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# A framework for leading change in the UAE public sector

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to guide managers on business process reengineering (BPR) and automation projects in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) public sector context.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This paper relies on a literature review and synthesis in the areas of leadership, BPR, change management, user resistance and power to propose a change management framework.

**Findings** – The paper argues for attention to be paid to the power relationships among various stakeholders. Stakeholder impact analysis is recommended to understand how change will impact stakeholders and shift power balances. It proposes that leadership and communication are essential for implementing change, especially given the particular cultural conditions of the UAE. Moreover, change should be a continuous process supported by communication.

**Research limitations/implications** – As power and authority are very important elements of the UAE culture, future research should further examine the role of power in implementing organizational change in the UAE context.

**Practical implications** – This paper proposes a ten-step change management framework that adopts the latest thinking on change management to the UAE context.

**Originality/value** – Although change management is a well-established field, the body of knowledge that concentrates on the UAE organizational context is scant. This paper translates the latest thinking on change management to the UAE context (characterized by sensitivity to power issues and stakeholder impact) and proposes a practical framework for leading change in the UAE public sector context.

**Keywords** Change management, Business process reengineering, Power, Organizational change, Resistance, Automation

**Paper type** Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Over the past few decades, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been going through rapid changes (ADCED, 2008). The emirate of Abu Dhabi, the largest of the seven emirates comprising the UAE federation, is playing a major role in driving socioeconomic development of the country (SCAD, 2014). The UAE Government itself has been a major target of change and development in the UAE. As explained in Abu Dhabi's 2030 Vision (ADCED, 2008), the government of Abu Dhabi is committed to reengineering and automation of its processes to achieve greater operational excellence. In fact, the government of UAE as a whole is committed to becoming one of the top five governments in the world in terms of the quality of public services provided.



This transformation will require radical changes in business processes. Unfortunately, business process reengineering (BPR) and business process automation (BPA) are often resisted by UAE public sector employees. Regular employees tend to resist BPR and BPA because they fear losing their jobs because of the redesigning or the automating of their job tasks. Some employees resist by changing the workflows within their areas of responsibility to avoid complying with the new processes. Likewise, managers may resist BPR and BPA if they think that the reengineered and automated processes may lead to delegating authority to their subordinates, thereby diminishing their influence within the organization. Resistance from regular employees and senior managers can turn a BPR or a BPA project into a “political battlefield” – something that may lead to the failure of these initiatives. The main goal of this paper, then, is to devise an effective change management framework for carrying out BPR and BPA in the UAE public sector. The framework takes into account the uniqueness of the UAE context and draws on two broad theoretical perspectives: leadership and change management.

## Literature review

### *BPR and BPA*

BPR and BPA are organizational initiatives that aim to enhance speed, efficiency and quality of organizational processes (Aler *et al.*, 2002; Hammer, 1993; Hesson, 2007). BPR involves fundamental rethinking and redesigning of organizational processes to reduce cost, improve quality and optimize time of organizational processes (Hammer, 1993). BPA involves capturing business workflows and using technology to automate and streamline these workflows (Hesson, 2007; Samaranayake, 2009). BPR and BPA can potentially eliminate non-value-adding steps in organizational processes and improve cost, quality and time of these processes. In service organizations, these benefits are often achieved with the help of information and communication technologies that facilitate creation, storage, retrieval, exchange and visualization of data and information (Olalla, 2000). Thus, information technology (IT) is often viewed as a “fundamental capacitor” of both BPR and BPA (Hammer, 1993; Olalla, 2000).

### *Barriers to BPR and BPA in UAE*

As indicated above, the UAE Government is committed to its vision of turning its government into one of the top five governments in the world in terms of the quality of public services provided (ADCED, 2008), which will require public organizations to undertake BPR or BPA projects. Despite the strategic importance of these BPR and BPA initiatives, UAE public organizations often encounter fierce resistance when trying to implement them (Al-Khoury and Bal, 2007; Al-Yahya, 2009; Hesson, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012; Badawy, 1980; ADCED, 2008). The problem is that the UAE social culture often clashes with the organizational culture that is needed to successfully achieve change (Badawy, 1980; Muna, 1980; Darwish, 1998; Yaseen and Okour, 2012; Common, 2011). Several organizational and individual factors are behind this clash and give rise to resistance. The major factors engendering resistance are discussed below.

### *Organizational resistance factors*

The UAE is a young nation, and many of its social and economic institutes are still emerging. Because of that, the UAE public sector often suffers from the lack of organizational maturity and stability (Al-Khoury and Bal, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Research shows that the lack of organizational maturity and stability is usually

accompanied by the lack of change management capabilities and often results in frequent conflicts among employees and business units (Nedovic-Budic and Godschalk, 1996; Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007).

