippines more competitive.

Change, as Kotter (1982) defined it, involves creating new systems in order for organizations to continuously re-invent themselves and stay in the competition. There are a number of models that prescribe how change can be encouraged and implemented. Change guru Kurt Lewin (1951) describes the steps inherent in a change process. His model of organization change describes three stages: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing. The task of leaders during the unfreezing stage is to overcome the inertia, minimize resistance and create a felt need for change. During the moving or implementation stage, it is important for change leaders to guide the organization through the confusion and transition from the current to desired state. Finally, to institutionalize the desired changes, leaders need to provide extra support when difficulties are encountered and reinforce desired outcomes.

A more contemporary model by Cummings and Worley (2008) describes a five-step model of organization and change management. According to them, successful change management requires motivating change, creating a vision, developing political support, managing the transition, and sustaining momentum. Motivating entails creating readiness for change and identifying areas of resistance for change. Creating a vision for change involves describing the need for change and specifying the objectives of the change process. The third step, developing political support, includes identifying stakeholders, their reactions to change, as well as possible threats to their acceptance of the change. Managing the transition encompasses the different practices that involve the creation of change leaders, initializing action plans, and commitment and communicating change plans. The last step, sustaining momentum, involves crafting strategies to reinforce new behaviors, developing new competencies and skills aligned to the change, creating support systems for the change agents, and providing resources for change.

Although Western models such as the above are useful, it is important to remember that they have been developed within a particular context and

there is a growing consensus of the importance of understanding the culture in which the change is to be effected (Kotter, 2007). Erez and Earley (1993) contend that culture may determine the effectiveness of work practices in an organization. Based on their observations that models of organization behavior developed in the West do not take cultural differences into consideration, they proposed the Cultural Self-Representation Model that seeks to describe organization behavior across cultures. Their model consists of four factors: (1) cultural values and norms, (2) work practices, (3) self, and (4) employees' work motivation and behavior. Erez and Earley contend that organization practices are not value-free. How people perceive organization practices will depend on the extent that these are consistent or run counter to prevailing cultural norms. The congruence of culture with work practice will affect how people feel or think about themselves and the organization. These individual attitudes will then affect employee motivation and behavior at work. To illustrate, the practice of rewarding individual achievement will be seen as more acceptable, and therefore more effective, in an individualistic as opposed to collectivist culture. In a collectivist culture, too much emphasis on individual rewards may make employees feel resentful if they are not recognized or ashamed if they are recognized but sense resentment from peers. These feelings may, in turn, affect their level of motivation and performance.

One criticism about the Cultural Self-Representation Theory is that because of its generality, it is not a model from which empirically testable hypotheses are derived. However, it can be used as an integrative framework to understand the outcomes of specific management practices within a particular cultural context (Bhagat, 1995). For example, Chen and Aryee (2007) used it as a lens to understand the impact of tradition on delegation and its work outcomes in China. They found that organization-based self-esteem and perceived insider status fully mediated the influence of delegation on affective organizational commitment, task performance, and innovative behavior. They also found that delegation partially mediated the relationship between delegation and job satisfaction.

We use Erez and Earley's (1993) Cultural Self-Representation Theory as a lens in examining change management. Specifically, we examine how a particular cultural dimension such as *samahan* may have a relationship with change management in influencing employee readiness for change. In addition, we test for the mediating role of employee engagement on the relationship between organization culture, change management, and readiness for change.

### Readiness for Change and Change Management

Because organizations are human systems, a critical factor in enabling organizational change is the readiness of its members. Susanto (2008) defined readiness as “reflected in the organizational members’ beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization’s capacity to successfully make those changes” (p.50).

There is robust evidence of the relationship between change management and readiness for change. Susanto (2008) found that change readiness is related to perceptions toward change efforts, vision for change, mutual trust and respect, change initiatives, management support, acceptance and organizational change management. Other studies found that readiness for change is significantly linked to management support (Susanto, 2008).

The importance of change management has also been validated in a local study. Hechanova and Teng-Calleja (2011) found that change management and transformational leadership are all significant predictors of commitment to change with change management having the biggest weight.

