

ASSESSMENT TO THE LEVEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS FOR CHANGE IN GOVERNMENTAL DIRECTORATES IN ZAKHO INDEPENDENT ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to assess the level of readiness for change among directors and heads of departments in governmental directorates affiliated with the “Zakho Independent Administration”. More specifically, the research focuses on measuring and assessing four selected dimensions of readiness for change. These are the following: Appropriateness, Management Support, Self-Efficacy, and Personally Beneficial. For this purpose, one hundred and nine (109) directors and heads of departments were selected randomly from governmental directorates in Zakho. The participants were given a pre-structured questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part was related to the demographic and personal characteristics, while the second part dealt with the change readiness questionnaire using four-dimension model. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data and achieve research objectives using SPSS (25.0). The results revealed a moderate level of readiness for change, with the mean for the overall change readiness somewhat over the middle of the Five-point Likert scale (3.5 out of 5). Among the four dimensions, Personally Beneficial recorded the highest level. The lowest level, on the other hand, was recorded with Management Support. Finally, the findings also showed that the level of readiness for change did not explain any significant variation based on personal factors.

Key words: Organizational Change, Readiness for Change, Governmental Directorates in “Zakho Independent Administration”

INTRODUCTION

The phenomena of globalization, which yielded a global competition, has greatly increased the frequency of change over the past few decades (Moric Milovanovic et al., 2022). Consequently, the process of organizational change has become an inevitable component of organizations' existence. The ability to quickly change and adjust to a new changing competitive environment has been asserted to be a crucial component of all organizations' survival (Rafferty et al., 2013; Todnem By, 2007). When organizations undergo change process, employees might choose to either resist or adapt to the new circumstance. Therefore, studies on the individual readiness for change and change management have become more prevalent. Specially, after organizations started to face some difficulties, such as more frequent economic crises, increasing demand for public services, and extremely quick technological advancements.

In general, organizations consistently fail to shift swiftly enough, and they are sometimes unable to adapt to the new economic and social conditions in such a dynamic environment (Belak & Ušljebrika, 2014). In this regard, Burke (2017) argued that every organization is impacted by different economic, social, political, legal, and other factors. Thus, in order for organizations to properly run their operations, their leaders must continuously monitor and

adjust to these variables. Moreover, they may only need to make small adjustments to their current economic model. However, some other times they may need to implement more dramatic changes, such as new structures, new practices, or a whole new identity. Therefore, effective organizations must have a strong plan of organizational change and change management in order to "close the gap" with economic trends and adapt to the environmental advancement. Organizational members, including leaders and followers, can determine how well an organization can adapt in response to its surrounding variables (Moric Milovanovic et al., 2022). Therefore, in order for the change to be effective, the majority of staff, specifically those in positions of authority, must be open to the change and ready for it. Otherwise, internal conflict may arise, causing serious harm to the organization and fail any change efforts (Armenakis et al., 1993; Rafferty et al., 2013). Hence, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the degree to which individuals in positions of leadership are willing to accept organizational change. Based on the above discussion and clarifications, this study will answer the following question:

“What is the level of readiness for organizational change among leaders in governmental directorates in Zakho Independent Administration”.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

This research aims specifically to achieve the following objectives:

- To evaluate the degree to which individuals in governmental directorates in “Zakho Independent Administration” believe that the organizational changes are appropriate.
- To investigate the extent to which individuals in governmental directorates in “Zakho Independent Administration” believe that they are capable of implementing organizational changes.
- To examine the degree to which individuals in governmental directorates in “Zakho Independent Administration” feel that the senior leaders support the organizational changes.
- To assess the extent to which individuals in governmental directorates in “Zakho Independent Administration” believe that the organizational changes are personally beneficial.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 highlights the importance of the study. Followed by a theoretical background about readiness for change and the significant of being ready for change in the third section. The fourth section illustrates the methodology of the study. The fifth section includes the empirical results and discussion of the present study. Finally, section 6 draws the main conclusions, limitations, suggestions for future studies and recommendations.

