REACTIONS TO PLANNED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: THE REVIEW OF RESISTANCE BEHAVIOUR

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a conceptual model of resistance to change (RTC) behaviour among civil servant officers in the Malaysia public sector (MPS). It is based on an extensive review of past research on RTC behaviour. From the literature reviewed, three groups of antecedents of RTC behaviour were identified, viz. individual factors, social factors and organizational factors. This paper offers a number of propositions which cumulatively propose leadership competency as a mediating variable in linking the three groups of antecedents with RTC behaviour. Upon model validation, the paper could offer practical intervention for managers and Organizational Development (OD) practitioners to review and manage "positive" RTC behaviour among civil servants in organizations. It is hoped that this paper yields a new approach in theorizing the behaviour of RTC by integrating the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Theory of Psychological Reactance, Social Identity Theory and Organizational Support Theory. This paper contributes to literature in RTC, OD and Human Resource Development.

Keywords: Reactions to change, Resistance to change, Planned Organizational Change, Change Agent and Leadership Competencies.

INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable in the life-cycle of any organizations. In brief, the Malaysia public sector (MPS) has undergone various planned organizational change (POC) initiatives since independence in 1957. The British colonial administration was custodial in nature and MPS played a limited developmental role. The only main change undertaken by the new government after independence was replacing the expatriates with Malayan civil servants (Nabiha & Khalid, 2008).

Consequently, the public sector widened its scope and change initiatives. After the New Economic Plan (NEP) was established via a revenue growth grant, the functions of the public sector changed from those performed under the colonial administration to ones directly involved in the economic development of the country (Economic Planning Unit (EPU), 1979). In the 1990s, the widening range of public enterprises' functions led to a number of development programmes (Rais, 1995). The effect of the Look East Policy in 1982 and of the Malaysia Incorporated and Privatisation Policy in 1983 pioneered the transformation of the role, function and scope of the public sector (EPU, 1981).

The POC initiatives in the 2000s had a huge impact on the MPS. 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). With the implementation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and other initiatives, civil servants are now required to work efficiently to respond to the new environment and to meet the demands of the stakeholders.

In today's challenging environment, the government has acknowledged that people's participation and contribution must be considered in the formation of transformation initiatives. The Government Transformation Programme (GTP) is seen as the biggest POC initiative in the history of the country and it encompasses the vast area of the full public sector. Other initiatives, such as the Economic Transformation Plan (ETP), the New Economic Model (EPU, 2011) and the creation of a civil service that is

people-oriented (KSN 2014), as well as the establishment of the Performance Management & Delivery Unit (PEMANDU), Unit Peneraju Agenda Bumiputera (TERAJU) and TALENT Corp, are deemed to be the driving forces for the public sector's transformation into a people-based institution (EPU, 2015).

Though numerous POC initiatives have been implemented by the government, civil servants' resistance to change is a main restraining force behind the limited results of some of the initiatives (Nabiha & Khalid, 2008; PEMANDU, 2015). Resistance of civil servants to each activity of POC implementation varies in degree. A civil servant might resist even while technically implementing a POC initiative. This behaviour or attitude triggered the interest of the author to further explore and investigate this phenomenon.

Civil servants in the MPS have been unable to respond effectively to the POC initiatives (Nabiha & Khalid, 2008). Civil servants' efficiency in service delivery has become a critical issue in the MPS due to the expectations of the society (Institut Tadbiran Awam Negara (INTAN) 2011). Indeed, the MPS, through New Economic Model (NEM) recognizes that public service productivity has not improved much over the past few years (INTAN, 2010). Although there are many potential factors behind the failure to enact the POC initiatives, resistance to change (RTC) behaviour is widely recognized as a significant contributor to this problem (Georgalis et al., 2014).

THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

Public sector organizations often attempt to implement POC to improve efficiency, enhance the quality of service delivery and cut cost expenditure (Kuipers et al., 2014). Employees are critical in POC initiatives because they are either the change implementers or change recipients. Despite well-planned change initiatives, approximately 70 percent of all change implementations generally have failed, leading to disappointed expectations (Pieterse, 2012). RTC behaviour by employees is

the main factor behind unsuccessful POC and often cited as the main reason for difficulties in implementing POC initiatives.

