

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR ORGANISATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Simin Ghavifekr*, Mojgan Afshari & Wumaierjiang Ayoufu

Faculty of Education
University of Malaya
sg502@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In the current environment of market competition and globalization, change management strategies become increasingly important for all organizations including education. In this regard, managing systemic change implementation has been considered as the integral part of the change process to achieve organizational desired goals and objectives. For educational organizations, especially Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions, management strategic planning for technological change implementation are believed to be the key solution to improve the quality of teaching and learning process. This paper aims to address the key question of "What are the management strategies and policies for effective organizational implementation of the systemic change in context of an ODL organization?" Based on the data analysis for this qualitative research it was found that in a technology-based systemic change, planning, organizing, guiding and monitoring are the main strategic elements for the management in successful organizational implementation of the new learning technologies. "Organizational implementation" as one of the key components of systemic change management is the main theme for this study. The results of in-depth analysis including emerged sub-themes and the sub-sub-themes are presented in this paper.

Keywords: *Organizational implementation, change management, systemic change, Open and Distance Learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current market competition and globalization, change management strategies become increasingly important for all organizations including education. This is due to the essential role of change management in being considered as the (an) integral part of the change implementation process to achieve organizational desired goals and objectives.

The recent technological change from e-learning implementation in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) organizations have a major systemic implication that affects all the levels and aspects of the education system as a whole. Therefore, for the success of the technology-based education system in order to

be the alternative solution to improve the quality of teaching and learning process, much more than just a minor organisational adjustment are needed (Senge, 1999; Uys & Siverts, 2001; Fullan, 2001). In the other word, e-learning implementation in educational organisation has directed the higher education specially ODL institutions to the revolution in thinking about teaching and learning (Bates, 2000). Hence, the main part of this transformation is related to the management's effective strategies and policies to deal with the new changes for maximum efficiency (Ghavifekr & Sufean, 2011). Accordingly, organizational implementation of change process requires management multidisciplinary skills and knowledge from various aspects including technology integration, education system transformation, and organizational development and improvement (Nadler, 1993; Rogers, 1995). In addition factors such as cooperation, communication, professional development, human and economic resource, and financing are also among the main components of the organizational implementation of change management process. Hence understanding the interrelationships and interdependencies between the various parts of the education system (Bates, 2000) by the management team, would help them to accomplish their important task regarding the organisational implementation.

However, for successful organizational implementation of e-learning in an open university, considering the necessary elements related to technology selection, maintenance, development, implementation and technical tools including hardware, software and infrastructure is an essential task for the management team. This is because in context of ODL institutions, management strategies for technological change implementation are believed to be the key solution to improve the quality of teaching and learning process. The other key elements in implementation of e-learning in an educational organization include time, financial support, administration support, networking, systems administration, and professional development (Menchaca et al., 2003). In addition consistent monitoring of the systemic change process, communicating and corresponding with the stakeholders in order to motivate them to assist in the new situation, are also among the required elements for the management to consider in their decision making on the organizational implementation of new changes.

Previous literatures indicate that recent integration of e-learning in education system has a major systemic implication which needs to be carefully planned and managed to make it more effective and efficient (Richards et al., 2004; Uys & Siverts, 2001; Coimbra Group of Universities in Europe, 2002; Rossiter, 2006; Zellweger, 2006; Uys, 2007). Therefore, the current key challenge facing educational planners and management teams is related to their capability to identify appropriate strategies and policies to direct the change process. However, for the effective organizational implementation of e-learning and other learning technologies clear vision, careful planning and strategic management are the main prerequisites (Ghavifekr & Sufean, 2010).