Moreover, the social culture of the UAE may result in bureaucracy being deeply ingrained in some of the aspects of public sector operations (Yaseen and Okour, 2012; Al-Yahya, 2009). Bureaucracy often captures, solidifies and legitimizes the power relationships within UAE organizations. An attempt to simplify or even modify bureaucracy often creates political conflicts among employees and functional units. Thus, bureaucracy tends to be a major obstacle to BPR in the UAE public sector (Jurisch, 2012; Kudray and Kleiner, 1997).

Lack of management commitment and sponsorship is another important factor of organizational resistance to BPR in the UAE public sector (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Al-Yahya, 2009; Yaseen and Okour, 2012; Badawy, 1980). The culture of the UAE encourages compliance with the vision of a leader. Absence of clear executive support can create ambiguities in the goals and objectives of a change initiative or even make employees feel “lost” and “paralyzed” (Barley, 1990). Moreover, absence of management support can result in poor participation and collaboration among the involved functional units and employees (Crowswell, 1991). Finally, lack of executive support can deprive a BPR project of necessary resources (Barley, 1990; Bensaou and Earl, 1998; Crowswell, 1991).

Poor communication is another frequently encountered organizational obstacle to change in the UAE public sector. With the UAE social culture placing value on individual privacy, shared decision-making and collective responsibility, managers are often reluctant to regularly communicate in relation to a change initiative in an open and direct manner. This lack of communication often creates a divide between functional units involved in a change initiative (Al-Mashari and Zairi, 1999; Dixon *et al.*, 1994; Fondas, 1993; Rodney and John, 1999). This can result in inconsistent interpretation and implementation of project’s goals and objectives (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012).

#### *Individual resistance factors*

Resistance to BPR and BPA because of the fear of losing power is of special concern in the UAE public sector. Power and decision-making authority are very important and sensitive areas in UAE organizations. This sensitivity is a result of the “tribal” social structure of the UAE that existed in the past (Peterson, 1977; Al-Yahya, 2009; Common, 2011). The harsh and resource-deprived desert environment left many tribes with no margin for error. Tribal leaders faced immense challenges in ensuring survival and well-being of their people. These challenges lead many tribal leaders to adopt a rather centralized decision-making process (Mimouni and Metcalfe, 2011). All decisions related to social, political and financial issues within a tribe were handled solely by the tribe leader. Many of these challenges are now gone because of the impressive socioeconomic growth in the UAE over the past few decades. Yet, this culture is still deeply engraved in the minds of some employees in the UAE public sector (Al-Yahya, 2009; Yaseen and Okour, 2012; Common, 2011). Losing any portion of authority, legitimacy or respect (no matter how small the loss is) is viewed as a serious threat (Hesson, 2007; Al-Yahya, 2009; Silva and Backhouse, 2003).

Lack of IT competence among employees often causes fear of losing power and results in user resistance to BPR (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Hesson, 2007). IT competence here is understood as the skills and knowledge required to efficiently operate these technologies. As many BPR and BPA projects are driven by IT, it becomes necessary for all employees to use IT skillfully (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Bensaou and Earl, 1998). Employees who cannot master a particular technology or tool feel helpless and incapable – a situation often referred to as a “technical shock”. Employees are afraid of “technical shock”, as this may damage their reputation and legitimacy within the organization (Pacific Council, 2002). Because of that, UAE public sector employees, especially the older generation, often prefer to stay away from change involving technology.

Fear of losing employment is another important individual resistance factor to BPR and BPA in the UAE public sector (Hesson, 2007; Silva and Backhouse, 2003; Dorthy and Kraus, 1985; Silva, 2007). The majority of the UAE workforce are expatriate employees (SCAD, 2014). Expatriates often think that BPR and BPA initiatives will inevitably result in at least partial replacement of the expatriate workforce with the UAE nationals (Hesson, 2007; Al-Yahya, 2009). The UAE nationals, in turn, may feel that BPR and BPA can result in automation of their duties and will make their jobs redundant or less relevant. These concerns often give rise to fierce resistance to change in the UAE public sector from expatriates and UAE nationals alike.

Lack of perceived personal benefits is another important resistance factor. This perception makes employees view BPR and BPA as a burden and not as a vehicle for improving and streamlining operations (Kudray and Kleiner, 1997; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Fairness is a crucial cornerstone of the UAE social culture. Uneven distribution of burdens and rewards in an organization is viewed as unfair and tends to be resisted fiercely by employees. However, a BPR initiative may require sacrifices from some individuals while benefitting others. In such a situation, the UAE social norms and values will often override the organizational culture and bring a BPR to a standstill until a fair compromise is reached (Badawy, 1980; Darwish, 1998; Muna, 1980; Yaseen and Okour, 2012).

