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Principals' Change Leadership Competencies: A Study in Malaysian High Performing Secondary School

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Abstract
The purpose of the study was to examine teachers' perception regarding Principals' Change Leadership Competencies (PCLC) in managing change. A total of 936 teachers from 47 High Performing Secondary School (HPSS) in Malaysia completed the survey. The findings revealed that i) principals in HPSS possess adequate PCLC; ii) although PCLC was reported higher in rural rather than urban area, it was not reliably related to location of school; iii) principals in Fully Residential Secondary School achieved the highest PCLC, followed by principals in Daily Secondary School and Religious Secondary School; iv) PCLC was reliably related to the type of HPSS; v) principals achieved the highest mean score of PCLC in Goal Framing domain but the lowest score in Defusing Resistance and Conflict domain regardless of school location and type of HPSS; vi) principals of HPSS were not competent in the domain of Defusing Resistance and Conflict; vii) principals of Religious Secondary School were not competent both in Defusing Resistance and Conflict and Capacity Building domain; viii) in terms of four domains, except Defusing Resistance and Conflict, PCLC was not reliably related to location of school; and ix) in terms of four domains, PCLC was reliably related to the type of HPSS. The study offers relevant parties a lens through which they could better understand, prepare for, and enhance principals' capacity for change. Specifically, it provides direction for practitioners as useful feedback in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating future change management training programs for principals to best lead change in schools.
Keywords: Principals' Change Leadership Competencies, High Performing Secondary Schools, Goal Framing, Capacity Building, Defusing Resistance and Conflict, Institutionalizing

1. Introduction

In light of globalization, today, educational reform has become a top priority for many countries. Schools, as the core of education, thus are subject to inescapable internal and external change pressures (Fink, 2003; Fullan, 2007; Goodson, 2001; Hallinger, 2004; Harris, 2006). However, although schools are faced with the need for continued reforms to improve student achievement, most education reforms have not been completely successful at any place in the world (Levin, 2001, May; Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). One of the reasons is the absence of leadership for the change (Drucker, 1999; Fullan, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2001; Pettigrew, Woodman & Cameron, 2001).

Indeed, research on education has found that the future effectiveness of all schools depends on the ability of school leaders managing change (Fullan, 2001; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996). There is also increasing awareness that effective change does not occur in educational organizations unless the school principals initiate the change process competently (Clarke, 2000; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Lakomski, 2001; Oplatka, 2003).Clearly, there is a dire need for effective change leadership in school systems as school change can occur when guided by leadership (Fullan, 2001; Hallinger, 2004; Harris, 2004; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, Wahlstrom, 2004).

Nevertheless, the task of leading and executing change effectively requires a multi-dimensional set of competencies. Marcus and Pringle (1995) highlighted competencies as one of the three critical keys to successful change (the other two being commitment and capability). Successful leaders of change are those ensure that competencies are put in place to involve and transform organizational individuals through the different stages of change (Tizard, 2001). As instructional leaders, school principals are responsible for change strategy, implementation, and monitoring in any change and thus, they need to possess specific change leadership competency (Hyland, 2007).

In the year of 2009, Institute Aminuddin Baki, National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership, Ministry of Education Malaysia had conducted a need analysis study to identify competencies to be improved by school principals in school management. The results of the study showed that among the eight high impact competencies identified by school principals, managing change is the most needed competency ($\underline{M}$=3.85) (Rosnarizah, Amin & Abdul Razak, 2009). Obviously, it is imperative to help equip school principals with

effective change leadership competency. However, although school principals who were in the position to implement change addressed their awkward predicament, yet, this need was not being effectively responded to by the field of education leadership.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian education system has come under increased public scrutiny and debate regarding its ability to adequately prepare young Malaysians for the needs of the 21st century (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Consequently, Malaysia Education Blueprint that suggests eleven strategic and operation shifts for the enhancement of the education system over a span of thirteen years was launched in September 2013. In other words, the Malaysian education system is entering an intensive period of change. However, the task of executing change effectively requires a multi-dimensional set of competencies. Unless the school leaders, especially principals are equipped with subsequent competencies and initiate the process competently, school reform will ultimately fall short of the ambitious aspirations set out in the Blueprint.

In relation to this, the objective of the present study was to examine the patterns of Principals' Change Leadership Competencies (PCLC) of High Performing Secondary School (HPSS) which included: a) the level of PCLC in HPSS; b) whether PCLC was reliably related to location of school; c) whether PCLC was reliably related to the different type of HPSS; d) the most and least competent domains of PCLC by principals of HPSS; e) the level of PCLC in terms of school type; f) whether PCLC was reliably related to location of school in terms of four domains of PCLC; g) whether PCLC was reliably related to the different type of HPSS in terms of four domains of PCLC.

2. Change Leadership and Competency

No matter 'old paradigm' or 'new paradigm' models, most definitions about leadership have a common theme of mobilizing and directing others towards goal setting and goal achievement. As leadership is defined as setting a direction and developing the strategies necessary to move in that direction, that is, creating and achieving a vision, leadership thus is a process to do with change (Kotter, 1999). Arguing a similar point, Cairns (2000) pointed out that as leaders challenge the *status quo* and hence, leadership is change focus. Elliott (1992) stressed that without change no leadership had occurred. Addressing this point, Yukl (2002) refers leading change is the fundamental role of a leader and everything else is secondary. Likewise, Kellerman and Webster (2001) defined "leader" as one who creates or strives to create change, large or small. In turn, they considered leadership as a process – a dynamic process in which the leader(s) and followers interact in such a way as to generate change.

Obviously, leadership is not a static endeavor but an evolving construct which demands fluidity (Myatt, 2010). It requires the wisdom to recognize the need for change, and finally the ability to lead change. In relation to this, inducing change, getting others to change and upholding change are at the essence of leadership (Smit, 2003). In other words, as leadership needs to be understood in a change context, to achieve successful outcome, undoubtedly, leaders certainly should possess specific change leadership competency (Hyland, 2007; Tizard, 2001).

