Employee Engagement and Change Management Programmes: a Comparative Study of Organisational Commitment between Thai and Irish Cultures

Mark J. Dunne

Ramkhamhaeng University, Institute of International Studies,

Ramkhamhaeng Road, Huamark, Bangkok 10240, Thailand

Email: mjadunne@yahoo.com

Bahaudin G. Mujtaba (*correspondent author*)

Nova Southeastern University

H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship,

3301 College Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, FL. 33314-7796, USA

Email: mujtaba@nova.edu

ABSTRACT:

The objective of this research was to explore the nature of employee commitment and to determine if this commitment is enhanced if the company encourages a climate of inclusive change and whether there is a difference in the nature of this relationship based on nationality. The survey was conducted amongst 121 respondents in full-time employment in Thailand and Ireland. The findings indicate that change management styles in both countries show some statistically significant changes along with room for improvement and that the appetite for more active participation in change management programmes does exist. Limitations and implications for management and future research are presented.

Key Words: Change climate, change management, commitment, Ireland, Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

Change is an inevitable and constant feature of modern corporate life. Whether the process is called 're-engineering', 'downsizing', 'rightsizing' or 'strategising for efficiencies' it can be a very expensive undertaking, and not only in monetary terms: traumatic for employees, demanding and difficult for management and disruptive to company productivity. Most employees tend to react with resistance rather than seeing change as an opportunity to initiate improvements. The legacy of a difficult Change Management process can linger long after the actual programme has been completed and can adversely affect employees' sense of job security, satisfaction, trust and can lead to issues with staff retention. However, change processes conducted in an open and inclusive manner can facilitate new thinking, enhance efficiencies, improve innovation, inspire all employees to work at higher levels of self-awareness and should lead to a greater degree of commitment to the organisation.

This study investigates the relationship between the level of an employee's commitment to his/her employer organisation and the environment in which change management programmes are implemented

within that organisation. Does an open and inclusive change management climate engender greater commitment from employees? 'Commitment' is seen according to Allen and Meyer's (1991) three-component model: Affective, Continuance and Normative.

Furthermore, it attempts to identify if there is a significant difference in the nature of this relationship between European and South-East Asian work cultures, specifically Ireland in the former category and Thailand in the latter category.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In today's fast-moving and increasingly globalised business world 'change' is not the exception but rather a steady, relentless process. This is evident in the inexorable move from legacy, top-down, value creation models to more horizontal models that necessitate collaboration across different work groups, departments, companies, cultures and even countries. The cultural and business revolution initiated by invention of the Internet, the creation of the World Wide Web and the mass availability of open source software to leverage the power of both has had profound effects on companies and countries. An increasingly interconnected, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society is in evidence all across the developing and developed worlds. To operate in this new world and profitably engage with it organisations require confidence, structural agility, flexibility of thought and, critically, an ability to welcome change and see the opportunities it presents. Change is an unavoidable process in modern business life and, if handled insensitively, it can have an insidious effect on the level of employee commitment to his/her company. On the other hand it can provide benefits for all stakeholders if the 'Change Management' process is transparent and inclusive.

Change requires the continuous adaption of corporate strategies, and consequent changes in company structures, as well as innovation in business processes to respond to changes in the external and internal environments. In this context change may be concerned with a wide variety of issues, from introducing a new product line to implementing a completely new corporate strategy. Organisational change can be described as a way of altering the structure and/or processes of an existing company in order to increase its effectiveness in pursuit of its strategic objectives.

Change management means to plan, initiate, realise, control, and finally stabilise change processes on a corporate and personal level. Change management comprises both, revolutionary one-off projects and evolutionary transformations (Frans, 2010).

In a business environment where change is unrelenting, and its rate increasing, organisational structures must be nimble enough to support change and empower their people, not only embrace change but, to drive it also. Burke and Cooper (2009, p.XXI) state that there is increasing evidence that people, their management and their organisational culture are the only really unique source of competitive advantage available to companies today.

It has been widely known that high levels of organisational commitment from employees lead to higher productivity, reduced levels of staff turnover, lower rates of absenteeism and the urge to 'go the extra mile' in seeing a job done well. How is it possible to maintain such high levels of commitment from people in the face of constant change and uncertainties about their futures? Worley and Lawler (2006, p.4) contend "built-to-change firms are anxious about being caught off-guard, so they place everyone close to customers and the environment…That way, when the time comes to alter the direction of the organisation, everyone

moves together based on a common understanding and felt need for the change." Additionally they state that 'shared leadership' facilitates effective change management but requires constant input from employees to develop business strategy (p.7).

Conger and Pearce (2003, p.1) offer the following definition of 'shared leadership': "A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organisational goals or both". They continue, "This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence". According to Duck (2001), the four main reasons for people's resistance to change are as follows:

- *Parochial self-interest* – people are fearful of the potential losses as a result of the change, organisational objectives are given secondary consideration;

- *Misunderstanding and lack of trust* – people misunderstand the drivers and objectives of the changes, this attitude is hardened if there is a high degree of organisational distrust;

- *Different assessments* – people's (managers and employees) decision-making abilities are based on different knowledge sets, even within these groups there can be a broad spectrum of opinion;

- *Low tolerance for change* – people may be fearful that their present skills and competencies do not equip them to perform well when the changes are implemented, others may be reluctant to expend the additional effort required to gain new skills.

The difficulty lies in motivating people to accept change, embrace it and leverage it to produce new opportunities for growth for themselves and for their organisations. People typically perceive change in seven stages (Recklies, 2001):

(1) *Shock* – faced with an unexpected situation people can suffer a loss of self-confidence;

(2) *Denial* – people believe change is unnecessary, 'if it's not broken don't fix it';

(3) *Rational Understanding* – realise that change is necessary but personal behaviour patterns remain embedded;

(4) *Emotional Acceptance* – management need to influence people to change personal habits, beliefs

and values fundamentally;

(5) *Exercising and Learning* – change champion needs to implement new processes and encourage new

behaviours;

(6) *Realisation* – positive feedback from new behaviours encourages new thinking patterns;

(7) *Integration* – new behaviours and beliefs are completely assimilated.