For Malaysian education system, the critical role of technology change is a foundation for competitive advantage of the ODL institutions in the country. Earlier research shows that due to the issues and challenges related to the use of learning technologies in the Malaysian higher education today, directing and managing e-learning is a complex process which requires for change management strategies and policies to deal with the new changes (Rahimah, 1998; Poole et al., 2004; Raja Maznah, 2004; Hashim, 2007). The essential role of change management strategies in organizational implementation of learning technologies in the Malaysian education system is a basis for competitive advantage of the ODL institutions in the country. Hence, it requires a shift from change management to strategic planning and strategic management for the change implementation (Raja Maznah, 2004).

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE & QUESTION

The main purpose of this paper is to examine “organizational implementation” as one of the main components of systemic change with the four management fundamental skills including planning, organizing, guiding, and monitoring in context of a Malaysian ODL institution. More specifically this paper attempts to examine and analyze the dynamics and interactions which involved in management strategies, policies and methods in order to deal with the implementation of e-learning system at the case open university. Therefore, the study tries to address the question of “what are the management strategies that can help them to direct the organizational implementation of change process in line with the desired goals and objectives?”

3. METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this study a qualitative research methodology was used and data were collected through three different sources including open-ended interviews, direct observation, and official documents revision techniques for the duration of six months in an open university in Malaysia. The interviewees were from various groups including top management, deans of the faculties, and directors and heads of the supporting centers and departments. Apart from interview, data were also collected through examination of official documents obtained including the university’s published Annual and Monthly Reports, newspapers, public records, and research articles which have been presented in local and international seminars and conferences by officials of the open university. However, all materials and interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using the open coding, axial coding and selective coding techniques. In order to organize and manage the data more systematically, the raw data were analyzed using NVivo 8.3. Using computer software helped the researcher to find in-depth and detailed data on management key strategies and policies regarding organizational implementation of systemic change in the open university. In addition, the procedures for coding and categorizing organizational implementation as the main theme of this study were guided with the Ladder of Analytical Abstraction by Milles & Huberman (1994). The results of the emerging sub-themes are based on examination of planning, organizing, guiding, and monitoring as the four key functions of management.

4. DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

4.1 *Strategies for Organizational Implementation of Systemic Change*

Since establishment of the case open university in 2001, e-learning was the most influential factor for the management team to direct their organisation in various aspects including education, technology and finance. Accordingly, improvement and enhancement of the e-learning system implementation had been the main focus for the management in making any decisions or setting any strategies and policies.

This study found that in the open university’s context, e-learning system meant to be as an enabler tool for the management team to align their key strategies to achieve the desired goal of “democratizing education”. From this specific image, the leaders and top management of the ODL institution had set

the main organisational objectives not only to plan for the systemic change ahead, but also to organize, guide and monitor the new alterations in order:

- To meet higher education aspirations using flexible, accessible and affordable system
- To provide lifelong learning opportunities, and
- To help the government in the democratization of education (Ghavifekr & Sufean, 2011).

Based on the data analysis, the organizational implementation of the systemic change was a complex process for the open university that involved modification of the values, beliefs, and procedures. This is could be due to the characteristics of the change which referred to implementation and utilization of e-learning in the education system that affected all the organizational levels and aspects. Hence, encouraging the organizational members to participate in the implementation process was the key task for the management team.

Figure 1 shows the overview of the sub-themes and sub-sub themes of this study which emerged from in-depth analysis on the organisational implementation of e-learning system in terms of planning, organizing, guiding and monitoring. Analysis and categorizing concepts were made by employing the grounded theory approach in which the data would give rise to the new possible conceptions and theoretical propositions.