Motivation to the Study

The constant developments within and across political, economic, social, technical, legal, demographical, environmental, and global domains place pressure on organizations to adapt quickly to forthcoming changes in order to achieve success, growth, and in some cases, survival (Adam & Hanafi, 2022; and Chen et al., 2018). Furthermore, due to the intertwinement and integration of these areas, the scope of change has grown considerably. For instance, the change in one domain may result in changes in other domains. Hence, as noted by Rothwell & Sullivan, (2005) the only thing that is constant nowadays is change itself. As a result, change is becoming an inevitable matter. Moreover, researchers have given several motives for change in the public sector, such as enhancing the quality of public services and promoting societal well-being of. In order to broaden the level of public services provided to Zakho people, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has recently recognized Zakho town as an independent administration from Duhok governorate, naming it “Zakho Independent Administration”. This transition has resulted in an increase the number of the services provided by the local government in Zakho directorates. In addition, people’s expectations of the quality of these services have also increased as a result of this massive change. However, the question that arise here is whether the individuals working within these directorates, especially those with authority, are ready to implement this change and meet people’s expectations. Based on this question, this study attempts to identify, via a descriptive study, the level of readiness for change among directors and heads of departments in governmental directorates in “Zakho Independent Administration”. This is because individuals’ readiness for change is one of the most significant element of the success or failing of any change program (Ahmad et al., 2017; and Robbins & Coulter, 2017).

Readiness for Change

Readiness, as defined by Robbins & Coulter, (2017), is the willingness and ability of individuals to achieve a particular mission. An updated systematic review about organizational change readiness illustrated that different terms have been used to define and measure readiness for change including willingness, preparedness for change, acceptance of change, openness to change and commitment to change (J. Meyer & Hamilton, 2013; Mignonac, 2008; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Although the mentioned terms are slightly different in terms of meaning, they all express similar concept. For instance, commitment to change is defined by Meyer & Hamilton (2013) as employees’ obligation to what is required for the change process to be implemented effectively. Likewise, openness to change is described by Wanberg & Banas (2000) as a required condition to support the change efforts. Looking at the readiness for change as a cognitive state of resistance and support by individuals, it can be said that all the mentioned terms are comparable since they all support the change efforts to be successful.

Generally, change readiness is described as a combination of change commitment and change success. It expresses both the willingness to change and the common belief in the organization’s ability to implement the change (Shea et al., 2014). Organizational readiness for change has been studied on different level. For instance, according to Rafferty et al. (2013), readiness for change can be viewed on three different levels, namely organizational level, group level, and

individual level. Focusing on factors of the group and organizational level, change readiness contains collective efficacy, financial capabilities, and comprehensive attitude. While on the micro-level (individual level), readiness for change concentrates on studying and understanding individuals' characteristics inside the organization as well as their attitude toward change initiatives. On the other hand, Weiner (2009) and Adam & Hanafi (2022) proposed two main forms of readiness for change including organizational and individual readiness. Due to the nature and objectives of this study, it focuses on explaining the organizational readiness for change at the individual level.

According to Weiner (2009), organizations face difficult issues at the individual level when they strive to adopt with changes. This might be attributed to the fact that not all organizational members are prepared and committed to change. Moreover, Robbins & Coulter (2017) found that one of the main reasons behind the failure and success of any changing process is the individuals level of readiness for change. According to Mangundjaya (2013) and Katsaros et al., (2020), organizational readiness for change at the individual level refers to the degree to which employees within an organization are behaviorally, psychologically and mentally ready to accomplish a desired change. Similarly, Hanpachern et al., (1998) illustrates that it is related to the individuals' attitudes, intentions and beliefs about the degree to which a specific change is accepted or rejected. They further added that readiness for change is a "a state of mind about the need" of change. Armenakis et al., (1993) also defined readiness for change as individuals' beliefs, intentions and attitudes to reject or accept particular change efforts (i.e., the extent to which employees understand the necessity of the change for organization's success). They went on to say that, in order to implement change effectively, dealing with the issue of employees' readiness for change is more important than utilizing a specific model of change. In this regard, a study on readiness for change by (Hanpachern et al., 1998) found that employees with a high level of change readiness are more likely to embrace change and may be more readily integrated into the change program. Hence, the next section will discuss the importance of individual readiness for change.