Indeed, leadership is often discussed in term of competencies (Bueno & Tubbs, 2005; Boyatsis, 1982). According to Cairns (2000), leadership competencies are viewed as a collection of competencies ready to be used when necessary. Competency theory thus is 'based on studying successful leaders, breaking down their behaviors, attitudes and skills into measurable bits and then putting them together to form beings demonstrating superior performance' (Boak & Coolican, 2001; Cairns, 2000). Importantly, viewing leadership in terms of competency implied that leadership can be taught and learned (Intagliata, Ulrich, & Smallwood, 2000). Simply put, many people can become better leaders, by gaining new knowledge, skills and ability that will make them better leaders (Tubbs & Schulz, 2006).

3. Principals' Change Leadership Competencies

In line with the discussion above, PCLC, in this study, was viewed as knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviours that demonstrate excellent performance (Bonder, 2003; Crawford, 2003; Duffy, 2009; Letsinger, 1998; Mirabile, 1997; Nadler, 1990; Smit, 2003), required for a principal in influencing teachers to work toward the achievement of the change goal. As school principals need to initiate, implement, evaluate and sustain the change, they are at the centre of the change processes, align and exhibit change leadership competencies to turn vision into reality. Clearly, PCLC are manifested in actions, structures and processes that enhance or impede change, which in turn strengthens the linkage between principals' behaviors and effectiveness in impeding change.

Successful school principals must ensure that their competencies are put in place to involve and transform teachers to work through the change process. Levin (2001, May) spotlighted the importance of school principals need to possess competencies to demonstrate change in his study. Kursunoglu and Tanriogen (2009) also made the same point in their study that principals must have necessary skills to implement successful school change. In short, school principals as change agent need a substantial repertoire of competencies to draw on to best lead

change in school as PCLC is one of the important components of leadership effectiveness in leading school change.

In the year 2013, Tai (2013) developed Principals' Change Leadership Competency Model to identify PCLC which facilitate change in Malaysian secondary schools. Four domains of competencies were identified based on four phases of change namely, a) *Goal Framing*; b) *Capacity Building*; C) *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*; and d) *Institutionalizing* (Table 1). The first phase of the change – *Goal Framing*, emphasizes the importance of constructing a goal to direct the change effort before attempting any change. *Goal Framing* identifies direction and purpose of the change and is the first step in strategic planning of any school change. A clear and well-formulated change goal gives all teachers the feeling that the school is carrying out a meaningful task. Hence, a change goal brings meaning to teachers' work and mobilizes them to action. It guides the behavior of all teachers and helps set goals to advance the school.

The associated significant competency for *Goal Framing* was 'Setting a clear change goal' which includes i) Developing an attainable goal for the school; ii) Presenting the rationale of need for change; and iii) Having a clear direction of how to achieve the goal (Tai, 2013) (Table 1). In order to develop an attainable goal for the school, school principal needs to review the present state and identify future state based on the needs of the school and its change readiness and deciding what that change should be. Hayes (2010) termed this as 'Diagnosis' as it is concerned with identifying what it is that needs to be changed and needs to be achieved. Once the change goal is created, it will become a driving force that can compel the change implementers – the teachers to do something, change something. It is this drive that can transform a school into a better place for teaching and learning.

'Presenting the rationale of need for change' is another important competency of *Goal Framing*. Hayes (2010) as well as Nilakant and Ramanarayan (2006) made a similar point that leaders should have the competency to initiate dialogue to direct the need for change, make followers understand the consequences of changing and not changing. And, once a vision is created, it must be communicated and articulated effectively so that it becomes the *shared* vision of everyone in the organization. Likewise, Kotter (1999) also emphasized that leaders should provide evidence that change is necessary for the organization and thus creating a 'burning platform' is one way of generating the sense of urgency. As no follower will give heart and soul to any change unless he or she understands why the change is necessary and what benefit it promises – personally and organizationally (Anderson & Anderson, 2001). Kotter (1999) suggested that leaders should able to use every possible means to communicating the new vision to create full understanding.

'Having a clear direction of how to achieve the goal' also an important competency of *Goal Framing*. Starting a change without clear and specific directions and a prepared plan of action will waste time and effort. When everyone has clear guidance, they feel valued and don't end up frustrated or even resist the change. Lewin (1958) and Nilakant and Ramanarayan (2006) pointed that, at this stage, alternatives should be identified and a proposed course of action should be selected which including some old ways of doing things to be discarded, mobilizing resources, building networks, and planning structures to turn change goal into reality. This competency is essential as it enables school principal to gain insight how to map the school's systems dynamics that is relevant to the change and where the leverage points are for producing that change.

Table 1. The Principals' Change Leadership Competency Scale

	Domain	Associated Competencies
1.	Goal Framing	**Setting A Clear Change Goal** a. Developing an attainable goal for the school b. Presenting the rationale of need for change c. Having a clear direction of how to achieve the goal
2.	Capacity Building	**Building Competence to Meet Change Requirements** a. Seeking ways to develop staff's competencies in teaching and learning b. Providing training in coaching among the staff c. Ensuring staff are able to perform the new task
3.	Defusing Resistance and Conflict	**Mitigating Resistance and Conflict** a. Anticipating the resistance behavior that threatens the change efforts b. Making individuals who resist change feel confident c. Managing change conflict effectively by seeking an agreement from every party
4.	Institutionalizing	**Evaluation for Continuous Improvement and Institutionalizing** a. Analyzing objectively the final change outcomes b. Creating opportunities for sharing best practices among the departments c. Ensuring staff members continuing contribute to changes that were made

Next, *Capacity Building* was the second phase of the school change process (Tai, 2013) (Table 1). Nilakant and Ramanarayan (2006) and Hayes (2010) spotlight the importance of capacity building whereby it promotes organizational learning, training and development. Lewin (1958) also revealed that leaders should prepare the followers to change. In fact, a deficiency in organization's capacity may slow down the change, especially if the deficiency is widely shared. Hence, capacity building is any set of actions that a leader should take to improve the organization's ability and readiness to succeed in the change.