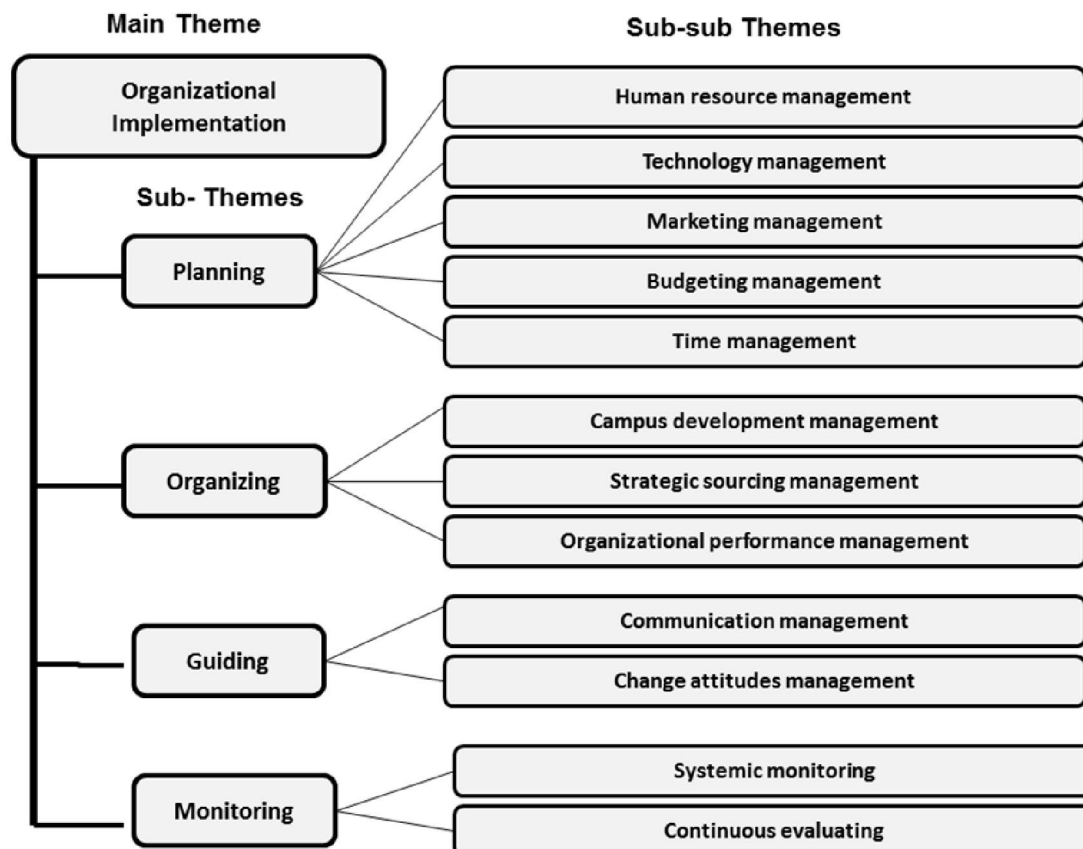


Figure 1. Management strategies for organizational implementation of systemic change

The ensuing sub-sections elaborate the above figure.

4.1.1 Planning Organizational Implementation

According to the data analysis, planning organizational implementation was referred to the management strategic efforts in identifying the most appropriate strategies and policies for successful implementation of the new changes.

This study found that the main focus of management team in planning for organizational implementation of the systemic change was to achieve the goal of being a world class center of excellence in open- distance education. Accordingly, management strategies for planning the change implementation were regarding the need for being equipped by appropriate capacity to sustain the e-learning system and ICT-based activities.

In-depth analysis shows that in process of systemic change management in the open university, there were five essential strategies in planning for organizational implementation. These strategies included:

- Human resource management
- Technology management
- Marketing management
- Budgeting management
- Time management

The elaboration of these strategies that emerged from in-depth analysis based on thematic analysis on planning organizational implementation for e-learning system is presented in the following sub-sections.

- ***Human Resource Management***

In planning organizational implementation the first strategy of the management team was to concentrate more on human resource management. In this study human resource management refers to the strategies, policies and approaches that management of the ODL institution considered in order to employ the most relevant, capable, and skilled -working forces to run the organization more efficiently and effectively.