The Significant of Being Ready for Change

Accepting change is essential for organizational growth since it is an ongoing and unavoidable process. Organizations need to develop strategies in order to prepare and encourage their employees to adapt to the continuous changes (Madsen et al., 2005). This is due to the fact that successful change implementations must begin with the workforce. Numerous studies have revealed that most attempts to implement change in organizations fail owing to organizational members' resistance and unacceptance of the change programs (Ján & Veronika, 2017). In this regard, evidences from previous studies highlight that 70% to 90% of change initiatives in organizations end up with failure (Beer & Nohria, 2000; and Decker et al., 2012). Although studies attributed this failure back to different reasons, employee resistance to organizational change is one of the most common reasons of organizational change initiative failure (Stojanovic Aleksic et al., 2014; Lines et al., 2015). Repovš et al., (2019) also stated that change resistance is one of the primary causes of change efforts failure, which often arises as a result of the fear of the unknown situation that individual may face after implementing change. They

further claimed that since people are "creatures of habit" and prefer routine, implementing change may cause employees to feel anxious and insecure, resulting in resistance. Hence, individuals must feel that dealing with change is a common occurrence. Therefore, in order for change program to be willingly accepted and effectively implemented throughout the entire organization, it must be integrated with the organizational culture in such a way that it becomes more natural to the individuals and prepare them to accept it (Moric Milovanovic et al., 2022).

Moreover, Weiner (2009) illustrated that more successful change implementations are resulted from better individual readiness for change. However, the question arises here is, how this may happen. According to social cognitive theory by (Gist & Mitchell, 1992), employees are more likely to accept and involve in change initiatives when their level of organizational change readiness is high. They are, for instance, more eager to implement new procedures, policies and practices. Adding to that, during the implementation of change program, individuals with a high level of readiness for change are more likely to make additional efforts to promote change and show greater persistence in the face of challenges. Furthermore, studies claimed that when individuals are mentally, psychologically and behaviourally ready for change, they would support the change initiatives and go above and beyond the call of duty or expectations of their roles (J. Meyer & Hamilton, 2013; J. P. Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). In this context, Hanpachern et al., (1998) explained that organizational members with a high level of readiness for change are more likely to commit to and participate to change initiatives. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) also support this idea and discovered that individuals who were committed to change because they "want to" instead of "need to" or "ought to" demonstrated not only cooperative behavior, but also supportive behavior by promoting and sharing the values and benefits of the change programs with other organizational members.

To sum up, studies by Armenakis et al., (1993); Madsen et al., (2005); and Moric Milovanovic et al., (2022) have revealed that openness and acceptance of the change are indications of a positive employee attitude toward change. A negative attitude, on the other hand, would almost always results in dissatisfaction, job delays, and very frequently, resigning and leaving the organization. As a result, in order for a change initiative to be effective, organizational members must be attentive, open, and ready for it.

METHODOLOGY

Design

A descriptive study was conducted in Zakho Independent Administration in order to investigate the level of readiness for change among directors and heads of departments in Zakho governmental directorates. The data were collected quantitatively using a self-administrated questionnaire for investigating and measuring readiness for change.

Procedures

According to a decision by ministry council of Kurdistan Regional Government, Zakho has become an independent administration. This decision has increased the number of the governmental directors in Zakho and broadened the services provided by the existing

directorates. Therefore, the survey was conducted on the new opening directorates as well as the directorates that have been extended as a result of the transformation process that has happen in Zakho.

A self-administrated questionnaire was distributed to (120) randomly selected directors and heads of departments from various governmental directorates in Zakho Independent Administration- Kurdistan regional-Iraq. A probability sampling method, namely simple random sampling, was used for this purpose. Among the (120) selected samples, only (109) of them were returned properly. A letter was attached with the questionnaire explaining the purpose of the research and the confidentiality of the given information. The demographic factors and the personal characteristics are illustrated in the following table.

Table 1: Demographic factors and personal characteristics of the participants

	Demographic and personal factors	Categories	N	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	78	71.6
		Female	31	28.4
2	Age	Under 30 years	8	7.3
		31 to 40 years	62	56.9
		41 to 50 years	34	31.2
		Above 50 years	5	4.6
3	Educational Level	Diploma	19	17.4
		Bachelor	82	75.2
		Master	3	2.8
4	Tenure	Less than 5 years	11	10.1
		5 to 10 years	25	22.9
		10 to 15 years	58	53.2
		More than 15 years	15	13.8
5	Position	Director	24	22.0
		Heads of Departments	85	78.0