Over the last two decades, research on leadership styles has explored the relationship between leadership competency and POC. Literatures on leadership have also postulated that leaders' competency in interpersonal interactions is determined by their abilities to mediate their own and others' emotions and to use this information to guide thinking and action whether to accept or resist the change (Berson & Avolio, 2004; Higgs & Rowland, 2000; Higgs & Rowland, 2005). In recent years, several academic studies have examined POC in the public service together with RTC behaviour as a whole. However, there is a lack of research analysing the degree of resistance to each level of activities in implementing POC which are communicating, mobilizing and evaluating (Battilana et al., 2010) and analysing how leadership competency can influence these activities .

In the Malaysian context, there are various arguments that the implementation of POC initiatives in the MPS have not led to significant changes mainly due to employee resistance (Nabiha & Khalid, 2008; PEMANDU, 2015). Indeed, Malaysia Government recognized that its organizations underperform largely due to the likelihood that the status quo will be maintained at each phase of POC initiatives (PEMANDU, 2015). Hence, to develop in-depth knowledge on resistance to change in each activity, there is a need to endeavour a research in the MPS.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE (RTC) BEHAVIOUR DEFINED

RTC behaviour is basically a catchall phrase and it has been seen as a dangerous potency that runs counter to the enthusiasm of the organization (Erwin & Garman, 2010; Smollan, 2011). In that capacity, RTC behaviour is viewed as something to overcome no matter what. Those whom resist are considered individuals with poor states of mind, ailing in camaraderie. As anyone might expect, treating "resistance"

along these lines serves just to escalate genuine resistance, in this way obstructing or possibly derailing POC (Erwin & Garman, 2010).

Likewise, Dent and Goldberg (1999) warn managers to avoid creating resistance among employees by assuming that employees will always be opposed to change. In the 1990s others have reissued similar warnings (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Merron, 1993). A prominent consultant noted that the concept of RTC "has been transformed over the years into a not-so-disguised way of blaming the less powerful for unsatisfactory results of change efforts" (Krantz, 1999: 42).

As the discussion of POC revealed, however, resistance is a part of the natural process of adapting to change. It is normal response for employee who has a strong vested interest in maintaining their perception of the current state and guarding themselves against loss (Smollan, 2011). In most studies on RTC behaviour, researchers have obtained a perspective from Lewin (1957) where resistance is defined as a restraining force moving toward keeping up the status quo. As such, employee's RTC behaviour is always being considered in the organizations negatively. Indeed, managers treat RTC in employees as an impediment to the POC. Nevertheless, at the point when RTC is viewed as a normal response in the POC process, it can in this way be seen as an initial move toward acceptance to change (Georgalis et al., 2014; Smollan, 2011). RTC generally shows the extent to which POC has affected on something significant to employees and the organization (Saksvik & Hetland, 2009). Organizations would not be able to achieve the POC if its employees do not acknowledge the change and make the change "work" (Burke, Lake, & Paine, 2008).

In different sorts of literature which encompasses the exploration on RTC, researchers likewise postulate more extensive spectrum of reasons why employees may resist POC. For example, research on commitment to organization shows that resistance may be motivated by people's intention to act as per their principles (Milgram, 1968). Moreover, the organizational change literature demonstrates that most of employee RTC is influenced by their intention to get the management's attention on issues that

need to be considered for making the organization relevant and current rather than individual selfishness (Ashford et al., 1998; Chuang, 1999; Dutton et al., 1997).

It is seldom for employees to resist or express such mentalities in demonstrations of dispute or dissent, without taking into account the potential pessimistic outcomes for themselves. Consequently, what some may see as impolite or unwarranted action may likewise be impelled by employees' ethical principles or by their yearning to safeguard the organization's best interest (Gravenhorst, 2003). The author feels it is worth to consider those virtuous intentions by modulating the part of tagging employee's reactions to change as "bad employee".