Lewin (1947) contended that most people are fearful of change and are more confortable in a stable, unchanging environment. In order to overcome this fear-driven mindset he proposed a three stage model involving (1) 'unfreezing' old ways and attitudes, (2) establishing a new vision and learning through inclusion, training and empowerment, and (3) 'refreezing' this new behaviour, through support, reinforcement and feedback, so that it becomes the new norm. This process was to be repeated each time a new change is required.

Burke and Fiksenbaum (2009, p.23) states "emotions that work against change include anxiety, fear, insecurity, fatigue, cynicism, pessimism, arrogance and anger. Emotions that support change include optimism, urgency, trust, passions, hope enthusiasm and excitement". Senge (2006, p.18) observes that many see themselves as working in a system over which they have no control. They do what is expected of them and go home – their responsibilities end at the boundaries of their roles. So it is essential that people are motivated to act for the right reasons; the ability to tap into the emotions associated with employee-supported change are powerful enablers towards enhanced performance at a personal and organisational level.

For managers to perform this task they must have finely honed 'soft skills', excellent interpersonal communication, empathy and political skills, as well as more traditional management skills such as business and analytical skills. Fullan (2002, p.8) states that,

> Leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups —
> especially with people different than themselves. This is why emotional intelligence is
> equal to or more important than having the best ideas. In complex times, emotional
> intelligence is a must.

Managers must get the 'buy-in' of all stakeholders involved in the change in order for that change to be successful. Employees, particularly, need to understand the objective of the change, must see the benefit for them and must be active in the implementation, if not the development, of the change so that they can bring all their skills, experience and enthusiasm to bear to change ingrained habits and work towards new goals.

Organisational managers with responsibility for implementing change need to create an open, accommodating and inclusive climate in which to engage with their employees. Clear communication is critical to all such undertakings. Managers need to employ a number of influencing techniques to establish a trusting environment, throughout the organisation, within which to elicit the best from their staff. For example, Vengel (2000) identified two types of energy that can be used to influence people: 'push' energy which is forceful, persuasive and 'pull' energy which is involving, inclusive (Mujtaba, 2014). Other techniques include building rapport, consultation and, importantly, appeals based on friendship. All these techniques illustrate that building and maintaining relationships are the keys to successful change management. Employees need to believe that they are included in the process, their opinions have value and their voices are heard.

The organisational structure must facilitate unleashing the creative forces within employees to harness and direct those energies towards achieving corporate objectives. Senge (2006, p. 7) describes the concept of 'personal mastery' as "the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience and of seeing reality objectively". He says that this is a cornerstone of a learning organisation but that few such organisations exist and the vast majority of organisations do not encourage the personal growth of their staff. Senge goes on to state that employees with high levels of mastery are highly committed, learn fast, take responsibility and work under their own initiative (p.133). Bill O'Brien (as cited in Senge 2006, p.134) said "to seek personal fulfilment only outside of work and to ignore the significant portion of our lives which we spend working, would be to limit our opportunities to be happy and complete human beings."

If the premise is accepted that, in response to the increasing pace of globalisation and business innovation, all organisations' new modus operandi in dealing with a never-ending series of change processes then it is essential to include employees in the shared leadership process, motivate them towards continued self-development and leverage their intellectual capital in responding to developing business challenges.

Senior management need to demonstrate that tacit knowledge is valued for the asset it really is and organisational memory is recognised and utilised for its ability for comparing past outcomes and making inferences about what actions will improve future results.

Mahler and Casamayou state "it is not enough that information exists somewhere in the organization. It must be shared, interpreted, argued over, and reinterpreted to tease out trends and understand the link between actions and results" (2009, p.203).

This concept is of such critical importance that the US Army even has an office called the 'Center for Army Lessons Learned' located in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Here the Army tries to learn from encounters with the enemy and then incorporate these lessons into its training manoeuvres (Ricks, 2006, p.193). Kanter (1979, p.72) argues that,

> Powerless people are usually the last ones to whom anyone wants to entrust more power, for fear of its dissipation or abuse. But those people are precisely the ones who might benefit most from an injection of power and whose behaviour is likely to change as new options open up to them.

He goes on to explain that the reasons that most organisation's are not inclusive and do not empower employees are mundane: current managers will feel threatened, the existing hierarchy will not be respected, less skilled people should not be opining on management issues, and that predictability is rated more highly than flexibility(p.74).

Conger and Kanungo (1988, p.476) believe that "empowerment processes may allow leaders to lessen the emotional impact of demoralising change or to mobilise organisational members in the face of difficult competitive challenges".

Eisenberger *et al*. (1986, p.501) defined an employee concept of 'perceived organisational support' and noted that employees "develop global beliefs concerning the extent to which organisations value their contributions and cares about their well-being". Furthermore they state that, assuming expectations for praise and reward for extra effort are met, employees would identify themselves with the organisation and develop a positive affective attachment. Thus there would be an increase in the employee's efforts to achieve organisational objectives.

The concept of 'organisational commitment' and its relationship to job satisfaction, innate employee beliefs and behaviours has been widely researched and documented in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors (Porter *et al*., 1974, 1976; Mowday *et al*., 1979; Vandenberg and Lance, 1992; Haluk, 2008).

Organisational commitment is defined as acceptance as well as a strong belief in the organisation's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, and a desire to maintain organisational membership (Mowday *et al*., 1979).

Furthermore, Allen and Meyer (1990, p.1) defined three distinct components of organisational commitment as:

- *Affective commitment* – 'employees' emotional attachment to, identification with, and

  involvement in, the organisation';

- *Continuance commitment* – 'based on the costs the employee associates with leaving the

  organisation';

- *Normative commitment* – 'employees' feelings of obligation to remain with the organisation'.

In addition, research (Allen & Meyer, 1990) has also investigated the antecedents of commitment, including work experience (affective commitment), perceived lack of alternatives & magnitude of side-bets (continuance commitment) and family and cultural socialisation experiences (normative commitment).