### Organization Culture as a Foundation for Change

Beyond how change is managed, another factor that has gained increasing attention is the organizational culture where change is to take place. Organizational culture is defined as “a pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1990, p.111). Schein (1990) describes three fundamental levels of culture. The first is on the level of observable artifacts, composed of almost everything visibly identifiable in the organization, such as physical layout, dress code, among others. Second are values, pertaining to norms, ideologies, and statements that guide organizational behavior. Last are basic underlying assumptions, which are generally unconscious and taken-for-granted values that are understood to be the correct way of doing things. These common assumptions give rise to automatic patterns of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and behaving that provide a sense of meaning, stability, and comfort among its members.

Organization culture plays a significant role in the implementation of change (Latta, 2009). Unfortunately, most organizations do not possess a culture ready for change. According to Kotter (2008), “The average organization’s built-in skill in dealing with change is just nowhere near what is needed for the increasing turbulence we are going to be facing. Most organizational cultures are not change friendly” (p.34).

Thus, it is important for change management to take into consideration the culture of the people in the organization. Although there are many dimensions of organization culture, research suggests that how people feel about their organization and quality of relationships are necessary ingredients for employee readiness to change. Madsen, Miller and John (2005) found that organizational commitment is positively related to readiness for change. In addition, the quality of social relationships in the workplace is significantly correlated with change readiness (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005; Madsen, Miller, & John, 2005;).

We suggest, however, that these factors do not occur independently of change management. Rather, we propose that there will be a symbiotic relationship between change management and quality of relationships. Because employees often resist change, the goal of change management is to identify sources of resistance and ways to overcome them. Thus, effective change management requires a certain level of personal relationship and interaction among members of the organization. For instance, Cummings and Worley’s model (2008) involves motivating change and developing political support. Both of these tasks entail good relationships between change leaders and their followers. However, the relationship is not necessarily just one way. Even as good relationships can facilitate change management, it is also quite possible the good change management practices, can reinforce quality of relationships by uniting people towards a common cause. We thus expect that there would be a positive relationship between quality of relationships and change management.

#### Philippine Culture and Readiness for Change

There appear to be Philippine cultural values that may influence readiness for change. One barrier to change might be the Filipino sense of fatalism (Jocano, 1990). In such fatalistic cultures, employees may be less willing to initiate change. A driver for change, however, might be worker’s dependence and need for approval by the authority figure (Bulatao, 1978). Hofstede’s (1991) cross-cultural study has also identified the Philippines as having a

high power distance culture. This suggests that leaders can count on followers to obey because of the respect afforded to people of higher positions.

Another cultural nuance that has implications on change management is the value Filipinos give towards relationships. Jocano (1999) explains that Filipino values are different from Western values because of the significance of interpersonal relations. The need for social acceptance and the fear of rejection, remain powerful social dynamics governing Filipino work attitudes and behaviors (Salmer & de Leon, 2002). Filipinos tend to be more motivated and productive when working in groups with face-to-face interaction with co-workers (Saito, Imamura, & Miyagi, 2010; Salmer & de Leon, 2002). *Samahan*, which is associated with smooth interpersonal relationships, is essential for Filipinos. It comes from the root word *sama* which means “to accompany, to go along with” (Jocano, 1997, p.64). It is a manifestation of a cultural value of *pakikisama*, which means to be concerned about, supportive of, and willing to concede to public opinion in social situations. *Pakikisama* enables group cohesion (Jocano, 1999), which promotes camaraderie, cooperation, and better performance (Jocano, 1990). A study by Saito, Imamura and Miyagi (2010) shows how salient the value of *pakikisama* is among Filipino subjects. Given its salience in the Philippine culture, we suggest that *samahan* will not only be critical in enabling readiness for change, it may even have a greater weight than change management.

### The Mediating Role of Employee Engagement

The Cultural Self-Representation Theory (Erez & Earley, 1993) suggests that organization culture and management practice influence individual attitudes that, in turn, affect work motivation and behavior. In this study, we look at change management practices, the culture of *samahan*, readiness for change and suggest that this outcome is mediated by employee engagement.

Employee engagement refers to the full employment of one’s physical, cognitive and emotional presence in one’s task. Engaged employees are psychologically present, fully there, attentive, and focused in their role performance (Kahn, 1992). Employee engagement is considered to be a key business driver for organizational success (Lockwood, 2007). Engaged employees seem to work better, and exert more effort in achieving the company’s vision. Engagement is considered important in having effective, productive, loyal and committed employee (Swaminathan & Rajasekaran,

2010). Engagement is considered as one of the salient factors in the success of change management implementation (Dicke, 2007).