As far as RTC behaviour is concerned, leaders play important roles in ensuring POC initiatives are successfully implemented (Burnes, 2004). Studies have postulated that leaders' RTC behaviour will influence the success rate of planned organizational change implementation activities (Burnes, 2004; Ford & Greer, 2009; Nielsen et al., 1995; Purser, 2005). Building on this phenomenon, the author argues that each activity in planned organizational change implemented by the leaders has a certain amount of degree of resistance. However, based on exhaustive reading on literatures, there is a lack of study to empirically determine which of those activities have the highest amount of resistance.

THEORIZING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE (RTC) BEHAVIOUR

There are several theories chosen to conceptualize the RTC behaviour of individuals.

Theory of Planned Behaviour

Theory of Planned Behaviour is one of the most comprehensive frameworks examining human behaviour (Strambach & Doring, 2012). This theory proposed by Ajzen (1991) explains that an individual's intention to perform a specific behaviour is a result of his or her behavioural beliefs. Thus, the more control and information

regarding the behaviour of an individual, the greater the likelihood in predicting his or her behaviour.

Theory of Psychological Reactance

According to the Theory of Psychological Reactance introduced by Brehm in 1968, in the event that people feel that any of their free practices, in which they can draw in at any minute or later, is dispensed with or undermined with disposal, the motivational condition of psychological reactance will be stimulated (Miron & Brehm, 2006). This reactance state is coordinated toward the rebuilding of the debilitated or dispensed with conduct. This theory proposes that if the degree of reactance is high, the individual may have antagonistic sentiments (Thomas Dowd et al., 1994). Therefore, individual will make an effort to restore the opportunity which has been lost or debilitated when the degree of reactance is higher (Knabe 2012; Nesterkin, 2013).

Social Identity Theory

An essential presumption in this theory is that individuals tend to consider themselves as far as groups and organizations to which they belong (Stets & Burke, 2000). As a result of social identification (or self-categorization) processes, people may develop a sense of psychological attachment to their organization(s), which can be an important predictor of their motivated behaviour (Smith et al., 2007). In accordance, they will behave the way a good member behaves because they want to be recognized as a good member for a particular group (Ellemers et al., 2004; Reicher et al., 2005). The theory implies that a person will be influenced to exhibit certain behaviour when he/she is attached to a certain group of people whom also enact the same behaviour.

Organizational Support Theory

Organizational Support Theory was developed from the social exchange perspective in order to explain the member-organization relationship (Ngo et al., 2012). Research on RTC behaviour was done more commonly in organization settings in order to

examine employees' response to any POC implementation. It is assumed that organizational factors are linked to evaluations of respect, which in turn could influence the volatility of individuals' engagement and contribution to the organization, one aspect of which is RTC behaviour (Ngo et al. 2012).

CONTINUUM OF EMPLOYEES' RESPONSES TO PLANNED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE (POC): ACCEPTANCE AND RESISTANCE

To empower change agents to recognize employees' acceptance and resistance, it is crucial to operationalize the meanings of reaction to change. Resistance is a multidimensional state of mind toward change, containing affective (feelings toward the change), cognitive (assessments of worth and advantage of the change) and behavioural (intention to act against the change) elements (Oreg, 2006). Hence, these dimensions can be described as extending from "acceptance" to "resistance". Should these elements are considered as a whole; the outcome is the employees' acceptance or resistance to change (Self et al., 2007). Moreover, employees can actually respond with both resistance and acceptance (Harding, 2005; Wittig, 2012). Therefore, investigating the relationship between the behaviour of resistance and acceptance to change is critical to completely comprehend the range of employees' response to change.

ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE BEHAVIOUR

Research shows that high extents of POC initiatives are unsuccessful (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Beer, 2011). Researchers basically concur that employee resistance is one of the main sources for the failure of POC initiatives (Bovey & Hede, 2001a; Higgs & Rowland, 2005; Jurisch, Ikas, Wolf, & Krcmar, 2013). Such findings indicate that change agents focusing on employee's reactions including resistance and acceptance during POC are of utmost importance to the success of the initiative. In response, this paper provides a model that illustrates the cause of employees' RTC behaviour.