The rise of interest in this concept is due to the increased dislocation of the world of work and its perceived effects on the output and efficiency of employees. Due to the rapid changes in business over the last thirty years employees in modern organisations are expected to be more proactive than ever before. The expectation from management is for employees to show more flexibility, initiative, motivation, and commitment while the employees may be inclined to display less of these qualities due to a perceived lack

of reciprocal commitment from their managers. The success of any organisation depends, not only on how it leverages its human capital and organisational memory but also, on how it encourages further commitment and innovation from its employees in the face of market pressures, rapid market changes and increased pressure on existing corporate structures and processes.

Organisational leaders need to create a coherent overview of the change they are seeking, communicate this vision to all employees and invest resources into building and maintaining the processes required to embed these practices and engage their staff in a consistent, meaningful and rewarding manner. Real inclusion must mean more than rhetoric.

Ackoff (2006)   defined two types of mistakes that organisations could and should learn from: (1) errors of commission – something that should not have been done, (2) errors of omission – something that should have been done. According to Ackoff, the latter are not recorded, are unacknowledged and there is no accountability for them. He states,

> In such a situation a manager who wants to invoke as little disapproval as possible must
> try either to minimize errors of commission or transfer to others responsibility for those
> he or she makes. The best way to do this is to do nothing, or as little as one can get away
> with. This is a major reason that organizations do not make radical changes (2006, p.4).

Many studies have been undertaken to investigate the relationship between job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and these have shown that there is a positive correlation between the two. The focus of this study is on the influence of change management culture on all three elements of organisational commitment. However, if we assume that if an organisation fosters a more open and inclusive change management policy, and this leads to increased levels of job satisfaction for employees, then we would expect such a policy to also lead to greater levels of commitment to one's organisation.

HYPOTHESES

This study focuses on the potential relationships between an organisation's change management philosophy or climate and the degree of commitment to that organisation experienced by its employees. As stated previously today's increasingly globalised business world is characterised by 'change' being the norm rather than the exception. If it could be demonstrated that an inclusive company-wide change management climate leads to higher levels of employee engagement and commitment then there are significant implications for senior management teams regarding organisational strategy, and therefore structure, as well as middle managers, coaches and mentors.

Figure 1: Model of hypotheses
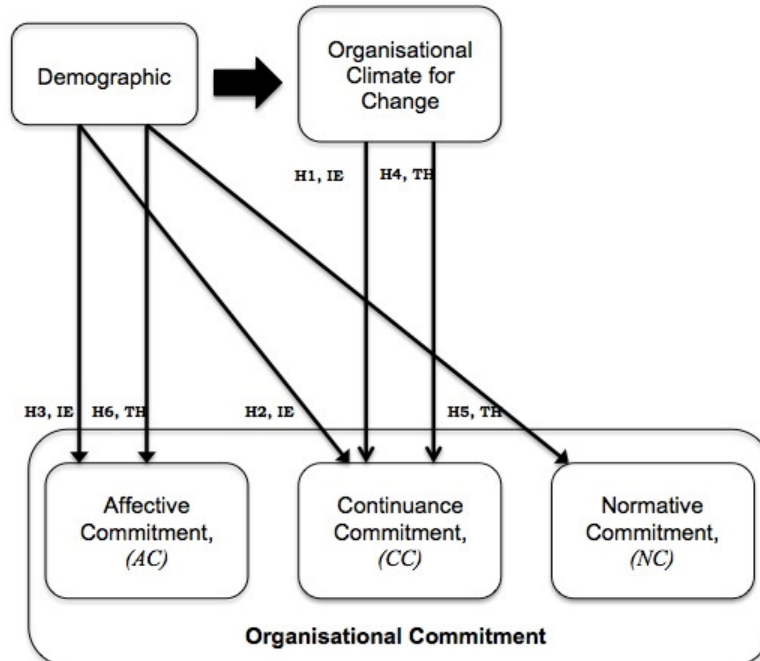
This is a quantitative study where the data was gathered by using a Web-based questionnaire survey instrument. The unit of analysis is the individual respondent who completed the survey. The six hypotheses that were tested are:

1. Irish employee's organisational commitment   (affective, continuance and normative) will be higher
   if the organisation in which he/she works employs a more inclusive type of change management
   style.

2. Irish employees with longer company service have a greater degree of continuance commitment.

3. Irish employees with higher educational qualifications have a greater degree of affective
   commitment.

4. Thai employee's organisational commitment (affective, continuance and normative) is unaffected
   by the climate for change applied in his/her company.

5.   Thai employees with longer company service have a greater degree of normative commitment.

6.   Thai employees with higher educational qualifications have a greater degree of affective

commitment.

METHODOLOGY

The dependent variables are 'Organisational Climate for Change' and 'Organisational Commitment'. The latter is sub-divided into 'Affective Commitment', 'Continuance Commitment' and 'Normative Commitment', as identified by Allen and Meyer (1991). The independent variables are the demographic information comprising the respondents' nationality, gender, age, education, number of service years, and occupation grade.

The survey was targeted at a population sample of two hundred (200) Irish nationals working mainly, but not exclusively in the Republic of Ireland, and two hundred (200) Thai nationals working mainly, but not exclusively in Thailand. The population was aimed at employees working in full-time employment in companies, from small- to large-scale enterprises. No industries were deemed as excludable.

In actuality 131 responses were collected, of which 121 were valid for the purposes of this project. Fifty-three (53) were from Irish respondents (43.8% of total) and sixty-eight (68) were from Thai respondents (56.2% of total). In addition six (6) responses were collected from nationals outside these target populations. This latter category was not considered for data analysis.

The survey instrument used in the collection of data for this research consists of forty (40) statements divided into four sections:

- Section 1 - consists of seventeen (17) statements that comprise the 'Survey of Organisational

  Climate for Change' questionnaire (Mujtaba and McCartney, 2010);

- Section 2 - consists of eight (8) statements that comprise the 'Affective Commitment' component

  of Allen and Meyer's organisational commitment questionnaire;

- Section 3 - consists of nine (9) statements that comprise the 'Continuance Commitment'

  component of Allen and Meyer's organisational commitment questionnaire;

- Section 4 - consists of six (6) statements that comprise the 'Normative Commitment' component

  of Allen and Meyer's organisational commitment questionnaire.

The final section consists of the six (6) categories that describe the demographic data of the sampled population.