Research on the antecedents of employee engagement reveal that it is associated with a feelings of choice and control, appropriate recognition and reward, a supportive work community, fairness and justice, and meaningful and valued work (Saks, 2006). Similarly, Kahn (1990) believed that the higher the level of challenge, variety and creativity in the work role of the employee, the more engaged they become with work, making them highly involved, expressing great enthusiasm for the success of the organization, and going the extra mile beyond the job expectations (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). Thus, if employees are engaged in the change, they are likely to be more involved, leading to better performance (Dicke, 2007).

There is evidence that employee engagement mediates the relationship between value congruence and satisfaction (Erez & Earley, 1993). It is also related to task performance (Markos & Sridevi, 2010) and citizenship behaviors (Ologbo & Saudah, 2012; Saradha & Patrick, 2011). At the same time, there is also support for the mediating role of engagement on the relationship of perceived organization support with task performance and citizenship behaviors (Rich, Lepine & Crawford, 2010). Unfortunately, the empirical relationship of employee engagement and readiness for change has not been established. However, readiness for change may be considered some form of organizational citizenship behavior. That is, organization changes often require changes on the part of employees. These changes may not necessarily be part of employee job descriptions. In addition, although the changes are aimed to benefit the organization, they do not necessarily benefit employees. Hence, the willingness to adopt to change, take on new roles or learn new skills or procedures for the good of the organization may be viewed as extra-role behaviors. This study seeks to expand knowledge on employee engagement by testing its role in mediating the relationship between change management, *samahan* and readiness for change.

### Research Problem

This study applies and tests the Cultural Self-Representation Theory in the context of organizational change (see Figure 1). Specifically, it seeks to test the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between *samahan* and change management.



Hypothesis 2: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between change management and readiness for change.

Hypothesis 3: Employee engagement mediates the relationship between *samahan* and readiness for change.

Hypothesis 4: *Samahan* would significantly predict employee engagement more than change management practices.

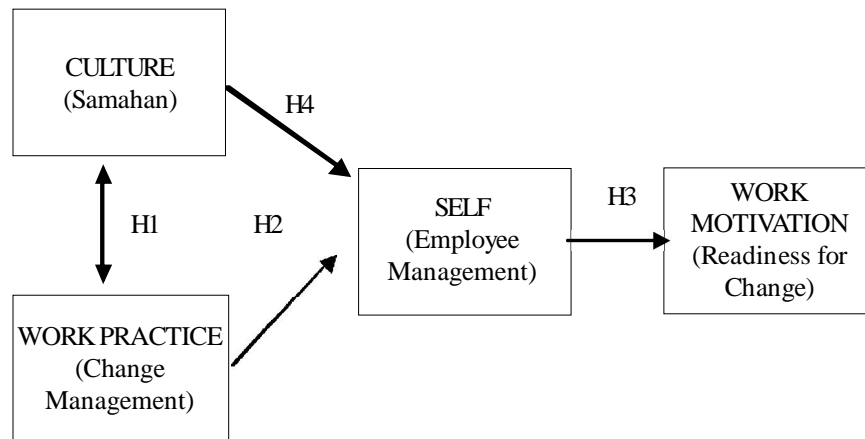


Figure 1. Framework of the study

## METHOD

In order to test the hypotheses, a quantitative research design was employed. This section discusses the nature of the respondents, the instruments used, and the conduct of the data analysis.

### Sample

The respondents (N=1,482) were employees from 29 organizations in Metro Manila, mostly coming from the corporate (63%) and academe (37%) industries. The organizations represented a variety of industries: manufacturing, services, hospitality, financial, construction, utilities, government, health, education, trade, transportation and communication. Sixty four per cent of the respondents were married, and 52% of all respondents were female. The participants came from different job levels,

namely: rank and file/manual (36.5%), professional/technical (31.7%), and supervisory/managerial (28.8%), while the rest did not specify (3%).

The following criteria were used in sampling: organization must have gone through organizational transformation such as changes in the vision, mission and/or values, changes in strategy, business acquisition, merger, downsizing, or reengineering within the past five years, and employee respondents must have tenure of at least three years.

### Measures

The current study used data from a survey created and administered by the Ateneo Center for Organization Research and Development. The survey included sections for each of the latent variables: change management, employee engagement, *samahan* and readiness for change. Respondents scored each item on a five-point Likert scale measuring disagreement or agreement on the statements of each section. A score of 1 indicated strong disagreement and is not likeable, and a score of 5 indicated strong agreement and is most likeable.