Due to the characteristics of the education system in integrating advanced technologies, human resource management strategies were included providing training programs for both academic and non-academic staff. Data analysis shows that the training programs was a useful tool for employing appropriate people, providing efficient and effective technology training to develop the ICT capacity, as well as directing and maintaining the services in line with their responsibilities and organizational requirements. Correspondingly, concentration on human resource management strategies for the purpose of producing skilled human capital was an important element in success of the change implementation.

- ***Technology Management***

Because of the essential role of learning technologies in open and distance education, the ability of the leaders to manage the implementation of the technology changes was the critical task that needed proper planning. Moreover, in context of the ODL institution, technology change was considered as a systemic change which affected every sections and parts of the university including departments, centers and faculties.

From data analysis of this study it was found that appropriate planning for implementation of the advanced technologies in one hand and setting the proper strategies and policies to maintain these technologies in the other hand, made the technology management as a key task for the leadership and management team. However, formation of a reasonable technology plan with the consideration of the status quo in terms of prioritizing of the organizational needs and requirements was the main elements for the management in setting up their strategic plan. The first step in such a plan was to identifying the most suitable technology for the open university which is able to upgrade the system to the better position and improvement. Moreover, determination of the fact that what resources would be needed to make the best use of the technologies in the organization was the next step for the management to consider in their technology plan. These resources were included educational, financial, human, and technical in various aspects. Estimating the expected cost benefit and time line with the general short and long term objectives that explained the implementation trail for the technology management plan was the final key tasks in the planning organizational implementation.

- ***Marketing Management***

Based on the data analysis, marketing management was the other key strategy for the management team in planning organizational implementation of the systemic change. In this study marketing management refers to management various strategies to cultivate university's designated market based upon the organizational goals and objective. These strategies are focused on the practical application of marketing techniques and resources that would address the needs and requirements of the ODL institution. In the case open university, marketing management section was responsible for developing more facilities in order to attract more learners from the domestic market as well as international market. The main focus of the management team in this regard was to create awareness about organizational objectives. Therefore, when leaders of the ODL institution were planning for the change, they had to consider some strategies to help in attracting more learners. These strategies not only would affect the marketing point, but also will help to attract more students. Finally, filling the geographical gap through building a strong and professional academic reputation was the major criterion for the change management team to set up the organizational implementation strategies.

- ***Budgeting Management***

From in-depth analysis budgeting management was another emerged element in management planning for organizational implementation of systemic change. In this study budgeting management refers to all the strategic planning and decision making in terms of budgeting and financial matters which is approved by the change management team. In this regard the main task is to prepare a guideline for all the budgeting plans for the whole university. This guideline which is reviewed every semester is dependent on the budget that the university needed to maintain its activities regarding organizational implementation of the advanced technology.

This study found that in terms of budgeting management there were differences between the open university as a private institution in compared to public universities. This is because in private universities all the financial matters are the university's responsibility; therefore the funds should be spent by the organization without financial supports from the government.

The analysis shows that in context of a private educational institution, budgeting management is more about providing skilled manpower, efficient facilities, sufficient software and hard ware as well as providing more learner centers to cater the large numbers of the adult learners all over the country.

- ***Time Management***

In managing organizational implementation of the systemic change, after budgeting management there was a need for a time management. Because of the dynamic and complex characteristic of systemic change, time management could be considered as spending a time guideline for each activity involved in the change process. In this study time management refers to the necessary range of skills and practices that was used by the management of change in order to achieve the specific organizational goals and objectives in a sufficient and proper time. These skills were included a broad range of actions such as planning, organizing, guiding, and monitoring the change activities in terms of time spending for each activity. In the case university, setting short and long term plans for the change objectives was an example for time management activities.