The respondents were asked to consider each statement in turn and indicate their level of agreement by placing a checkmark on a five-level Likert scale: (1) Strongly Disagreeing, (2) Disagreeing, (3) Neutral, (4) Agreeing, (5) Strongly Agreeing.

The survey was prepared in English, however considerable efforts were made to ensure the survey introductory statement, instructions and research statements were accurately translated into Thai and back-translated into English language by another person who spoke both languages fluently to make sure there is equivalency in the meaning. As a result, minor adjustments were made prior to implementation.

The decision to expend efforts in translation was driven by the need to make the survey instrument as accessible as possible to potential Thai respondents. The aim is that the survey would be answered by Thais not normally exposed to non-Thai nationals or non-Thai work cultures. The survey instrument was bi-lingual (English and Thai).

The survey was initially sent to Thai students of the part-time MBA programme at the Institute of International Studies, Ramkhamhaeng University who were engaged in full-time employment, as well as professional contacts in Thailand's telecommunications industry.

Similarly, the survey was initially sent to friends, former colleagues and professional contacts in Ireland's telecommunications industry. In both cases it was requested of the initial respondents that they forward the survey to friends and colleagues employed full-time in as wide a spectrum of industries as possible in order to obtain a more representative population sample. The survey instrument was distributed as a unique weblink through e-mail.

Data analysis

Frequency analysis was used to indicate the respondent's opinions on each of the survey statements. Then, as the aim of the study was to determine the relationship between employees' organisational commitment and their perception of change management climate, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used. The hypotheses were tested using one-way ANOVA, mean, standard deviation, t-test and F-test.

Using the online survey collection method a total of 131 responses were collected, of which 121 were deemed valid for the purposes of this project. 53 were from Irish respondents (43.8% of total) and 68 were from Thai respondents (56.2% of total).

Reliability analysis was conducted using SPSS for Windows Version 16 statistical analysis programme and this resulted in the calculation of an overall Cronbach's α co-efficient of 0.902 for the 46 items that constituted the survey instrument.

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Gender. Of the total number of responses 40.5% were from females and 59.5% were from males, however there was quite an imbalance between the sexes if viewed across the nationality category. Irish responses were decidedly male, 92.4%, versus 33.82% for Thai respondents. Females only accounted for 7.55% of Irish respondents whereas they accounted for almost two-thirds of Thai respondents, 66.18%.

This can probably be attributed to the way in which the survey instrument was initially distributed. For Irish respondents the survey was sent to friends and former work colleagues of the first author who used to be employed in the telecommunications industry. In Ireland this has traditionally been a male-dominated profession, although this is changing in recent years. One consequence of this is very few women have yet to reach middle- and upper-management grades. However, this is changing, and will continue to change, as more women are entering tertiary level education in general and engineering in particular. Due to the low numbers of total responses received and the small representation of females in the sample, one can surmise that the survey instrument was not circulated much beyond the initial recipients and, therefore, was primarily answered by male telecommunication engineers and managers.

Over 60% of the Thai respondents were female, and this is due to the fact that the initial circulation for the survey was amongst colleagues who worked in a diverse range of business sectors. In addition, many of them passed on the survey to their friends, mostly female, in full-time employment. This was confirmed by follow-up discussions with respondents.

Age. There were also significant differences in the age profile between Irish and Thai respondents. Half of the Thai respondents were between 21-35 years of age, but only 25% of the Irish respondents were in this category. The 36-50 age category accounted for 44% of Thai, versus 66% of Irish, respondents. This disparity may again be explained by

- the age profile of the first author's peer group in Ireland's telecommunication industry;

- the suspected lack of success in circulating the survey instrument beyond the initial target group;

- the significant age spectrum that existed in the researcher's MBA programme class;

- the age profile of the peer group of the MBA programme respondents who participated in the

  survey.

Table 1: Respondents by Age

Age	Thai		Irish		Total	
	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total
21 - 35 years old	34	50.00%	13	24.53%	47	38.84%
36 - 50 years old	30	44.12%	35	66.04%	65	53.72%
over 50 years old	4	5.88%	5	9.43%	9	7.44%

Education. One very noticeable feature of the education profile is that all Thai respondents were qualified to a minimum of Bachelor's degree level and about 46% had attained a Master's degree or above.

In stark contrast 45% of Irish respondents had attained a Bachelor's qualification and only 26% had a Master's degree or above. A further 9.4% had a diploma. Surprisingly, nearly 19% had no qualification beyond a high school education. Without having specific knowledge of the industry background of the respondents it is impossible to draw any kind of conclusion from this statistic, beyond stating that it does seem high given the profile of the population sample.

A discussion with one Thai respondent on this issue prompted them to say that a minimum of a Bachelor's degree qualification was required to secure any kind of decent job, regardless of its specification or responsibilities, in the Thai labour market. This seems to result in academic inflation but, as a result, Thai society places great store on achievement of a tertiary level qualification.

Table 2: Respondents by Education

Education	Thai		Irish		Total	
	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total
High School	0	0.00%	10	18.87%	10	8.26%
Diploma	0	0.00%	5	9.43%	5	4.13%
Bachelor's Degree	37	54.41%	24	45.28%	61	50.41%
Master's Degree or above	31	45.59%	14	26.42%	45	37.19%

Service Years. In this category the results showed similar percentages for Thai and Irish in each of the four categories. The majority of respondents of both nationalities were in the sub-10 year, at over 60%. There were three Irish respondents in the 31-40 year service category and two Thais, accounting for 4% of the total.

Table 3: Respondents by Service Years

Years of Service in Present Employment	Thai		Irish		Total	
	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total
Less than 10 years	45	66.18%	33	62.26%	78	64.46%
11 - 20 years	14	20.59%	11	20.75%	25	20.66%
21 - 30 years	7	10.29%	6	11.32%	13	10.74%
31 - 40 years	2	2.94%	3	5.66%	5	4.13%

The large number of Irish respondents in the sub-10 year category may be accounted for by the economic boom that occurred in that country between 1998 and 2007. Many new technology companies, in particular, were established during that period, the labour market was very vibrant and the economy effectively had full employment. There was much fluidity in the job market for suitably qualified personnel, leading to frequent job changes, increased salaries and accelerated advancement up the managerial ladder. It is interesting to note that, although 66% of total Irish respondents were between 36-50 years old, 62% of total respondents had less than 10 years service in their present companies. One would normally expect

employees in an older age group to change jobs less frequently.