*Change management* describes how organizations implement change. It was measured using 17 items that described practices including creating a change team, planning and organizing the change, consulting people on the change, clarifying change goals, communicating the change, providing resources to enable the change, monitoring progress towards change goals, being sensitive to employee reactions to the change, and having leaders who supported, role modeled and had the political will to implement the change ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Fitting the structural equation model with 17 manifest variables would have been difficult, and so we decided to limit the number of manifest variables into parcels (Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002). We ran an exploratory factor analysis to cluster the items into parcels and three factors emerged, which we labeled them leadership, communication, planning and teamwork. The three theoretically-meaningful parcels were used as manifest variables in the analysis.

*Employee engagement* means to be psychologically present when occupying and performing an organizational role. It was measured using a five-item scale that included items such as: employees are willing to go beyond what is required for the good of the company, voluntarily use of cost-cutting measures, show a united front, have the initiative to think of ways to help the company, and make sacrifices to ensure company survival. The overall consistency of the six items was  $\alpha = .88$ .

*Samahan* is the quality of relationships among members of an organization. It was measured using six items defining organizational behaviors of employees in relation to their co-workers and leaders such as receiving fair treatment from bosses, working as teams, and caring for each other ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Readiness for change* pertains to the employee's perception whether the organization is ready to undertake organizational change. It was measured using ten items describing beliefs people have regarding organization change (Holt, 2007). However, four items were dropped because of poor item-total correlation during the testing of the measurement model. The internal consistency of the remaining six items was  $\alpha = .76$ .

### Data Analysis

The data was checked for missing inputs, encoding errors and violations of assumptions of normality, linearity, and skewness. The hypotheses were testing using Structural Equation Modeling examining both the measurement and structural model. The initial test of the measurement model did not yield good fit indices so we dropped variables that were not significantly correlated with the latent factors. The results of the trimmed model elicited better fit indices ( $\chi^2(80) = 659.52, p = .00; CFI = .96; NFI = .96; \text{ and } RMSEA = .05$ ) and given this, we ran the structural model to test our hypotheses.

## RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for the various scales are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

Scale	N	Mean	Variance	SD	Inter-item Correlation mean	Standardized Item Alpha	Alpha
Change management	14	48.09	78.54	8.86	.47	.92	.75
<i>Samahan</i>	4	14.27	10.68	3.27	.61	.86	.92
Employee engagement	4	14.68	9.42	3.07	.62	.87	.86
Readiness for Change	4	14.83	5.78	2.40	.43	.75	.75

### *Samahan* and Change Management

Hypothesis 1 predicted that there would be a positive correlation between *samahan* and change management. As seen in Figure 2, this was supported. The statistical analysis showed a moderate positive correlation, with  $r = .44$ , ( $p < .00$ ).

### Employee Engagement as a Mediator

Hypotheses 2 and 3 predicted that employee engagement would mediate the relationship between change management, quality of relationship and readiness for change. We tested these hypotheses using structural equation model. The hypothesized model elicited acceptable fit indices,  $\chi^2(78) = 655.02$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $NFI = .96$ ,  $RMSEA = .05$

Figure 2 shows the structure of the modified model with corresponding coefficients. The results of SEM for the structural model show that employee engagement mediates the relationship between change management and readiness for change, with the relationship between change management and employee engagement at  $\beta = .25$  ( $p = .00$ ), and with employee engagement to readiness for change at  $\beta = .52$  ( $p = .00$ ). As hypothesized, employee engagement fully mediates the relationship of change management with readiness for change.

The results likewise show that employee engagement mediates the relationship between the *samahan* and readiness for change with the relationship between *samahan* to employee engagement at  $\beta = .74$  ( $p = .00$ ), and with the correlations of employee engagement to readiness at  $\beta = .52$  ( $p = .00$ ).

### *Samahan* versus Change Management

We found support for hypothesis 4 that predicts that *samahan* would predict employee engagement more than change management practices. While both predict employee engagement, *samahan* has greater weight ( $\beta = .56$ ) than change management ( $\beta = .16$ ).

Figure 2. *Structure Equation Model for Modified Model on Change Management, Employee Engagement, Readiness for Change and Samahan*

## DISCUSSION

The results validated the hypothesis that *samahan* is positively correlated with change management. This reinforces the symbiotic relationship between these two variables and suggests that *samahan* is an essential ingredient to organizational change. This is consistent with findings in the West that have likewise found a positive correlation between quality of social relationships in the workplace and change readiness (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005; Madsen, Miller, & John, 2005).