4.1.2 Organizing Organizational Implementation

After planning for organizational implementation of the new changes, there was a need for management strategies and policies for organizing the process of the change. In this study organizing organizational implementation refers to the management activities in order to prepare and arrange appropriate resources for implementation of the planned change. This was in order to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the change implementation procedures in the open university. From the in-depth analysis it was revealed that in an ODL institution, organizing organizational implementation of the systemic change management was included three main strategies as follows:

- Campus development management
- Collaboration of inside and outside sourcing
- Organizational performance management

The explanation of the sub-themes and sub-sub-themes for organizing organizational implementation is presenting in the following sub-sections.

- ***Campus Development Management***

For the change management team, the initial strategy in organizing implementation of systemic change was to provide necessary facilities and services in order to prepare the environment for adoption of the new technological changes. The analysis shows that campus development strategies was considered as an engine to achieve the university's business goals and objectives. One of these objectives was to develop more learning centers all over the country. This was due to the management plan for attracting more adult learners to enroll the university as their first option for continuing their higher education. To

achieve this critical objective the management had to concentrate more on the developmental and physical infrastructures strategies. Developing more learning centers in many parts of the country, was among the strategies which was adopted to provide more opportunities for the adult learners to obtain their tertiary education via open and flexible concepts. With this policy the change management team aimed to attract more learners even though if they were placing at the remote areas. Accordingly the main effort was to ensure that the learning centers are well equipped with the infrastructure and advanced learning facilities such as computer laboratories and digital libraries.

- ***Strategic Sourcing Management***

In the ODL institution, identifying the most appropriate sources that could help to provide sufficient and efficient facilities to the organization was an essential task for the systemic change management team. In this study, “strategic sourcing management” refers to the change management strategies and policies in organizing the suitable sources from inside and outside the university. Data analysis shows that the main “in” and “out” sourcing that the open university’s management relies on included technology, learning materials, and human capital. Due to the nature of ODL organization, technology and Information Technology (IT) services was the most focused elements for the management team in sourcing areas that involved variety of issues included software, hardware, equipment, and the technical people. In order to provide a quality technology sources, all these issues needs to be carefully planned and managed. In the other words, when considering the outsourcing of IT services, management needed to be very clear about the purchases as well as their expectations from the services in terms of delivery, usability, scalability and friendliness.

From the data analysis it was found that in terms of sourcing technology, the university had improvement periods of change during last eleven years of operation. This could be due to the change management’s strategies and policies on enhancing the technology services and facilities. From analysis it was found that considering effective and efficient technology sources and services and having clear strategies with respect to the organization’s expectations played an important role in the success of the systemic change management process. In the other words, the goal of technology sourcing, servicing, and the delivery cost needs to be clearly defined and planned. In terms of human capital sourcing, the university relies more on the professional Subject Matter Experts (SME) to develop the learning materials in both format of e-content and printed modules. In terms of producing quality learning materials for both printed and e-content modules, the main task for the change management was to provide appropriate subject matter experts from inside and outside of the university. Apart from the professional members of the university, inviting some SMEs from public universities to help for developing quality learning materials was part of this task.

- ***Organizational Performance Management***

In the systemic change process, one of the main goals of the management team was to improve the entire organizational performances. From the analysis, organizational performance management refers to the strategies and policies that ensure the institutional goals and objectives are consistently being met in an effective and efficient approach. In this regard, organizational performance management was focused on performance of the organization as a whole which included all the departments, faculties, centers as well as the processes and services. This study shows that for the change management team the key activity in enhancing organizational performance was to set the goals, monitor the progress of

the change process toward the goals in entire system, and make amendments to achieve those goals more effectively and efficiently.

4.1.3 Guiding Organizational Implementation

This study found that in order to achieve the predetermined goals and objective, after planning and organizing the organizational implementation of the systemic change there is a need for management strategies to guide and direct the process consistency. From the data analysis, guiding organizational implementation refers to the process that management team considered as initiating, directing and leading the performance of the organizational members in order to achieve the university's objectives. Apart from these, other main activities in guiding organizational implementation of the systemic change were included motivating, supervising, and training the members towards achievement of the organizational goals. The sub-sub-themes of guiding organizational implementation that emerged from in-depth analysis are included two main strategies as follows:

- Communication management
- Change attitudes management

The ensuing sub-sections elaborate on the sub-themes and sub-sub-themes of guiding organizational implementation.