Compare this to the Thai nationality, where a much smaller percentage of total respondents (44%) were between 36-50 years old, but 66% of total respondents had less than 10 years service in their present companies.

If causation could be proven we would expect this trend to be reversed as Ireland is now in the early stages of a prolonged recession and, conversely, Thailand is entering a period of sustained economic prosperity as they prepare to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the ASEAN trade agreement initiating in the coming two years. This environment should facilitate greater fluidity in the job market with consequent rises in salaries and accelerated career development, but there may be socio-cultural aspects that come into play. This topic is worthy of further research.

Occupation Grade. Nearly 65% of Thai respondents were in the 'Staff' occupation grade versus 34% of Irish respondents. This may be explained by the fact that Thais accounted for nearly twice the percentage of Irish respondents in the 21-35 age group, 64.7% and 33.96% respectively. One would normally expect that younger staff would occupy a proportionate amount of junior positions.

Table 4: Respondents by Occupation Grade

Occupation Grade	Thai		Irish		Total	
	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total
Staff	44	64.71%	18	33.96%	62	51.24%
1st Line Management	14	20.59%	11	20.75%	25	20.66%
Mid-level Management	9	13.24%	16	30.19%	25	20.66%
Senior Management	1	1.47%	8	15.09%	9	7.44%

The first-line management grade shows comparable percentages between the two nationalities, 20.59% and 20.75% respectively.

The mid-level management category accounts for 13% of Thais but 30% of Irish respondents. This may be explained by the different age profiles discussed previously, as could the percentages in the senior management categories.

Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested using one-way ANOVA, mean, standard deviation, t-test and F-test. A significance level of 0.05 was selected to determine if a hypothesis was supported by the collected data or not.

Hypothesis 1. Irish employee's organisational commitment (affective, continuance and normative) will be higher if the organisation in which he/she works employs a more inclusive type of change management style.

One-way ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis, with the dependent variable being the degree of organisational commitment (affective, continuance and normative). This resulted in a calculated significance level or p-value = 0.527. As this number is greater than 0.05 it means that there is a 'difference'

but this difference is 'Not Significant', therefore the research hypothesis is not supported. The measured value obtained in the sample is not consistent with that implied in the hypothesis.

This implies that an organisation with a more inclusive type of change management style does not cause an Irish employee's organisational commitment (OC) to be higher. The 'mean' data does show that Irish employees that work in organisations with more inclusive style of change management will have a higher level of organisational commitment, however the difference across the five groups of the Likert scale is such   that this 'difference' is not deemed to be statistically significant. There is a steady rise visible in the mean commitment level until that category of employee who perceives that that change management climate was most inclusive (group 5), where a drop in commitment was recorded.

This is an interesting result – intuitively one would have expected the hypothesis to hold true. Any organisation that actively engages its employees in decision-making, shared leadership and empowerment should engender greater levels of commitment. It is possible the result for group 5 is an anomaly since the number of respondents in this group is quite small and other, more transitory or superficial (for example a negative performance review), factors may be involved that served to reduce overall commitment level at the time of the survey. Maybe a larger sample would provide more conclusive evidence in this regard.

It is interesting to note that no Irish respondents chose Option 1 (Strongly Disagree) for the statements relating to change management style and only one Thai respondent chose this option. The three middle options (Disagree, Neutral and Agree) accounted for 96% of Irish respondents' and 94% of Thai respondents' opinion.

Hypothesis 2. Irish employees with longer company service have a greater degree of continuance commitment.
The dependent variable is the degree of organisational continuance commitment. This resulted in a calculated significance level or p-value = 0.078. As this number is greater than 0.05 it means that the research hypothesis is not supported. The measured value obtained in the sample is not consistent with that implied in the hypothesis.

This implies that, overall, Irish employees with longer company service do not have a greater degree of continuance commitment, i.e. employees will not stay with the organisation just because they feel they have to. Closer examination of the 'mean' data does show that employees with 21-30 years service show an increased level of continuance commitment but this is at odds with reduced level of commitment in the 11-20 years service category. It is interesting that the mean continuance commitment should reduce after the first decade in an organisation increase and then fall off in the 31-40 years service category.

There are so many factors that may play a role in this, such as cultural, societal and economic. As discussed previously the dramatic change in Ireland's economic fortunes, and hence its labour market and work attitudes, over the last 30 years may help explain this. For example, because of the world economic crash in 2008 and its consequences for the Irish economy, those employees with relatively short service who retained their jobs were probably more inclined to feel that they had to stay in their jobs as they provided a degree of financial security. Those with 11-20 years service, having lived through a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity, may have felt that opportunities would always exist for people (like them) of talent and experience. Employees with 21-30 years service would have lived through a period of economic stagnation and mass unemployment so they would place great store on a job, continuance

commitment and the security they provided.   It is difficult to explain the mean in the last service year category with only three respondents. It is possible that employees so close to retirement may have other priorities that impact negatively on their continuance commitment.

Hypothesis 3. Irish employees with higher educational qualifications have a greater degree of affective commitment.

The dependent variable is the degree of organisational affective commitment. This resulted in a calculated significance level or p-value = 0.05. In itself this result is insufficient to prove that the data supports the hypothesis or not. By using Scheffe's Theory (as the samples are of unequal sizes) as a secondary test, the p-values calculated range from 0.085 to 0.973. As these numbers are greater than 0.05, therefore the research hypothesis is not supported. The measured value obtained in the sample is not consistent with that implied in the hypothesis.

This implies that, overall, Irish employees with higher educational qualifications do not have a greater degree of affective commitment, i.e. employees will not stay with the organisation just because they want to continue work there – they could be easily tempted by other offers of higher salaries or better working conditions. This indicates that the social aspect of work, for example *esprit de corps*, workplace friendships and a mutually supportive and comfortable environment, become less important as employees attain higher levels of education. Maybe this is because, with better education, career advancement and managerial aspirations become more important than the social aspect of the workplace. A senior manager interviewed remarked, "I didn't earn an MBA and become a manager to make friends" (John Cusack, personal communications, 17th March 2012).