The results also validated that *samahan* predicts readiness for change over and above that predicted by change management. This reinforces the importance of nurturing relationships in a collectivist and relational society such as the Philippines. Jocano (1999) explains that Filipino employees consider workmates as friends and that relationships extend to personal lives. Likewise, Saito et al. (2010) suggest that Filipinos tend to be more motivated and productive when working in groups with face-to-face interaction with co-workers.

We found support for our hypotheses that employee engagement would moderate the relationship between change management, *samahan*, and readiness for change. Specifically, our results reveal the presence of full mediation, suggesting that readiness for change, in the Philippine setting, is driven by effective change management practices and *samahan*, leading to better employee engagement that, in turn, predicts readiness for change.

The results validate the importance of change management theories and highlights the importance of articulating change goals, crafting deliberate change plans, choosing competent change leaders who will advocate and role model the change, communicating change goals and plans, providing resources for change, and monitoring and rewarding change efforts.

Beyond this, it emphasizes the critical role of culture in enabling readiness for change. Western change management models tend to describe the necessary processes in order to facilitate change. Even as such prescriptions are useful, the findings suggest that change leaders should not merely focus on process when enabling change. The results underscores that in a relational culture such as the Philippines, *samahan* is a necessary foundation to enable employee engagement and effective change management. Of course, group cohesion can either promote or resist change. Organization members may use group cohesion and pressure to accept or reject proposed changes. Hence, beyond looking at relationships in general perhaps even more critical is the *samahan* between management and employees.

How does one build goodwill and employees' trust in management? One way is to select and develop leaders who are also perceived as credible and trustworthy and have good people skills. According to Matsumoto (2000), leaders in Asia win loyalty and support by establishing personal contact with subordinates and showing awareness of their problems and sentiments. Jocano (1999) suggests that Filipino workers expect their leaders to care for them as individuals and not just mere employees.

Beyond ensuring effective leadership, organizations may wish to institute mechanisms to allow for communication and interaction between leaders and employees. For example, some organizations hold monthly birthday celebrations hosted by the company president or chief executive officer. Celebrations are another important means of building solidarity. Team-building programs, inter-departmental interactions, and company-wide events are other means to build unity within the organization.

#### Limitations and Implications for Future Research

This study confirmed the positive and moderate relationship between change management and *samahan*. The cross-sectional nature of study makes it difficult to conclusively interpret how one variable influences the other. Does change management improve *samahan* or does *samahan* improve change management? These questions may be answered using longitudinal studies that look at *samahan* before and after the implementation of a change.

Another area worth exploring would be specific practices and behaviors in change management in Philippine organizations and how these influence engagement and readiness for change. For example, Hechanova and Franco's study (in press) on transformation in Philippine organizations suggest three important dimensions of change management that appear to be culturally nuanced – participation, communication, and the composition of the change management team. Contrary to Western theory, they found a negative relationship between participation and readiness for change. They suggest the obtaining participation at the wrong times may make leaders appear to be weak or wishy-washy, at least among Filipinos. They also cite difficulties in the communication of change that they attribute to the sensitivity of Filipinos and *hiya* (shame). These values create a propensity for indirect communication and make it difficult for change leaders to gauge what their employees are really thinking or feeling. Their study likewise found that given a culture of high power distance, it is important that change

management teams are composed of people from various levels. Future studies may wish to validate these observations. In addition, other researchers may wish to further dissect change practices prior to, during and post change to examine how they influence employee engagement and readiness for change.

The study highlights the role of understanding culture and the values that are important in promoting good interpersonal relationships, better performance and satisfaction among workers (Jocano,1990). This study focused on only one value, *samahan*, but there are other Filipino values that may be salient to change management such *hiya*, personalism and paternalism.

In addition, the study provides a general overview of the relationship of the factors across types of organizations. Future studies may wish to dissect whether the relationships between the variables may vary according to moderators such as group composition, group size, demographics of the participants and type of organization. For example, the value for *samahan* may be more salient in family-owned organizations rather than foreign or multinational organizations that may have different cultures and dynamics.

In conclusion, the study contributes to theory by applying Erez and Earley's Cultural Self-Representation Theory in the context of change management. The results highlight the importance of *samahan* and systematic change management in enabling employee engagement and readiness for change. Beyond its theoretical contribution, it presents important implications on what organizations in the Philippines -- relationships between Filipino workers and their leaders.

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