'Building competence to meet change requirements' was found as significant competency of *Building Capacity* which includes i) Seeking ways to develop staff's competencies in teaching and learning; ii) Providing training in coaching among the staff; and iii) Ensuring staff are able to perform the new task' (Tai, 2013) (Table 1). All too often, one of the most tragic mistakes made in leading change is to impose it on an organization that is not ready and able to perform the new task (Kotter, 1999). Thus, school principal needs to examine the readiness and capacity of the teachers to do what is required to change. Based on the results of the readiness and capacity assessment, plans to establish teachers' capacity should be created which includes staff development programs especially regarding teaching and learning so to ensure that teachers are able to perform the new task competently.

Besides, as instructional leader, school principal is not only able to coach teachers in terms of teaching and learning pedagogy as well as classroom management, he or she also needs to find ways to provide training and professional development to enable teachers to be capable in peer coaching among themselves to meet change requirements. All these initiatives ultimately will enhance teachers' efficacy which can make the change successful.

Next, the third phase of change was 'Defusing Resistance and Conflict' (Tai, 2013) (Table 1). As we know, the heart of managing change is managing people. Thus, the competence of '*Defusing Resistance and Conflict*' is critical to turn change goal into reality. Indeed according to Deloitte and Touche (1996), resistance to change is the number one reason why organization change initiatives fail. Lewin (1958) had pointed out that there are two opposing sets of forces within any social system, the driving forces that promote change and the resisting forces that maintain the status quo. Removing or mitigating resisting forces often can be more effective in unfreezing an organization instead of increasing driving forces for change. Teachers, as the most important change agents in

school reform, if refuse to buy-in any school change, undoubtedly, will be the resisting force in the change process. Hence, school principals need to equip themselves with concerned competency so as to diffuse these resisting forces effectively.

The associated significant competency for *Defusing resistance and conflict* was 'Mitigating Resistance and Conflict' which includes i) Anticipating the resistance behavior that threatens the change efforts; ii) Making individuals who resist change feel confident; and iii) Managing change conflict effectively by seeking an agreement from every party (Tai, 2013) (Table 1). In order to make school change to be successful, school principal needs to understand the key reasons for resistance and competent to anticipate the behaviors for and against change. He or she needs to identify the resistance behaviors, especially who the supporters are, who needs to be influenced and who the main resistors are. In this way, school principal can plan strategically for overcoming resistance. However, if school principal fail to do so, it will generate negative emotions such as anger, resent, frustration, anxiety, stresses or fear that Lines (2005), Martin, Jones, & Callan (2006), Oreg (2006) and Piderit (2000) concluded in their studies, respectively.

Thus, it is important that school principal is able to perform the competency of making teachers who resist change feel confident for example, creating meaningful dialogue that gives teachers a stake in the change, negotiating the need for change with teachers who resist change, and helping teachers through their emotional reaction to change. Despite resistance to change, conflict might exist among teachers in the process of change which will jeopardize change initiatives and change outcomes. Managing change conflict effectively by seeking an agreement from every party is vital so that everyone can pull in the same direction to make change happens.

Institutionalizing was the fourth phase of the school change process (Tai, 2013) (Table 1). Lewin (1958), Kotter (1999), Nilakant and Ramanarayan (2006) as well as Hayes (2010) had stressed the importance of sustaining the achievements of the change or made the change sticks, otherwise the benefits will be lost as the organization slips back into the old ways of working. The associated significant competency for *Institutionalizing* was 'Evaluation for Continuous Improvement and Institutionalizing which includes competencies of i) Analyzing objectively the final change outcomes; ii) Creating opportunities for sharing best practices among the departments; and iii) Ensuring staff members continually contribute to changes that were made (Tai, 2013) (Table 1).

Without dispute, attention needs to be given by school principal to consolidate a change and hold on to gains. First, school principal needs to analyze objectively the final change outcomes so as to assess whether the change are being implemented as intended, whether the implemented change are having the desired effects, whether the change plan continue to be valid and what are the limitations of the change outcomes. Relevant, objective and focused analysis and feedback can help to keep teachers' efforts directed to those things that are really making a difference and thus is effective in helping to sustain the achievements of the change (Hayes, 2010).

Second, school principal also needs to create opportunities for sharing best practices among the departments so that the new ways of working and improved outcomes become the norm of the whole organization while the thinking and attitudes behind them are eventually altered (Tai, 2013). This task focuses on identifying and sharing an array of best practices which includes strategies, skills, knowledge, mindsets, behaviors, tools as well as techniques. It allows teachers to settle in, learn about, and ultimately master the new way of working and relating and practise it continuously.

Thirdly, as change all too often is short-lived (Kotter, 1999; Lewin, 1958), to ensure teachers continues to contribute to changes that were made is another important task of the school principal. In fact once the change had been successfully implemented, process of promoting maintenance of standards and continuous improvement must be carried out to ensure ongoing success. Building a mechanism to refine and continuously improve the new state is one of the effective ways. Celebrate and reward the achievement is another way which allows teachers to enjoy the fruits of their hard work and is an opportunity for them to reinforce the new culture further and continuously contribute to changes that were made (Tai, 2013).

4. Methodology

4.1 Population

The ideal population in the study was defined as all secondary school teachers in Malaysia (N= 177,388). The study population comprised 13,900 HPSS teachers in Malaysia. HPSS and the concerned teachers were the sites and study population chosen for the study. The standard used in choosing sites and respondents was based on the reason that they are "information rich" and of central importance to the purpose of the study (Patton, 2002). As planned change are intentional acts designed to disrupt the status quo and move the organization towards a more

effective state (Hayes, 2010), the probability of principals in HPSS usually lead changes more often compared with principals in mediocre or low performing schools. Also, to ensure the validity of the information, only HPSS with school principal who held the post in the concerned school at least one year was chosen for the survey and only teachers who had taught at least one year in the concerned school were identified as respondents.