Additionally, during the boom years in Ireland there were significant shifts in societal priorities and a boom in the middle-class (and the extent of their aspirations). Greater emphasis was placed on attaining higher levels of education and post-graduate degrees as these were seen as the way to corporate respectability and managerial (and therefore financial) success. As a result there was fluid labour market for qualified staff and opportunities for advancement were in abundance. This led to wage inflation and an increased emphasis on financial incentives as the main arbiter of job satisfaction and commitment, with a reduced emphasis on the, heretofore, valued social aspects of work and the workplace.

Hypothesis 4. Thai employee's organisational commitment (affective, continuance and normative) is unaffected by the climate for change applied in his/her company.

The dependent variable is the degree of organisational commitment (affective, continuance and normative). This resulted in a calculated significance level or p-value = 0.92. As this number is greater than 0.05, therefore the research hypothesis is not supported. The measured value obtained in the sample is not consistent with that implied in the hypothesis.

This implies that an organisation with a more inclusive type of change management style does cause a change in Thai employee's organisational commitment (OC). The 'mean' data seems to show that Thai employees that work in organisations with more inclusive style of change management will have a higher level of organisational commitment up to a certain point, however the difference is not deemed to be statistically significant.

What is interesting is that there seems to be a positive correlation between an open change climate and organisational commitment and then a decrease in the level of the latter before it rises again as the

change management climate tends towards the most inclusive. The mean result for category 5 may be an anomaly as a result of the small number of respondents (there were only 3 in this category). A larger sample would probably provide more conclusive evidence in this regard.

In the cases of both Hypotheses 1 and 4 there does seem to be a positive correlation at the lower end of the change management climate scale but the higher end of the scale produced contrary results. In both cases the number of respondents was quite small and therefore may provide false readings.

The intention of Hypothesis 4 was to see if Thai employees were 'immune' to change management climate as a result of inherent cultural mores and the data seems to show that this is not the case. Has this always been the case or is a result of attitudinal shifts in the workplace amongst the younger generation of Thai employees? This is an area ripe for further research.

Another observation is that in both Thailand and Ireland the change management climate is unremarkable, i.e. opinion of the vast majority of both nationalities was that their respective companies' practices were average. This would indicate that there is much room for improvement in the need for perception-shift on the part of senior managers to fully appreciate the value of organisational memory and employee empowerment.

Hypothesis 5. Thai employees with longer company service have a greater degree of normative commitment.

The dependent variable is the degree of organisational normative commitment. This resulted in a calculated significance level or p-value = 0.007. As this number is less than 0.05 it means that there is a 'significant difference', therefore the research hypothesis is supported. The measured value obtained in the sample is consistent with that implied in the hypothesis.

Thai employees with higher educational qualifications have a greater degree of normative commitment. The increase in the value of the 'mean' from the <10 years service group 1 (2.7889) to the 31-40 year service group (3.9167) shows a large increase in normative commitment in the groups with more years of service. However, as commented on previously, with the small number of respondents in the latter group this high 'mean' level could be anomalous – a re-test with a larger sample would probably provide more conclusive evidence in this regard.

This result complies with earlier studies and highlights the importance of loyalty to older employees with long service to one company. This is also probably true in Ireland but there are also specific cultural dimensions to be considered in Thailand. Relationships and hierarchy are fundamentally important concepts in Thai culture and they both take time to build. In Thailand, there are some norms which can be said to exist:

- Thais work hard to build and maintain relationships among   a wide and complex network of people;

- Thais' interactions are more or less controlled within the context of a strong hierarchical system

(Holmes & Tantongtavy, 2000, p. 17).

It would seem logical that to function effectively in an organisation is predicated on one's success in building and developing personal networks throughout the organisation. Once an employee leaves the organisation the network ceases to provide the advantage it once did. In addition older people generally feel more loyalty to their employers, particularly if they have long service.

In more developed Western countries, this sentiment has changed amongst the younger generation as a result of the restructuring of labour markets and increased globalisation over the last twenty years. It will be interesting to see if similar cultural changes occur amongst Thailand's educated younger population in light of the country's flourishing economy and advent of the ASEAN Free Trade Area in 2015.

Hypothesis 6. Thai employees with higher educational qualifications have a greater degree of affective commitment.

The dependent variable is the degree of organisational affective commitment. This resulted in a calculated significance level or p-value = 0.306. As this number is greater than 0.05 it means that the research hypothesis is not supported. The measured value obtained in the sample is not consistent with that implied in the hypothesis.

This indicates that Thai employees with higher educational qualifications do not have a greater degree of affective commitment, i.e. employees will not stay with the organisation just because they want to continue work there – they could be easily tempted by other offers of higher salaries or better working conditions. This indicates that the social aspect of work has become less important. This is an interesting finding, as it seems to be contrary to the value that most Thai's find in workplace relationships. According to Holmes and Tantongtavy (2000, p.76), Thais feel that the ultimate workplace is where he or she feels at home. For most Thais the workplace should have *'gan eng'*, a pleasant and friendly atmosphere.

Another perspective on this issue is that maybe modern day workplaces in Thailand no longer have these attributes due, as in the Irish case (Hypothesis 3), to a burgeoning economy, fluid labour market and a cultural shift (however slight) away from group orientation towards individual self-realisation.

There are an increasing number of Thais who are receiving tertiary, and some receiving secondary and tertiary, education in the US, UK, Australia, and New Zealand over the last 10 – 20 years. This must be having an effect on their career expectations and managerial performance on returning to Thailand. This 'Westernisation' of work attitudes, in conjunction with an increasingly globalised business environment, may have an effect on the traditional social norms of individual and group behaviour.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research project was to investigate if there was a positive correlation between an open and inclusive change management climate and an increased level of organisational commitment from employees. Furthermore, a nationality dimension was added to see if there was any difference in the nature of this relationship between Irish and Thai employees.