Individual Factors

Employee's RTC behaviour is influenced by a number of factors, and the individual factor is an important one that must be considered (Swarnalatha 2014). It is practical to anticipate that employees will respond subsequent to the process of change includes going from the known not obscure, and when employees respond, it is crucial to recognize the manifestations of their responses and the reasons behind them (Wittig, 2012).

Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou (2004) defined emotional intelligence (EI) as "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships". The function of EI in employees' responses to change is essential in light of the fact that people with high amounts of EI experience more profession achievement, feel less employment instability and more successful and perform in a team, are more versatile to distressing situations and show strong adapting techniques compare to those with low EI levels (Vakola et al. 2004).

Research also shows that irrational thoughts are fundamentally corresponded with employees' RTC behaviour (Bovey & Hede, 2001a). Individuals have a tendency to have some thoughts that join what has been depicted as "faulty, irrational or crooked thinking" (Bovey & Hede, 2001a). Amid change, employees make their own particular judgement of what is going to happen, how others see and think about them (Neenan & Dryden, 2011).

Defence mechanisms emerge automatically in light of impression of risk and are embraced to reduce anxiety (Bovey et al., 2001b). According to Bovey et al. (2001b), employees who are unwittingly disposed to utilize maladaptive defences will probably oppose change. Employees with a propensity to unwittingly embrace adaptive defences are more averse to oppose change.

Vakola et al. (2004) recognized numerous studies in which employees' attitude toward change were crucial in accomplishing fruitful POC activities. A few components effect employees' states of mind toward change, particularly gender, tenure, educational attainment, and social systems (Oreg, 2006; Vakola et al. 2004). Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky (2005) have also recognized that there is a relationship between employees' negative dispositions and resistance.

Social Factors

A need to feel in a group or a requirement for social collaborations is a basic human motivation in interpersonal conduct (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Thus, individuals' reaction in certain behaviour can likewise be influenced by social components, for example, a longing to have social collaboration with others or as a consequence of the social connection itself. Leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships are social interactions between employees and their supervisors which can impact RTC behaviour (Griep et al., 2015).

Peer pressure also leads to RTC behaviour. Studies on reaction to change have found that social ties in organizations play a strong causal role in influencing individuals' decision to resist or support initiatives (Griep et al., 2015; Hill & Bartol, 2015). This evidence reflects the important role of group members as a paramount push factor to RTC behaviour.

Individuals' involvement in social roles recognized by the public can enhance one's image (Hu, 1994). A study by Ariely, Bracha and Meier (2009) on philanthropic behaviour shows that image is a vital force in driving and motivating a particular behaviour. It is assumed that an individual's image in his/her social roles will also influence the reaction in the POC initiatives by other employees.

Organizational Factors

RTC behaviour occurs in both formal and informal organizational contexts (Saksvik & Hetland, 2009). Thus, it is essential to discuss the organizational variables that are

most likely to influence individual involvements in this context since different people have different reactions when it comes to POC. Hence, organizational factors such as organizational structure (Saksvik & Hetland, 2009), organizational trust and goals (Loi et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2006) are found to affect employees' responses to change behaviours.

Organizational factors cannot be overlooked in examining resistance behaviour in the implementation activities of POC. In fact, Damanpour (1991) and Robertson, Roberts and Porras (1993) also advocated that organizational factors demonstrate significant variance in RTC behaviour. Thus, this suggests that the interrelationship of these organizational antecedents with RTC behaviour might be a direct or indirect association. There is a need to confirm this relationship.

RESISTANCE BEHAVIOUR IN A PLANNED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE (POC) CONTEXT: PUBLIC SERVICE TRANSFORMATION

Public Service Transformation (PST) initiative is in line with the aspirations and strategies outlined in the 10th Malaysia Plan: 2011-2015 (10MP), chapter on "Transforming Government to Transform Malaysia" (EPU, 2010). It specifically supports the government's agenda to restructure the public sector to ensure that it is more effective in its service delivery while at the same time ensuring that the transformation programmes contributes to better fiscal expenditure and management of the public sector. In the 10MP, one of the main priorities outlined by the government is the critical need to transform the government's systems, processes and human capacity in order to ensure that the government's various transformation programmes are implementable.