4.2 Sampling Procedure

Multiple-staged stratified random sampling procedure was used in this study because of its highly recommended efficiency and accuracy (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). There were three subgroups or strata in the study population namely, Daily Secondary School (DSS), Fully Residential School (FRSS), and Religious Secondary School (RSS). Among 186 HPSS in Malaysia, there were 80 DSS, 60 FRSS, and 46 RSS (Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2010). To ensure schools in each stratum proportionate to the total number of schools in the respective stratum of the total population, a proportionate stratification procedure was the right choice to stratify the concerned schools. The researcher decided to have a total of 25 percent of each stratum of the population, and as a result 20 DSS, 15 FRSS, and 12 RSS or a total of 47 HPSS were selected randomly for the survey as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Total number of HPSS involved in final survey

Type of School	Number of School	No of School Chosen for Survey
Daily Secondary School (DSS)	80	20
Fully Residential Secondary School (FRSS)	60	15
Religious Secondary School (RSS)	46	12
Total	186	47

Based on this, next, proportionate stratification procedure was applied again to stratify the HPSS in each state respectively as shown in Table 3. This sampling technique gives all the three strata in each state equal chances of being selected and the probability of a stratum being selected is proportional to the size of the ultimate segment of the total population and thus, increases representativeness. With 47 schools were identified for the study, 20 respondents or teachers from each school were chosen as sample by using simple sampling method. As a result, 400 teachers were selected for DSS, 300 for FRSS, and 240 for RSS. All in all, a total number of 940 respondents were identified for the survey and the number of respondents for each stratum was shown in Table 3

Table 3. Total number of school and respondent involved in the survey for each state based on proportional stratification

State	Daily Secondary School			Fully Residential Secondary School			Religious Secondary School			Total		
	ANS	NSS	NR	ANS	NSS	NR	ANS	NSS	NR	ANS	NSS	NR
Pahang	11	3	60	6	2	40	2	0	0	19	5	100
Johor	15	4	80	6	1	20	4	1	20	25	6	120
Selangor	9	2	40	6	1	20	8	2	40	23	5	100
Penang	9	2	40	2	1	20	3	1	20	14	4	80
Sarawak	0	0	0	4	1	20	0	0	0	4	1	20
Kelantan	5	1	20	5	1	20	6	2	40	16	4	80
N.Sembilan	3	1	20	5	1	20	3	1	20	11	3	60
Perak	6	1	20	6	2	40	3	1	20	15	4	80
Kedah	7	2	40	6	1	20	4	1	20	17	4	80
Sabah	0	0	0	2	1	20	0	0	0	2	1	20
Perlis	2	1	20	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	1	20
K.Lumpur	6	1	20	5	1	20	1	0	0	12	2	40
Melaka	2	1	20	2	1	20	1	0	0	5	2	40
Trengganu	5	1	20	4	1	20	10	3	60	19	5	100
Total	80	20	400	60	15	300	46	12	240	186	47	940

Note. ANS=Actual number of school; NSS=Number of school for survey; NR=Number of respondent

4.3 Survey Instrument

PCLC is measured using Principals' Change Leadership Competency Scale (PCLCS) which was developed by Tai (2013). As shown in Table 1, it consists of four main domains namely: (a) *Goal Framing*; (b) *Capacity Building*; (c) *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*; and (d) *Institutionalizing* with the composite reliability of .76, .76, .74 and .74, respectively. It constituted 12 items and all the items satisfied the cut off value of .70, ranging from .80 to .90. Moreover, the Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC) all was above the recommended acceptance level, 0.5 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2006; Holmes-Smith, 2001), and the Averaged Extracted Value (AVE) all surpassed 50% (Fornell & Larker, 1981) and thus provided evidence for convergent validity. Besides, PCLCS also hold discriminant validity since AVE of the factors was greater than 0.50 and Composite Reliability Index was greater than 0.70 (Tai, 2013).

4.4 Questionnaire Design and Survey Administration

The main content of the questionnaire consisted of two major parts (Part I and Part II). Part I contained demographic information such as gender, age, years in present school, type of school and location of school. Part II consisted of scale items for PCLC. The instrument was a six-point Likert scale. Respondents were asked to rank their responses from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Scoring was accomplished by assigning 1 to "strongly disagree", 2 to "disagree", 3 to "moderately disagree", 4 to "moderately agree", 5 to "agree", and 6 to "strongly agree".

Two ways of survey administration were engaged in this study. First, the researcher made arrangement to visit those selected HPSS on convenient basis especially those nearby schools. A session on answering questionnaire together with the respondents was conducted in the concerned schools at a convenient hour arranged by the principals. The researcher collected the questionnaires after the session was over. Second, for those HPSS which were far away from researcher's working place, questionnaires had been sent by post to the concerned schools. All in all, the data collection was completed in about two months.

4.5 Data Analysis

Out of 940 sets of questionnaires sent out by post, a total of 938 sets were returned, with a response rate of 99.78%. The high response rate might be due to a) effective monitoring of questionnaire administration especially during the grace period the researcher contacted personally at least two times via phone call to those schools which still did not respond; b) all respondents were from HPSS which were expected to have good school management including conducting survey as requested by researchers. Two sets of questionnaires had more than 25% obvious errors and illegible responses and were thus excluded from further analysis (Sekaran, 2000). Finally, a total of 936 sets of questionnaires were retained for the final analysis. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed in this study whereby data was computed to obtain scores, means and standard deviations. Besides, inferential statistical analysis was adopted too in this study.

5. Demographic Characteristics

The results shown in Table 4 indicated differences in demographics of the respondents. The analysis of the final sample profile showed a higher number of female (N=705) respondents than male (N=231), representing a ratio of 75.3% and 24.7%, respectively. For respondents' age group, the analysis showed that respondents aged between 41 to 50 years (N=337, 36%) was the largest group. This was followed by the age group of 31 to 40 years (N=319, 34.1%), 21 to 30 years (N=157, 16.8%) and 51 to 60 years (N=122, 13%) was the smallest group.