The data showed there was a positive correlation between change management style and levels of organisational commitments for both Thais and Irish employees, however at the more inclusive end of the change management scale the survey showed contrary results. The Irish respondents' commitment dropped sharply while the Thais' commitment rose. What caused this?

It may be an error due to the small sample sizes for both nationalities in this category. It would seem that few companies in either country provide truly open and inclusive change management climates. For Hypothesis 1 (Irish) and Hypothesis 4 (Thai) over 90% of all respondents selected statements characterising their change management climate in the 'Disagree', 'Neutral' or 'Agree' categories. This indicates that the majority of organisations are still being driven in a top-down style of management. In light of the fundamental changes in the business environment over the last 15 years it is questionable as to where this style of management in still appropriate for companies as the 21st century lies ahead of them.

In the case of Hypothesis 1 (Irish), it is surprising that there were not more instances of higher ratings for open change management climate. The Irish economic boom of the last 15 years certainly improved salaries, facilitated accelerated career mobility but, on the basis of this research data, has done little to improve the application and practice of advanced management techniques such as empowerment, distributed leadership and the learning organisation. Anecdotal evidence points to an increase in the availability and uptake of post-graduate management studies and yet there seems to be little evidence of the active application of these management theories in the workplaces of those surveyed.

It is possible that it will take time for such practices to 'trickle up', either by the senior management teams being convinced of their merits or by the promotion of the technique practitioners into influential positions such that they are able to implement new policies, change structures and evolve strategy in a direction more congruent with the requirements for business survival and prosperity in the globalised business world.

In the case of Hypothesis 4 (Thai), we found the results were also surprising but for a different reason. Thai cultural traits are generally believed to include risk avoidance, an ingrained respect for hierarchy, non-questioning of the 'normal' way of doing things and a generally conservative outlook. All of which leave employees with little chance to try new ideas or questions old ways. Knowledge of these traits informed the construction of Hypothesis 4. The data did not support this hypothesis – there does seem to be evidence of a positive correlation between the two. Why is this the case as it seems to contradict accepted Thai traits?

It is difficult to provide a definitive answer. Also more detailed enquiries need to be made into the backgrounds of the Thai respondents to determine if the results are related to:

1. age;

2. education received in an international school in Thailand;

3. education in a foreign university (UK, Australia, USA, Canada, India, New Zealand etc.);

4. international work experience;

5. work experience in a Thai-based multinational or multi-domestic company.

Are these changes a result of direct foreign education and/or work experience? Are they locally-driven changes as a result of years of Western teaching methods and textbooks filtered through the prism of local cultural sensibilities and nuances? This is a topic that invites further research. The findings indicate that,

1. practised change management styles show room for improvement in both countries;

2. Thai respondents are open to fuller engagement with inclusive change management styles if given the opportunity;

3. Irish respondents are in a similar position, but it is surprising that inclusive change management styles are not more widespread given the recent period of unprecedented economic growth, labour market development and ubiquity of professional management education.

In the cases of Hypotheses 3 and 6 the findings indicate that personal motivation and the desire for self-realisation might become more important in both Thai and Irish society – the root causes are unknown and would provide another interesting topic for research.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The study was limited by the small sample size, the imbalance in respondents' gender and the non-uniform size of each age category. All of these factors have the potential to provide greater insight into the issues investigated. Attempting to identify the real driver for increased appetite for participation amongst Thai employees, for example, could provide a very interesting topic for further research.

The implication for managers and organisations in both countries is that the appetite for more active participation in change management programmes exists and will be embraced if employees are provided with the appropriate support and structures. However, it is important to note that policies must be taken at senior management level and must be identified and prioritised as strategic goals of the organisation. Deeds must follow words.

The difficulty for many organisations is that there can be a gulf between the inclusive policies espoused by the management and what is actually practiced. The first author worked for a large US multinational for six years. This company invested heavily in corporate training and orientation programmes, but to little effect. From the employees' point of view it just seemed as if there was a new programme every quarter with accompanying inspirational posters and coffee mugs. The employees became cynical of these efforts, as there were no real structural changes to facilitate programme implementation and subsequent monitoring of progress. They became increasingly frustrated as there was a disconnect between what management said and actually did. The moral is that real inclusion must mean more than rhetoric.

Senior management needs to create a coherent overview of the change they are seeking, invest resources into building and maintain the structures required to embed these changes and engage their staff in

a consistent, meaningful and rewarding manner: reward success and tolerate failure. There has to be goal congruence, follow-through and a willingness to amend or scrap change programmes that are judged to be defective or unworkable. Openness, mutual respect and communication are critical to greater openness: clarify expectations, dispel rumours, harness creativity and focus enthusiasm towards realising corporate objectives.

Among the recommendations for organisations and managers are the needs to facilitate job enrichment, empower employees, optimise knowledge management and harness organisational memory. Charles Handy said "trust, like learning, requires unconditional support, and forgiveness for mistakes, provided always that the mistakes are learnt from" (1997, p.190).

Retention of qualified and experienced staff needs to become a strategic goal of the organisation. Only by valuing employees, promoting their self-development, actively seeking their opinions and facilitating them in participating in developing and achieving strategic goals can an organisation hope to maintain competitive edge in the 21st century business world.

Thomas Friedman in his award-winning book, '*The World Is Flat'*, which examined the implications of the globalised world for people and businesses in the 21st century, states that "the great challenge for our time will be to absorb these changes in ways that do not overwhelm people or leave them behind. None of this will be easy...It is inevitable and unavoidable" (2006, p.49).

CONCLUSIONS

Charles Franklin Kettering, inventor and businessman, said "the world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress" (as cited in Bateman and Snell, 2010, p.321).

Too often change is presented in a negative light and, for many employees, experience has taught them to engage with it in a circumspect manner due to the dichotomy between the words and deeds of their company's management with respect to planning and implementing it.

Amongst the findings the data indicates that change management styles in use in both countries show room for improvement. The implication for managers in both countries is that the appetite for more active participation in change management programmes exists and will be embraced if employees are provided with the appropriate support and structures.

Senior management need to create a coherent overview of the change they are seeking and engage their staff in a consistent, meaningful and rewarding manner: reward success and tolerate failure. Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, said "I've learned that mistakes can often be as good a teacher as success" (as cited in Bateman and Snell, 2010, p.313).