- ***Communication Management***

This study found that in situation of system wide change as e-learning implementation, the key practice for the success of the change process was regular communication between the management and organizational members. This could be due to the complex nature of the systemic change that needed to be implemented by team-working efforts. In this study, communication management refers to the management's strategies and policies that aimed to build commitment towards the organizational implementation of the new changes. Therefore, it was considered as a critical activity for the change management team to focus on a communication procedures that offered essential information on available supports and accessible resources to the organizational members. This was in order to ensure utmost acceptance of the changes, with least resistance from the members. Data analysis shows that as much as the organizational members understood the objectives of the change and accepted its implementation through effective communication with the management, it ensured the less negative impact on their performances. This was because through planned communication, organizational members had the opportunities to build their commitment to the new changes.

However, frequent and continued communication between the change management team and the organizational members was the best approach to deal with the problem of resistance to change. This study found that the management explanation about the reason for the new change as well as its goals and objectives in one hand, and to hear the views and opinions of the members about the new changes on the other hand, were among the criteria for the communication management.

- ***Change Attitudes Management***

The analysis shows that positive reaction and attitude of organizational members towards change was one of the key factors to successful implementation of the systemic changes. Understanding these attitudes by the change management team was an effective element to overcome the problems related to resistance to the change. It also prevented the management from over reacting to the members' behavior on the new adjustment.

From the data analysis it was found that formation of the members' attitudes toward organizational change mostly happened when the employees were first exposed to the early information about the change process. Thus, in this stage first belief of organizational members about the change had formed. This study found that management efforts in answering the questions regarding to "why" the new changes are needed and "how" the implementation of the new changes will take place, resulted in positive attitudes of the organizational members towards the changes.

In-depth analysis shows that in the process of implementing the new system-wide changes, facing with various attitudes from the organizational members were a normal fact which dealing with these attitudes in a more understanding and supportive manner was one of the key tasks for the change management team. The other task was considering enough time for the members to know more about the new changes. In addition, "age" was one of the main criteria for attitude of the organizational members towards the new changes. Because of the dynamic characteristic of the new changes in the open university, young staff were more interested in the new technological innovations.

4.1.4 Monitoring Organizational Implementation

This study found that in systemic change process, monitoring and controlling the organizational implementation helped the management to identify inherent problems for the purpose of system's improvement. The data analysis shows that monitoring organizational implementation refers to the management's strategies and policies to regular observation of the e-learning system execution. In this regard identifying the unwanted issues during the implementation process helped the change management to set the effective and efficient strategies to overcome the problems. In depth analysis indicates that in organizational implementation of the e-learning system, there are two main strategies that involved in the monitoring process. These strategies that present as the emerged sub-sub-themes for monitoring organizational implementation are as follow:

- Systemic monitoring
- Continuous evaluating

The following sub-sections cover the explanation of the sub-themes and the sub-sub-themes for monitoring organizational implementation.

- ***Systemic Monitoring***

In this study systemic monitoring refers to the management specific strategies and policies to observe and review all the aspect and levels of the system wide planned change implementation process at the open university. Due to the complete characteristics of such a monitoring, it played a key role in

improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the organizational performance. This study found that management approach for systemic monitoring helped them to find out if the activities which had been planned during the vision and mission planning phases, were working appropriately and based on the initial plans. Moreover it had a great impact on keeping the procedures in a right track that management could be able to identify any mistakes or weaknesses in the implementation process.

The results of analysis shows that systemic approach of the management for monitoring the evaluation of the organizational implementation enabled them to examine the sufficiency and usefulness of the available various resources which the university uses for its operation in terms of teaching and learning, technology tools and services and human resource. In addition quality systemic monitoring helped the management to achieve sustainable educational system that produce quality teaching and learning environment.