Next, regarding respondents' years with present school, majority of the respondents comprised those working ranging between 1 to 5 years (N=338, 36.1%). Respondents who were attached to the present school ranging between 6 to 10 years (N=266, 28.4%) were next most frequent. This was followed by those working between 11 to 15 years (N=185, 19.8%) and 16 to 20 years (N=90, 9.6%). Furthermore, respondents who work in the present school more than 20 years were the smallest number (N=57, 6.1%). Demographic details of the respondents also showed that approximately half of the respondents were from DSS (N=456, 48.7%). About 27.9% (N=261) and 23.4% (N=219) were from FRS and RSS, respectively. On top of this, 71.6% (N=670) of them were from urban school whereas a further 28.4% (N=266) were from rural school.

Table 4. Demographic characteristics of the respondent

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Per cent (%)
Gender	Male	231	24.7
	Female	705	75.3
Age	21-30	157	16.8
	31-40	319	34.1
	41-50	337	36.0
	51-60	122	13.0
Years in Present School	1-5	338	36.1
	6-10	266	28.4
	11-15	185	19.8
	16-20	90	9.6
	>20	57`	6.1
Type of School	Daily Secondary School	456	48.7
	Fully Residential Secondary School	261	27.9
	Religious Secondary School	219	23.4
Location of School	Urban	670	71.6
	Rural Area	266	28.4

6. Results

As shown in Table 5, the mean score of PCLC for school principals in HPSS was 4.66 (SD=.70). It was slightly higher than the threshold of 4.5 that principals are considered as competent in managing change in schools. The threshold of 4.5 was adopted by taking 75% of the Likert Scale of 6 (75/100 x 6=4.5).

Next, as depicted in Table 5 too, although the level of PCLC of principals in rural area (M=4.72) was reported higher than principals in urban area (M=4.63), the difference was small and not significant. The result of *t*-test, t(934)=-1.870, p>.05 in Table 5, affirmed that there was no significant relationship between PCLC and location of school. Simply, principals in rural and urban area did not differ in their PCLC.

Table 5. Means and *t*-Test of PCLC for principals of HPSS in rural and urban area

Type of School	n	M	SD	M	SD	t	p
High Performing Secondary School	936	4.66	.70				
High Performing Secondary School in rural area	266			4.72	.70	-1.870	.062
High Performing Secondary School in urban area	670			4.63	.70		

Table 6 shows the means and standard deviations of PCLC among principals of different type of HPSS. The mean scores ranged from 4.51 to 4.75. Principals in FRSS achieved the highest mean of 4.75 (SD=.71) while principals in RSS achieved the lowest mean score of 4.51 (SD=.74). Principals in DSS had a mean of 4.67 (SD=.66). Obviously, there were apparent differences in the mean scores among principals in three types of HPSS. The result of F-test in Table 7 again affirmed that the differences between the groups were statistically significant, F(2,933)=7.054, p<.05, MSE=.481. This meant that principals of different type of HPSS differ in their PCLC. In other words, PCLC was reliably related to the type of HPSS.

Table 6. Means and standard deviation of PCLC among principals according to type of HPSS

Type of HPSS	n	M	SD
Daily Secondary School (DSS)	456	4.67	.66
Fully Residential School (FRSS)	261	4.75	.71
Religious Secondary School (RSS)	219	4.51	.74

Table 7. One-way ANOVA of PCLC among principals of different type of HPSS

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between Groups	6.791	2	3.395	7.054	0.001
Within Groups	449.076	934	.481		
Total	455.867	936			

Table 8. Means of PCLC based on domains according to type of school

Type of School	Goal Framing	Capacity Building	Defusing Resistance & Conflict	Institutionalizing
High Performing Secondary School	4.99	4.54	4.39	4.70
High Performing Secondary School in rural area	5.04	4.60	4.48	4.77
High Performing Secondary School in urban area	4.97	4.52	4.35	4.68
Fully Residential Secondary School	5.12	4.65	4.44	4.78
Daily Secondary School	4.97	4.58	4.42	4.72
Religious Secondary School	4.89	4.34	4.25	4.57

Table 8 shows the mean scores of PCLC among principals of HPSS in four domain of PCLC, i.e. *Goal Framing*, *Capacity Building*, *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*, and *Institutionalizing*. Basically, principals of HPSS achieved the highest mean score of PCLC in the domain of *Goal Framing* i.e. 4.99 and the lowest mean score, 4.39, in the domain of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*.

Besides, obviously, all principals of HPSS were not competent in managing change in the domain of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* as the mean scores were below the threshold of 4.5 (Table 8). Among these, RSS achieved the lowest mean of 4.25. Indeed, principals in RSS were not competent in the domain of *Capacity Building* as well, with the mean of 4.34 which was lower than the cut off value of 4.5 (Table 8).

Analyzed according to four domains of PCLC, as a whole, principals of HPSS in rural area reported a slightly higher PCLC than those in urban area (Table 8). However, the result of *t*-test for the domain of Goal Framing, $t(934) = -1.287$, $p > .05$, Capacity Building, $t(934) = -1.364$, $p > .05$, and Institutionalizing, $t(934) = -1.779$, $p > .05$ as shown in Table 9, showed that the difference was small and insignificant. This implied that in terms of *Goal Framing*, *Capacity Building*, and *Institutionalizing*, PCLC was not reliably related to location of HPSS. Nevertheless, for the domain of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*, with the *t*-test result, $t(934) = -2.109$, $p < .05$ (Table 9), indicated that there was a significant relationship with the location of HPSS. This means that, in terms of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*, PCLC was reliably related to location of HPSS.