*Total respondents: 109

Table 1 demonstrates the demographic and personal factors of the participants. In terms of gender, the data revealed that approximately 72% of the participants were male, whereas females were consisted nearly 28% of the total participants. This indicate that the number of women in power positions is relatively low when compared to the number of males in power positions. This might be traced back to the masculine nature of the society. It is also illustrated that different age levels were participated in this survey. However, more than half of the respondents were between the ages of 31 to 40. This indicates that the majority of the individuals in leadership positions in Zakho directorates are young. This might be viewed as a positive indicator for the local authority of Zakho to get benefit from these young leaders and enhance them for future missions. In terms of educational level, although diverse levels of education can be noticed in the above table, individuals with a bachelor's degree took the lion's share, accounting for more than 75% of all participants. This indicates that the majority of those in positions of power are well educated and have the potential to be stronger leaders in the

future if properly mentored. Furthermore, the above table demonstrates that approximately 54% of the participants had 10 to 15 years of experience in leadership positions. Finally, out of 109 participants, 24 were main directors, which represent 22% of the total researched sample, and 85 were heads of departments within those directorates, accounting for 78%.

Measurement

A validated questionnaire, developed by (Holt et al., 2007), was utilized in this study to measure and assess the degree to which individuals in researched organizations are ready for organizational change. The questionnaire consisted of 25-items that were divided into four key dimensions: Appropriateness (10-items), Change Efficacy (6-items), Management Support (6-items), and Personally Beneficial (3-items). To express their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement, participants were asked to score each item on a 5-point Likert-scale, (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree). In terms of reliability, (Holt et al., 2007) reported a high reliability for the scale as the coefficient Alphas for Appropriateness, Management Support, Change Efficacy, and Personally beneficial were 0.80, 0.79, 0.79, 0.66 respectively. For this research, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for all items was 0.64, indicating an acceptable and satisfactory reliability.

DATA ANALYSIS

In order to meet the research objectives, all primary data were quantitatively analyzed using SPSS (version 25.0). Descriptive statistics, including frequency, relative frequencies, central tendency measures, and measures of dispersion, were used to measure the level of readiness for change among directors and heads of departments in Zakho governmental directorates.

Results

Table 2: Levels of readiness for change dimensions among the researched sample

Items	Means	Median	St. deviation
Appropriateness	3.52	3.50	0.3478
Management Support	3.49	3.50	0.3933
Change Efficacy	3.58	3.50	0.3853
Personal Beneficiary	3.69	3.67	0.6297
Overall Readiness for Change	3.56	3.50	0.2544

Table 2 shows the level of readiness for change and its dimensions, which includes Appropriateness, Management Support, Change Efficacy, and Personal Beneficiary among directors and heads of department in “Zakho Independent Administration” directorates. All of the mean values in the above table are slightly above the midpoint of the 5-point Likert scale. This indicates that the directors and heads of departments in Zakho governmental directorates showed a moderate level of readiness for change. More specifically, the highest mean value was for “Personally Beneficial”, with approximately 3.7. This indicates that individuals in leadership positions within the governmental directorates in Zakho believe that the organizational changes are personally beneficial for them. Followed by “Change Efficacy” and

“Appropriateness” with nearly 3.6 and 3.5, respectively. This demonstrates that, to some extent, these leaders believe that they are capable of implementing organizational changes and admit that the organizational changes are necessary. Although the mean value for “Management Support” was above the mid-point of the 5-point Likert scale with roughly 3.4, it has the lowest mean comparing to the other three dimensions of readiness for change. This refers to the fact that people in power positions in the researched directorates feel that senior leaders’ support for organizational changes does not meet their expectations. Finally, it can be stated that directors and heads of departments in the investigated directorates are, to some extent, ready for organizational change, as the recorded mean value is slightly above the mid-point of the 5-point Likert scale with roughly 3.5. Additionally, the standard deviation values for Appropriateness, Management Support, Change Efficacy, and Personal Beneficiary and overall readiness of change were (0.347, 0.393, 0.385, 0.629 and 0.254), respectively, indicating a low level of variation in the answers to the studied variables. The table also shows that the values of means and medians are extremely close, which indicates that the data are somehow tend to be normally distributed.