Change is unavoidable in the modern business world and needs to be embraced fully and implemented inclusively for all its benefits to be realised. Ricks (2006, p. 194) states that "...all big organisations tend to do what they know how to do, rather than what they need to do differently to address the situation they face." This strategy is no longer commensurate with survival, never mind success, in the globalised world in which we now live. The key to understanding the 'situation' is to engage fully with the people who deal with the daily realities of the business, the employees.

REFERENCES

Ackoff, Russell L. 2006. Why Few Organizations Adopt Systems Thinking. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science. 23, pp. 705–708.* Retrieved 29th May 2012 from: http://ackoffcenter.blogs.com/ackoff_center_weblog/files/Why_few_aopt_ST.pdf

Allen, N. J. and John P. Meyer. 1990. The Measurement and Antecedents of Affective, Continuance, and Normative Commitment to the Organization. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, Vol.63, pp.1-18.

Allen, N. J. and John P. Meyer. 1991. A Three-Component Conceptualization of Organizational Commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 61-89.

Bateman, T. and Scott Snell. 2010. *M: Management, 2ⁿᵈ edition*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Burke, R. J. and Cary L. Cooper, eds. 2009. *The Peak Performing Organisation*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Burke, R. J. and Lisa Fiksenbaum. 2009. *The Peak Performing Organisation – An Overview*. In Burke, R. J. and Cary L. Cooper, eds. *The Peak Performing Organisation*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Conger, J. A. and Rabindra Nath Kanungo. 1988. The Empowerment Process: Integrating Theory and Practice. *Academy of Management Review,* Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 471-482.

Conger, J. A. and Craig L. Pearce. 2003. *A Landscape of Opportunities: Future Research in Shared Leadership.* In C. L. Pearce & J. A. Conger, eds. *Shared Leadership.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Duck, Jeanie D. 2001. *The Change Monster: The Human Forces That Foil Corporate Transformations and Change*. New York, NY: Crown Business.

Eisenberger, R., Robin Huntington, Steven Hutchison and Debora Sowa. 1986. Perceived Organizational Support. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* Vol. 71, No. 3, pp. 500-507.

Frans, Peter. 2010. *Phases in Change Processes*. Trimitra Consultants. Retrieved 1st July 2011 from http://www.trimitra.com/articles/change_02.html

Friedman, Thomas. 2006. *The World is Flat – the Globalised World in the 21ˢᵗ Century*. London: Penguin Books.

Fullan, Michael. 2002. *Principals as Leaders in a Culture of Change.* Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. Retrieved 10ᵗʰ April 2012 from http://www.michaelfullan.ca/Articles_02/03_02.pdf

Haluk, T. 2008. Worker's Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment: Mediator Variable Relationships of Organizational Commitment Factors. *Journal of American Academy of Business*, Vol. 14 (1), pp. 152-163.

Handy, Charles. 1997. *The Hungry Spirit: Beyond Capitalism – A Quest for Purpose in the Modern World.* London: Hutchinson.

Holmes, H. & Suchada Tangtongtavy. 2000. *Working With The Thais: A Guide To Managing In Thailand.* Bangkok: White Lotus Press.

Kanter, R.M. 1979. Power Failure in Management Circuits. *Harvard Business Review 57*, no. 4, pp. 65-75.

Lewin, Kurt. 1947. Frontiers in Group Dynamics: II. Channels of Group Life; Social Planning and Action Research. *Human Relations*, November 1947, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 143-153.

Mahler, J. and Maureen Casamayou. 2009. *Organizational Learning at NASA: The Challenger & Columbia Accidents.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Mowday, R., Richard Steers and Lyman W. Porter. 1979. The Measurement of Organizational Commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 14, pp. 224-247.

Mujtaba, B. G. 2014. *Managerial Skills and Practices for Global Leadership*. ILEAD Academy: Florida.

- Mujtaba, B. G. and Timothy McCartney. 2010. *Managing Workplace Stress and Conflict amid Change, 2nd edition*. ILEAD Academy Publications: Florida.

Porter, L. W., William Crampon and Frank Smith. 1976. Organizational Commitment and Managerial Turnover: A Longitudinal Study. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, Vol. 15, pp. 87-98.

Porter, L.W., Richard Steers, Richard Mowday and Paul Boulian. 1974. Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction and Turnover Among Psychiatric Technicians. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* Vol. 59, pp. 603-609.

Recklies, Oliver. 2001. *Managing Change – Definition and Phases in Change Processes*. Recklies Management Project GmbH. Retrieved 22nd June 2011 from http://www.themanager.org/pdf/Change_Phases.PDF

Ricks, Thomas E. 2006. *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. London: Penguin Books.

Senge, Peter. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline*. London, UK: Random House Business Books.

Vandenberg, R. J. and Charles E. Lance. 1992. Examining the Causal Order of Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment. *Journal of Management,* Vol. 18, pp. 153-167.

Vengel, Alan A. 2000. *The Influence Edge: How to Persuade Others to Help You Achieve Your Goals.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Communications.

Worley, C.G. and Edward E. Lawler. 2006. *Designing Organizations That Are Built to Change.* Center for Effective Organizations (CEO), University of Southern California Marshall School of Business. CEO Publication: G 06-6 (495).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

Mark J. Dunne is a project manager, telecommunications consultant and an MBA graduate from the Institute of International Studies, Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok, Thailand. His areas of business research interests include leadership, change management, motivation, and cross-cultural management. Mark can be reached through e-mail at: mjadunne@yahoo.com

Bahaudin G. Mujtaba is Professor of Management and Human Resources at the Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship; Nova Southeastern University, Florida, U.S.A. Bahaudin has worked as an internal consultant, trainer, and teacher. His areas of research include business ethics, diversity management, change management, and cross-cultural management. Bahaudin can be reached through e-mail at: mujtaba@nova.edu

This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:
http://www.iiste.org

CALL FOR PAPERS

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. There's no deadline for submission. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:** http://www.iiste.org/Journals/

The IISTE editorial team promises to the review and publish all the qualified submissions in a **fast** manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digtial Library , NewJour, Google Scholar