Table 9. *t*-Test on four domains of PCLC for Principals of HPSS in rural and urban area

Domain	Group	n	M	SD	t	p
Goal Framing	HPSS in Rural Area	266	5.04	.72		
					-1.287	.198
	HPSS in Urban Area	670	4.97	.76		
Capacity Building	HPSS in Rural Area	266	4.60	.80		
					-1.364	.173
	HPSS in Urban Area	670	4.52	.80		
Defusing Resistance & Conflict	HPSS in Rural Area	266	4.48	.85		
					-2.109	.035
	HPSS in Urban Area	670	4.35	.86		
Institutionalizing	HPSS in Rural Area	266	4.77	.74		
					-1.779	.076
	HPSS in Urban Area	670	4.68	.76		

As shown in Table 8, in terms of four domains of PCLC for DSS, FRSS and RSS, the mean scores ranged from 4.25 to 5.12. Obviously, there were apparent differences in the mean scores of PCLC among the three different types of HPSS. The result of F-test in Table 10 again affirmed that the differences between the groups were

statistically significant, for *Goal Framing*, F(2, 933)= 5.884, p<.05, MSE=.561; *Capacity Building*, F(2, 933)= 9.814, p<.05, MSE=.634; *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*, F(2, 933)= 3.902, p<.05, MSE=.732; *Institutionalizing*, F(2, 933)= 4.738, p<.05, MSE=.569. This meant that principals of three different HPSS did differ in their PCLC in terms of four domains of PCLC, respectively.

Table 10. One-way ANOVA of four domains of PCLC among principals of different type of HPSS

Domain	Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	p
Goal Framing	Between Groups	6.602	2	3.301	5.884	.003
	Within Groups	523.435	933	.561		
	Total	530.037	935			
Capacity Building	Between Groups	12.436	2	6.218	9.814	.000
	Within Groups	591.131	933	.634		
	Total	603.566	935			
Defusing Resistance & Conflict	Between Groups	5.712	2	2.856	3.902	.021
	Within Groups	682.792	933	.732		
	Total	688.504	935			
Institutionalizing	Between Groups	5.396	2	2.698	4.738	.009
	Within Groups	531.234	933	.569		
	Total	536.630	935			

7. Discussion

The results of this study have made several noteworthy findings about PCLC in Malaysian HPSS. First, principals in HPSS possess adequate PCLC (4.66) although it was reported slightly higher than the threshold of 4.50 that principals are considered as competent in managing school change. This means that, as a whole, principals in HPSS who were in the position to implement change in schools were equipped with subsequent competencies and initiate the process competently. One possible reason, which substantially contributes to the situation is the fact that, as Malaysian education system is entering an intensive period of change, in order to ensure school reform will not fall short of the ambitious aspiration set out in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2015 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013), concerted efforts have been given to prioritize the continuous development of PCLC in the area of effective change management by relevant parties. This was to help equip school principals with effective PCLC as it is one of the important components of leadership effectiveness in leading change in schools (Tai, 2013). Indeed, ensuring every school will have a high-performing principal based on the demonstration of leadership competencies is one of the eleven operation shifts suggested in the concerned Blueprint (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

Second, though PCLC was reported higher in rural rather than urban area, it was not reliably related to location of school. This implied that location of school, the geographical factor, would not affect the actual level of PCLC in HPSS. Possibly, as competent school principals engage their PCLC and translate these into explicit behaviours to influence change initiatives positively, thus, as long as school principals themselves are equipped with adequate and sufficient PCLC which are required for them to gain the support of the teachers to work through the change process and turn change goals into reality, they can lead change in any school regardless of the location. This reason is congruent with the understanding of self-processes in social psychology, rather than geographical factor, whereby human action is heavily mediated through self-influence, which operates as important proximal determinants at the central of causal processes (Bandura, 1993).

Third, it was interesting to note that principals in FRSS achieved the highest PCLC, followed by principals in DSS and RSS. Obviously, PCLC was reliably related to the type of HPSS. The crux of the situation seems lay in the fact that different organizational culture of FRSS, DSS and RSS shapes different leadership which drive performance accordingly. Generally, without dispute, leadership helps shape organizational culture. However, over time, leaders in organizations respond to the organizational culture and alter their behaviors to meet the needs and requirements of organizational contingencies. Consequently, organizational culture which composed of shared values, beliefs, and societal norms (Tsai, 2011), in turn, shapes leadership. Clearly, all leadership contexts are distinct due to the fact that it differs substantially by organizational culture. In line with this, variations across organizational culture thus can be viewed as one of the important factors which determine how

leaders will lead in a given context. As leaders should possess specific competencies to achieve successful outcome in leading organizational change, when comes to competency, certainly organizational culture matters.

Along this line, although DSS, FRSS and RSS all are HPSS, differences are observed in terms of its organizational culture. Compared to DSS and RSS, the main aim of FRSS is to increase the opportunities for indigenous students to receive quality education as preparation for higher education to fulfill national needs (Tai, 2013). It therefore provides students with better education resources, complete and updated facilities which are conducive to healthy school culture. Meanwhile, DSS is the most popular type of secondary school in Malaysia whereby the admissions are not selective as FRSS. As a whole, it contributes 85% of the secondary schools in Malaysia. RSS, on the other hand, employs an overly Islamic-based curriculum which is totally different from FRSS and DSS (Tai, 2013). Clearly, the mission of DSS, FRSS and RSS are not the same. In relation to this, the expectations toward the leaders, what leaders should and should not do, which leadership competencies are most likely to produce favourable outcomes, and the status and influence bestowed on leaders vary considerably as a result of the cultural forces in the organizations in which the leaders function (DeGrosky, 2009). Thus, it was not surprised that PCLC was reliably related to the different type of HPSS.

Fourth, analyzing based on four domains of PCLC, i.e. *Goal Framing*, *Capacity Building*, *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*, and *Institutionalizing*, principals of HPSS achieved the highest mean score of PCLC in *Goal Framing* domain. This phenomenon was the same at all HPSS in rural as well as in urban area. While the findings demonstrated that principals in HPSS were most competent in *Goal Framing* domain, this meant that they were most competent in constructing change goal which provides focus for attention and action to direct the change efforts. In other words, as instructional leaders, principals of HPSS were competent in three associated significant competencies for *Goal Framing*, i.e. to develop an attainable goal for the school, presenting the rationale of need for change and have a clear direction of how to achieve the goal (Table 1). As mentioned earlier, goal framing is the first step in strategic planning of organizational change. As principals were competent in this domain, this implied that the likelihood for them to mobilize teachers to change action was relatively high.