During the planning period, the government will be undertaking a comprehensive audit of all government organizations and structures and reviewing roles, functions, gaps and overlaps. The objective of this will be to develop a plan for rationalizing agencies with overlapping or redundant functions and to align the structure of

government agencies contributing to the national priorities. As challenges and opportunities will increasingly transcend traditional public sector boundaries, a whole-of-government approach will be deployed during the 10MP period. This whole-of-government approach will require agencies to work across portfolio boundaries and across federal, state and local levels as an integrated government to address cross cutting issues.

This POC approach will be applied to policy formulation, programme development and delivery of outcomes. The new structure of government will require a number of existing government organisations, particularly those with overlapping or redundant functions, to be rationalised. Organisations focused on national priorities will be strengthened and talent in the public service will continue to be developed.

The importance of understanding resistance behaviour among civil servant is shown by various arguments that the implementation of POC initiatives previously such as Government Transformation Programme (GTP) in the beginning have not led to significant changes mainly due to employee's resistance to the change (Muhyiddin, 2010; PEMANDU, 2015). Therefore, this triggered the author's interest to endeavour a study on RTC in the MPS.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY AS MEDIATOR

One of the difficulties for leaders is to take their organizations into the future by executing POC towards more effective outcomes (Purser 2005; Van der Voet, 2015). Numerous leadership studies on the relationship between leadership and change does not accentuate on the unpredictability of intra-organizational processes (Yukl, 1999), including the multifaceted nature of the diverse activities in the POC implementation process.

In this paper, building on the leadership, organizational change and RTC behaviour literatures, the author proposes that with the influence of leadership competency as a

mediator, leaders are likely to accept on all or different activities involved in POC implementation.

Despite numerous theories progressed by leadership scholars (House & Aditya, 1997), this paper will emphasize on the task-oriented and person-oriented behaviours model. In this model, task-oriented emphasizes on organizational structure, outline, control and building up schedules to accomplish organizational objectives and goals (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). This orientation is vital for accomplishing organizational objectives and creating POC activities (House & Aditya, 1997; Huy, 1999; Nadler & Tushman, 1990). Person-oriented abilities incorporate practices that encourage synergistic cooperation among team members in organization, set up a supportive social atmosphere that guarantee fair treatment of team members in organization (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). These interpersonal aptitudes are vital in POC executions which empower leaders to spur and direct their followers (Nesterkin, 2013; Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). Such leadership competencies might mediate the RTC behaviour and probably have implications for POC implementation.

Based on the above discussion, a conceptual model to show the correlations between the variables has been developed. Figure 2 below illustrates a model showing the antecedents of resistance to change behaviour and the mediator.

Independent Variables   **Mediator**   **Dependent**
Variable

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┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Individual Factors:     │
│ - emotional intelligence, irrational │
│   thoughts, defense mechanisms and │
│   employee attitudes    │
└─────────────────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────┐         ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│ Social Factors:         │         │ Leadership   │      │ Resistance to│
│ - social interactions, peer pressure │    →    │ Competency   │  →   │ Change       │
│   and social roles      │         │              │      │ Behaviour    │
└─────────────────────────┘         └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘

┌─────────────────────────┐
│ Organizational Factors: │
│ - organizational goals, │
│   organizational structure and │
│   organizational trust  │
└─────────────────────────┘
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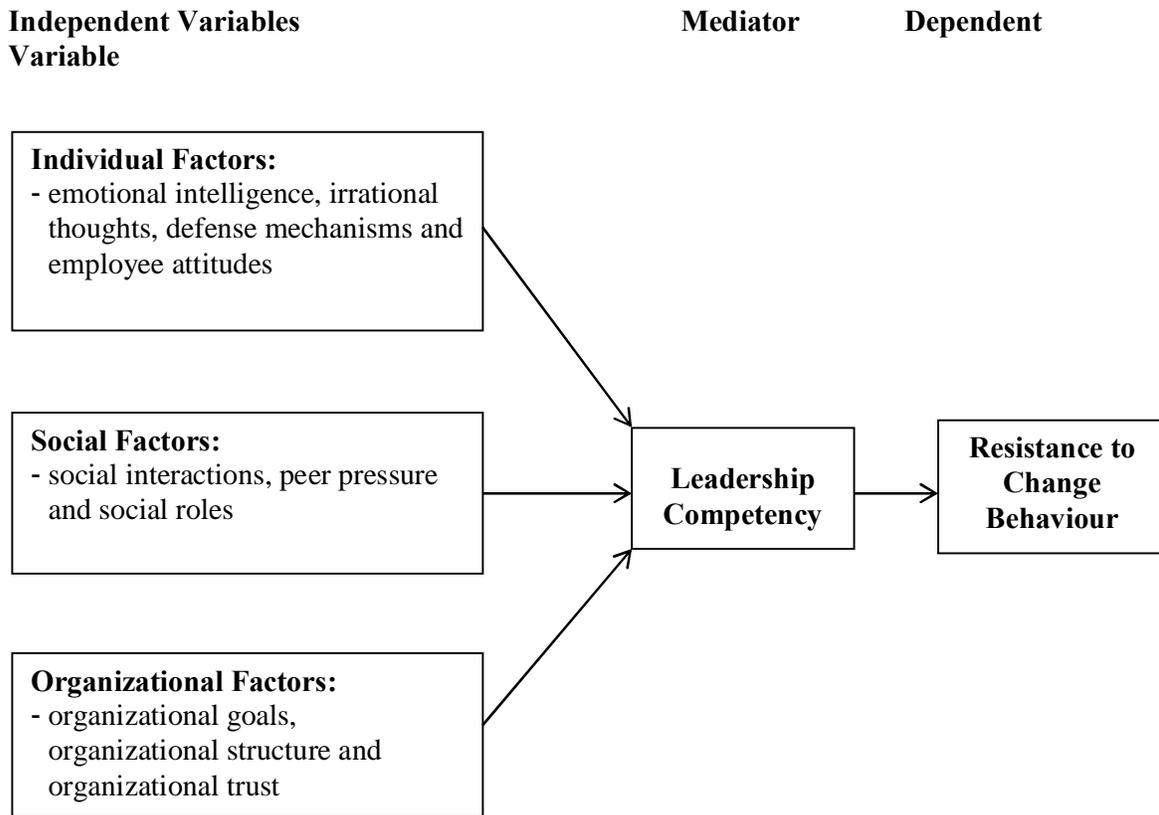
Figure 2: A model showing the antecedents of resistance to change behaviour and leadership competency as the mediator

IMPLICATIONS TO ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

POC is vital for organizations to stay focused in today's competitive environment. To effectively actualize change activities, change agents must understand that the responsibility of employees is essential and employees' responses to change are impacted by various components, including individual factors, social factors and organizational factors. Change agents can apply the understanding of continuum of employees' reactions to POC to illustrate how employees response to change. The proposed model is based on the idea that the level of employees' acceptance or resistance is a necessary element that change agents ought to analyse. Generally, this paper gives OD professionals and the managers' essential information about employees' responses to change. By understanding the degree of employees' resistance

and acceptance to change in each activity in implementing POC, top management would be able to review the POC initiatives which are not in the best interest of the organization. Therefore, resistance may be useful in helping productivity and assisting in refining the implementation strategic and action plans as well as to improve the quality of decision-making.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many factors must be considered when studying RTC behaviour among civil servants in MPS. The author further proposes that individuals should develop their leadership competencies in order to facilitate the implementation of POC initiatives in the government transformation. It is proposed that individuals' who have high leadership competency in the activities in implementing POC initiatives will be more likely to support and accept the change rather than resist it.

This paper provides a theoretical support for the individual factors, social factors and organizational factors as antecedents of RTC behaviour and leadership competency as a mediator. Therefore, the author proposes future research empirically test and validate the propositions and the links between individual, social, organizational factors, leadership competency and RTC behaviour among civil servants with the existence of the mediating variable in the model.

Consequently, empirical evidence that could be obtained based on this model may contribute to the emerging literature on rethinking the resistance behaviour of individuals from different perspectives, particularly in the MPS.

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