Moreover this study found that systemic approach of the management for monitoring the organizational implementation had helped them to identify that if the entire annual budget had been spend in the planned areas or else. The interviewees with emphasizing on the critical role of budgeting evaluation commented that whole university included every faculties, departments, centers and divisions had to spend based on the annual budget plans.

- ***Continuous Evaluating***

The other management strategy in monitoring organizational implementation of systemic change was continuous evaluation of the whole system. In this study continuous evaluation refers to the management activities that the situation of the organization before and after implementation of the new changes had been compared in terms of system development and improvement. Based on the analysis, to achieve efficient information to do such a comparison, there was a need for the management to do both formative and summative continuous evaluation. Formative evaluation has been conducted during the process of systemic change when the functioning of the whole system was evaluated with the purpose of improving the strategies, policies and methods of the organizational implementation. Accordingly, summative evaluation was performed after the organizational implementation of the planned change and the purpose was to provide information on the efficiency and the effectiveness of the new changes on the outcomes of the teaching and learning. As expressed by the top management interviewees the strategies and policies of the management for continuous evaluation was more focused on three elements of efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of the new technological changes on the organizational implementation.

8. CONCLUSION

Implementation and utilization of e-learning system, in context of the Malaysian open and distance learning institution, was the main reason for adoption of systemic change. In this regard, systemic change was considered as a key element for the educational system improvement which was associated with enhanced organizational performances.

In managing the process of change implementation in an organization, the first step is formatting effective and efficient strategic plan to direct the change process properly. In case of educational change, specifically at Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions, management strategic planning is

considered as the key prerequisite for systemic change regarding the implementation of e-learning system. In this regard, effective strategic planning should be able to include main elements and to address the key issues relating to technology implementation in the entire system. These issues include the process of systemic change that emerges from management's key functions consisting of planning, organizing, guiding, and monitoring.

This study on the management strategies for organizational implementation of e-learning has proved valuable for reminding us that for the success of the change process, there is a need for prioritizing of the organization's appropriate needs and requirements through strategic planning. As examined at the case open university in Malaysia, the critical factors in organizational implementation of e-learning system include:

- (a) Planning appropriate strategies for the most probable use of advanced technologies in order to achieve the goal of quality teaching - learning environment. Hence strategic planning needs to be considered as the management key strategy to lead the support for the systemic change.
- (b) Organizing the planned strategies for the determination of the technology integration as a whole system including all the aspects and levels of the organization. Moreover, the other elements that need to be considered in the systemic integration of e-learning in an education system are including the organization itself and the learners. Through organizing process, management team would be able to identify the needed resources and assets for the implementation of the planned change.
- (c) Guiding the organizational members and procedures in the critical process of change implementation. This is to ensure the organizational consistency and approaches to integrate learning technologies in the education system. In this regard, the country's national education vision could be considered as a guideline for the future progress of the institution and also to enable the change management team to steer the university towards future growth and development. On the other hand it could be an objective estimate of expected benefits in applying the strategic plan for the technology. These benefits consist of cost, time, and human capital.
- (d) Monitoring organizational performance for the continuous evaluation of the organizational activities and the system's performances. For the reason that technology implementation will affect all the levels and aspects of the system as a whole, hence regular upgrading of the initial strategic planning is a necessary task for the systemic change management team.

However, from these particular aspects of organizational implementation, the leaders and top management of the open university had set the desired goals and objectives to meet the country's higher education aspirations, using flexible, accessible and affordable systems, providing lifelong learning opportunities for the working-adult learners, and to help the government in the democratization of education. The researcher hopes that general findings of this study on organizational implementation of systemic change from e-learning innovation in a Malaysian open university, could be transferable to the contexts of further technology- based changes in other open- distance universities.

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