Fifth, on the other hand, principals of HPSS achieved the lowest main score in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain. With the main score of less than 4.5, they actually were not competent in this domain regardless of location or type of HPSS. This was not a complete surprise and indeed echoed Deloitte and Touches' (1996) view that resistance to change is the number one reason why organization change initiatives fail. The finding indicated that school principal failed to engage the three associated competencies of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* in managing school change: i) anticipating the resistance behavior that threatens the change efforts; ii) making individuals who resist change feel confident; and iii) managing change conflict effectively by seeking an agreement from every party (Table 1).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, concerted initiatives have been taken to improve PCLC in the area of effective change management by relevant parties to ensure school reform will not fall short of expectations (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). A case in point, school principals were offered Leadership for Change training course so to provide them with adequate PCLC to best lead change in school (Institut Aminuddin Baki, 2013). However, while scrutinizing the content of the course, it was found that basically emphasis was given to improve principals' competencies in recognizing the need for change, building new vision and institutionalizing the change. Somehow or other, there has been relatively little attention placed on *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* (Institut Aminuddin Baki, 2013). One reason why such a phenomenon has not been observed may have to do with the fact that people do not really aware resistance to change is an important factor why organization change initiatives fail. Hence, instead of removing resisting forces that maintain the *status quo*, increasing driving forces that promote change was viewed as more effective in managing change in the organization. It is totally distinct with the understanding which was addressed by Lewin (1958) in his three-step change model, a highly influential model that underpins many of the change management models and techniques today (Bamford & Forrester, 2003; Burnes, 2004).

On top of this, the finding that principals of HPSS achieved the highest mean score of PCLC in *Goal Framing* domain but lowest in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain, further reaffirmed that, comparatively, to gain the hearts and minds of the change recipients is the most challenging efforts in managing change in any organization. Arguing on this point, Fullan (1993) had emphasized that focusing on people is the most effective way to lead change successfully. Infrastructure and material development do not bring about change, people do. It is only when people within an organization change then the organization will adopt change. Therefore, school principals have to bear in mind that, ultimately, human factor is relatively an important factor in the change

process. This answers Juechter, Caroline and Alfords' (1998) call that the most potent leverage for significant and sustainable change resides within human system.

Sixth, another significant finding should be noted in the study was that principals in RSS were not only incompetent in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain, but *Capacity Building* domain as well. Obviously, principals of RSS were less competent in managing school change in comparison with those counterparts of FRSS and DSS who were only incompetent in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain. Despite the reason that variations across organizational culture determine how leaders will lead in a given context as discussed earlier, one possible explanation for this was that the exposure of principals of RSS to the professional development programs on change management was relatively lower than those principals of FRSS and DSS. As mentioned earlier, as leadership is often discussed in terms of competencies (Bueno & Tubbs, 2005; Boyatsis, 1982), this implied that leadership can be taught and learned (Intagliata, Ulrich, & Smallwood, 2000). In other words, clusters of PCLC can be learned through professional development programs and help school principals gauge improvement in school change and ultimately maximize school change effectiveness (Tai, 2013). If the probability of principals of RSS expose to change management professional development programs was relatively low, certainly it will impact on their competencies in leading change.

In addition, in line with the above finding, to a large extend, if principals of RSS were not competent in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* and *Capacity Building* domain, it was likely that the possibility of facing difficulties in leading change would be relatively high. Undoubtedly, in terms of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain, they were difficult to get buy-in from the teachers in implementing change in schools and most possibly generate negative emotions such as anger, resent, frustration, anxiety, stresses or fear that Lines (2005), Martin et al. (2006), Oreg (2006), and Piderit (2000) concluded in their studies, respectively, as a result of the change recipients reluctant to embrace change. Also, in terms of *Capacity Building* domain, possibly teachers were unable to perform the new task competently as efforts on creating and sustaining a positive climate which enhance teachers' self efficacy, ensuring support mechanisms and promote learning to well prepare the change were not put in place effectively (Tai, 2013). As previously mentioned, according to Kotter (1999), it is rather one of the most tragic mistakes made in leading change.

Seventh, analyzing more specific to the four domains of PCLC, the result which revealed that except the domain of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*, PCLC was not reliably related to location of school reinforced the point that the geographical factor was not the determinant factor of the level of PCLC in HPSS as discussed earlier. Meanwhile, the distinction of *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* was reliably related to location of school, i.e. principals of HPSS in rural area ($\underline{M}$=4.48) were reported more competent than principals in urban area ($\underline{M}$=4.35), most probably was due to the fact that resistance and conflict which arise in urban HPSS were relatively more complex and probably more often in comparison to rural HPSS. In the era of globalization, the information revolution and technological advancement have brought profound changes in economic, political and social life in urban than in rural area. Consequently, problems arise in urban area are relatively more complicated compared with those in the rural area. Likewise, this phenomenon also appeared in schools. Comparatively, problems which occur in urban HPSS in the change process demand specific PCLC to resolve it than in rural HPSS. Building on this rationale, this should not come as a surprise that principals in urban area were less competent in mitigating resistance and conflict than those in rural area.

Finally, the finding which demonstrated that in terms of four domains, PCLC was reliably related to the different type of HPSS, i.e. principals of FRSS, DSS and RSS did differ in their level of PCLC in terms of *Goal Framing*, *Capacity Building*, *Defusing Resistance and Conflict*, and *Institutionalizing,* respectively. This again reaffirmed that variations across organizational culture determine how leaders will lead in a given context. As DSS, FRSS and RSS possess different organizational culture, thus it differs substantially in leadership which is often discussed in term of competencies.