Table 3: Levels of overall readiness for change based on Demographic and personal factors

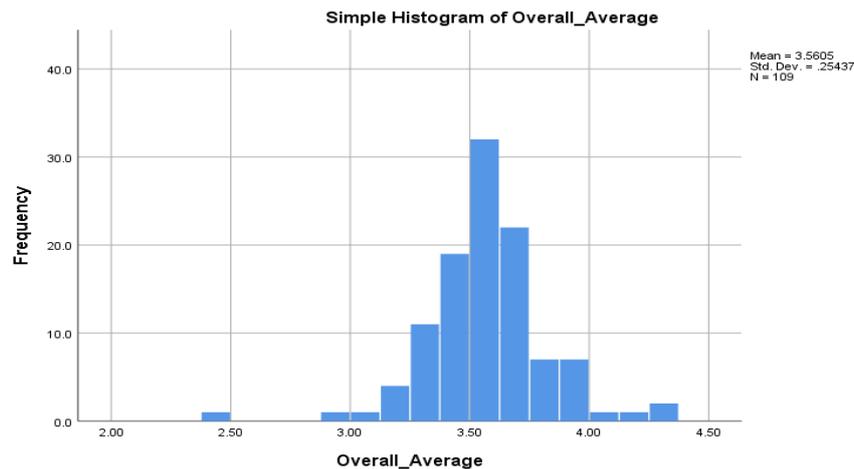
Demographic and personal factors	Categories	Mean	St. deviation
Gender	Male	3.57	0.262
	Female	3.53	0.235
Age	Under 30 years	3.49	0.289
	31 to 40 years	3.59	0.241
	41 to 50 years	3.51	0.281
	Above 50 years	3.56	0.146
Educational Level	Diploma	3.48	0.245
	Bachelor	3.56	0.222
	Master	3.78	0.160
Tenure	Less than 5 years	3.47	0.276
	5 to 10 years	3.54	0.216
	10 to 15 years	3.60	0.256
	More than 15 years	3.58	0.237
Current Position	Director	3.55	0.175
	Head of Departments	3.56	0.273

Table 3 explains the variation in the level of readiness for change among directors and heads of departments in the researched directorates in Zakho based on personal characteristics, such as gender, age, educational level, tenure, and position. Although there was no statistically significant difference based on these characteristics, some minor variance can be seen in the above table. For example, males and females differed slightly in term of their level of readiness for change. Males have shown to be more ready for the upcoming changes than females. There was also a modest difference in age groups, with individuals between the age 31 to 40 showing the highest level of change readiness. This is a good indicator as this age group represents more than half of the researched samples in the current study (see Table 2). In terms of educational level, the above table reveals that people with higher degrees shown a greater level of readiness for change. This indicates that the higher an individuals’ educational attainment, the more

likely they are to embrace and accept change. A slight difference was also found based on the number of years of experience. Individuals with 10-15 years of experience, who count for more than half of the researched sample, had the highest level of readiness for change (see Table 2). Finally, no variance was found based on the position as both the directors and heads of departments showed almost the same level of readiness.

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of respondents' overall averages on the X axis and the frequency of the participants on the Y axis. Despite a few outliers (skewed to the left), the overall averages of the respondents on the X axis appeared to be normally distributed. Furthermore, the figure also showed that the overall mean was 3.56 with standard deviation of 0.25. This indicates that the researched sample has a moderate level of readiness for change among. Moreover, the standard deviation value denotes a low amount of variation in the responses to the studied variables.

Figure 1: Data distribution



DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to assess the level of readiness for change among individuals' leadership positions in governmental directorates in "Zakho Independent Administration". The study focused mainly on evaluating four key dimensions of readiness for change, namely appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, and personally beneficial. Utilizing a standardized questionnaire, which is one of the widely used instrument for assessing readiness for change, have provided an understanding into a culture that had not previously been studied in the literature on readiness for change.

Different dimensions have been studied by researchers for determining individual readiness for change. These include participating in, promoting, and resisting change (Hanpachern et al., 1998) change commitment and change efficacy (Weiner, 2009) emotional readiness, intentional readiness, and cognitive readiness (Bouckenoghe et al., 2009) and discrepancy, appropriateness, efficacy, principal support, and valence (Armenakis et al., 2007). Krieger

(1996) also provided a good understanding about strengths and weaknesses of change readiness. This was through measuring degree of optimism, adventurousness, confidence, resourcefulness, tolerance for ambiguity, and adaptability that individuals have to be ready for change. The present study has utilized the (Holt et al., 2007) model, which asserted that appropriateness, management support, change efficacy, and personally beneficial are main determinants of individuals' readiness for change.