In summary, as a whole, principals in HPSS possess adequate PCLC in implementing change in schools. Besides, the level of PCLC was not reliably related to location of school, but rather the type of HPSS. Variations across organizational culture contribute substantially to this phenomenon. Further, in terms of four domains of PCLC, principals in all HPSS, regardless location of school and school type, were not competent in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain. Be that as it may, resistance to change is one of the important determinant factors why organization change initiatives fail. Lastly, principals of RSS were less competent in managing school change in comparison with those counterparts in FRSS and DSS. Despite the fact that different organizational culture drives leaders' performance differently, the probability of principals expose to the professional development programs on change management matters.

8. Theoretical Implications

Several theoretical contributions emerged from this study. First, the finding which revealed that the level of PCLC was not reliably related to location of school, but rather the type of HPSS contributes to the understanding that all leadership contexts are distinct due to the fact that it differs substantially by organizational culture. Variations across organizational culture thus can be viewed as one of the important factors which determine how leaders will lead in a given context. As leadership is often discussed in terms of competencies (Bueno & Tobbs, 2005; Boyatsis, 1982), it supports the logic that change leadership competency is somewhat closely related to organizational culture. The study therefore broadened our understanding of the relationship between the above two variables in managing any organizational change.

Second, the finding whereby principals of HPSS achieved the highest mean score of PCLC in *Goal Framing* domain but the lowest in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain reflect that, comparatively, to gain the hearts and minds of the change recipients is the most challenging efforts in managing change in any organization. It implies that human factor is relatively an important factor in managing change. Undoubtedly, it is not only reinforces the existing literature that stresses the significant human factor in change management, it expands our understanding of the resistance processes that arise in the public sector. Thus, it serves as an important step forward for organizational studies in exploring this phenomenon which may help move the organizational change literature to a more coherent theoretical perspective (Tai, 2013).

Third, the finding also demonstrated that principals of RSS were less competent in managing school change in comparison with those counterparts in FRSS and DSS. The probability of principals expose to the professional development programs on change management probably contributes to this phenomenon. This reaffirmed the competency theory advocated by Cairns (2000) and Boak and Coolican (2001) that leadership competencies can be taught and learned. By gaining new knowledge, skills and ability, one can become a better leader and vice versa (Tubbs & Schulz, 2006). Indeed, successful change leaders are those that ensure competencies are put in place to transform followers through the different stages of change (Tai, 2013).

9. Practical Implications

The findings of the study also offer several meaningful practical contributions. First, the findings provide practical insights for relevant parties for example, Institut Aminuddin Baki, Ministry of Education, who is leading in designing and conducting training courses for school principals in Malaysia, to better understanding the patterns of PCLC in HPSS. Specifically, it provides useful feedback in planning, designing and conducting change leadership development programs for school principals. Obviously, instead of employing one-size-fits-all approach, staged-matched interventions would meet the distinct needs of school principals of different HPSS in the different stages of managing school change. Basically, as all school principals in HPSS were not competent in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* domain, special attention thus should be given in designing and conducting training courses in enhancement of the concerned competency so to maximizing learning impact. Besides, for principals of RSS, they were not only incompetent in *Defusing Resistance and Conflict* but Capacity Building domain as well. Therefore, attempts should be made to equip them with subsequent competencies so to engage it to influence change initiatives effectively.

Second, the study's findings bear a number of implications for practitioners and especially school principals of HPSS – the change agents. As PCLC is somewhat closely related to organizational culture, purposeful initiatives to create ways and conditions to enhance positive school culture probably will help to increase the level of PCLC. Also, as the probability of principals expose to the professional development programs on change management probably will increase the level of PCLC, school principals particularly those form RSS, should take proactive initiatives to ensure they would gain knowledge, skills and abilities through strategic professional development programs that can help in facilitating change. Further, the finding may increase the awareness of school principals that human factor is relatively an important factor in managing change and thus greater attention to be given to the human side of the change process. For example, they may be more attentive to how they interact with teachers and try to consciously temper their predisposition against change and take initiatives to gain their hearts and soul to work through the change process.

Lastly, as a whole, practically, this study contributes to the field of change management as it presents a good first step in exploring the patterns of PCLC in local education context. Indeed, the need for research on PCLC is especially high with respect to the fact that Malaysian education system is entering an intensive period of change from the year 2013 to 2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). To equip school principals with adequate competencies, we need relevant data which can help principals gauge improvement in managing change. Hence,

the study provides a timely finding which offers practitioners and relevant parties a lens through which they could better understand, prepare for, and enhance principals' capacity to best lead change in schools.

10. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

In the light of this study, several limitations and future directions for research are identified and briefly discussed. First, as the information collected in this study was solely based on the perception of change recipients, the teachers, to gain a balanced and comprehensive view, as well as to increase the ability to interpret the findings, further research is recommended to involve the change agents themselves i.e. the school principals and also another third party, the senior assistants so as to gain a multidimensional perspective of the phenomenon.

Second, as HPSS and the concerned teachers were the sites and study population chosen for the study, future research could be pursued on a more diverse sample. For example, teachers in the mediocre or low performance secondary school as well as teachers in primary schools so to ascertain the extent to which the findings can be generalized. Third, while the research suggests that PCLC is somewhat closely related to organizational culture, it would therefore be meaningful to examine the relationship between these two variables in a more specific manner. By doing so, the complexity of the relationship can be captured and provide better understanding and interpreting of the findings.

Fourth, according to Rothwell, Hohne and King (2007), competencies can be technical and non-technical. Technical competencies are specific to certain role during the process of change while non-technical competencies are more generic in nature. Possessing either technical or non-technical competencies alone is not sufficient for successful change leadership. Indeed, non-technical competencies which are sometimes referred as core competencies apply across the complete terrain of the change process. As the present study only focused on technical competencies, to gain more insights about the patterns of PCLC, there is a pressing need for research to be conducted on non-technical change leadership competencies in near future.

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