Findings from the current research illustrate a moderate level of readiness for change among the directors and heads of departments in Zakho governmental directorates across all four dimensions. The highest level was recorded with "Personally Beneficial" dimension. This indicates that individuals in leadership positions within the directorates in Zakho see that the organizational changes are personally beneficial for them. This reflects the individuals' beliefs that the upcoming change initiatives will not threaten their current status in their organization, will not negatively affect their personal relationships, and will not restrict their future opportunities due to these changes (Holt et al., 2007). "Change Efficacy" and "Appropriateness" both demonstrated a moderate level of readiness. This suggests that individuals in the researched directorates believe that they are capable of implementing organizational changes and admit that the organizational change initiatives are appropriate. This was due to the individuals' confidence in their abilities to make the upcoming changes, as well as the experience they attained from previous change efforts. Alongside with their beliefs about the necessity of adopting organizational changes and the benefits that the organization could obtain from these changes. In comparison to the other dimensions, "Management Support" has the lowest level of readiness. This indicates that directors and heads of department in the researched directorates do not believe that senior leaders support organizational change initiatives as required in order to be implemented successfully. This is due to the lack of encouragement to embrace change and absence of motivation to adequately implement it. Finally, the findings of this study are in line with those of (Moric Milovanovic et al., 2022) in Croatian construction companies, (Harrison, 2017) in South Africa, (Workeneh & Abebe, 2019) in an Ethiopian university, and (Olafsen et al., 2021), who also found a moderate level of readiness for change among individuals in Norwegian public organizations undergoing major strategic changes. This suggests that individuals should be prepared for change and educated about upcoming changes. In this regard, (Hanpachern et al., 1998) proposed that in order for the process of implementing change to be effective, human resources must be developed to embrace change prior to attempting to apply it.

CONCLUSION

The present study evaluated the level of readiness for change among directors and heads of departments in governmental directorates in "Zakho Independent Administration". The study attempted to investigate the extent to which these individuals in positions of leadership positions believe that upcoming organizational change initiatives are appropriate. Furthermore, it explained the extent to which these individuals see the top management support change efforts. It also revealed how much they believe they are capable of adapting to the new environment. Lastly, it indicated the degree to which they think their future status will benefit

them personally. The empirical results discovered that managers and heads of departments in the researched directorates are only partially ready for organizational change. In addition to that, the results also revealed that, statistically, demographic factors had no effect on the level of readiness for change.

LIMITATION AND FURTHER STUDIES

The following are some limitations of the current study:

1. Researchers have proposed several factors to assess readiness for change. The current study employed the four-dimensional model suggested by (Holt et al., 2007). Therefore, it is recommended that future studies use some other dimensions for this purpose.
2. While this research was conducted among individuals in positions of leadership, future studies may include ordinary employees who engage directly with the stakeholders.
3. Due to the time limit, the sample size used in the present study was small. It is advised that future studies incorporate a larger sample, which may provide a more accurate picture of the level of readiness among the researched population.
4. While the study simply sought to establish the level of change readiness, future research should look at the elements that influence individual readiness for change or the effects of being a ready person for change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the discussion of the literature of readiness for change, it was found that one of the main tools of implementing change programs successfully is to have change-ready individuals. In addition, the empirical results from the current study have identified a moderate level of readiness for change at the researched directorates among the directors and heads of departments. Therefore, for the change programs to be successfully implemented in Zakho governmental directorates, the researchers recommended the following procedures:

1. The local authority in “Zakho Independent Administrations” should strive continuously to create a suitable environment that is conducive to the desired change.
2. Explaining the necessity and importance of the change programs to the people in governmental directorates through increasing their consciousness of the upcoming changes in order to persuade them that the change is as an appropriate step.
3. Preparing the opportunity of having continual planned training, mentoring, and coaching programs for those who are in power position in order to be capable of implementing change initiatives successfully.
4. Senior leader and the top level of management, in Kurdistan Region in general, and the “Zakho Independent Administration” in particular, must promote organizational change in

order to convince lower-level of management that they have sufficient support to implement change.

5. Change programs must be designed in such a manner that practitioners feel and realize that the organizational changes are personally beneficial for them.

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