Table I summarizes the main causes of resistance to BPR and BPA as discussed in this section. The resistance factors are derived from general literature on resistance to change as well as studies conducted specifically in the UAE or Middle Eastern context. As previously explained, any change management framework aiming at facilitating BPR and BPA in the UAE public sector should take these individual and organizational resistance factors into account.

### *Theoretical perspectives for overcoming barriers to BPR and BPA*

Two broad theoretical perspectives explain the resistance factors discussed above and can potentially guide managers on successfully implementing BPR and BPA: leadership and change management. Both theoretical perspectives together with their potential applications in BPR and BPA are discussed in more detail below.

#### *Leadership*

Leadership has always been viewed as a critical success factor in change management, as leadership is essential for formulating the end vision for a change program and enforcing this change (Crowswell, 1991; Ginzberg, 1981; Grover *et al.*, 1995; Taleai *et al.*,

Reasons for BPR and BPA resistance	Literature
<i>Organizational factors</i>	
Lack of organizational maturity and stability	General (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Nedovic-Budic and Godschalk, 1996) UAE-specific (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012)
Bureaucracy and traditions	General (Jurisch, 2012; Kudray and Kleiner, 1997) UAE-specific (Al-Yahya, 2009; Yaseen and Okour, 2012)
Lack of management commitment	General (Barley, 1990; Bensaou and Earl, 1998; Crowswell, 1991; Taher <i>et al.</i> , 2012) UAE-specific (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Al-Yahya, 2009; Badawy, 1980; Yaseen and Okour, 2012)
Poor communication	General (Al-Mashari and Zairi, 1999; Dixon <i>et al.</i> , 1994; Fondas, 1993; Rodney and John, 1999) UAE-specific (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012)
Conflicting interpretations of how technology should be implemented and used	General (Barley, 1990; Bensaou and Earl, 1998; Crowswell, 1991) UAE-specific (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012)
<i>Individual factors</i>	
Fear of losing power	General (Dorthy and Kraus, 1985; Silva and Backhouse, 2003; Silva, 2007) UAE-specific (Al-Yahya, 2009; Common, 2011; Hesson, 2007; Mimouni and Metcalfe, 2011; Peterson, 1977; Yaseen and Okour, 2012)
Lack of required technical knowledge	General (Bensaou and Earl, 1998; Pacific Council, April 2002) UAE-specific (Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Hesson, 2007)
Threatened job security	General (Hesson, 2007; Silva and Backhouse, 2003; Taher <i>et al.</i> , 2012) UAE-specific (Al-Yahya, 2009; Hesson, 2007)
Lack of perceived personal benefits	General (Kudray and Kleiner, 1997; Taher <i>et al.</i> , 2012) UAE-specific (Badawy, 1980; Darwish, 1998; Muna, 1980; Yaseen and Okour, 2012)

**Table I.**  
Barriers to BPR and BPA

2009). Leadership also promotes the necessary values and beliefs among the stakeholders impacted by change (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2007). In addition to that, leadership fosters organizational commitment to the initiative and consistent availability of resources. Leadership can also have a positive impact on technology implementation via mitigation of impediments to change.

Leadership is a combination of processes and behaviors (Barker, 2002; Winston and Patterson, 2006). Leadership can be manifested in a particular person (leader) or a group of people (steering committee). Northouse (2013, p. 5) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. A group of people can be influenced in a number of ways: via a visionary mindset, team



building and development and challenging the current status quo (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Numerous theories of leadership have been proposed. This includes contingency theory of leadership, functional theory, transformational leadership and transactional leadership. Each of these perspectives is discussed in detail below.

Transactional leadership looks at the followers from a managerial perspective. This perspective is rather utilitarian: although focusing on immediate objectives and processes that can be used to accomplish these objectives, it does not take into account the followers' needs for personal and professional development (Bass, 1985, 1990; Northouse, 2007, 2013). Transactional leadership mainly focuses on two factors: contingent rewards and management by expectations (Bass, 1990; Northouse, 2007, 2013). Contingent rewards are used to shape the relationships between leaders and followers by rewarding followers for following the directions and accomplishing tasks formulated by the leader (Northouse, 2013). Management by expectation relies on leader intervention. This intervention can be either positive or negative, depending on the result, that is, followers pursuing or not a particular objective as proposed by the manager (Northouse, 2013).

Contingency theories of leadership posit that there is no single leadership style that can be used in all situations and contexts (Hersey and Blanchard, 1974; Hersey, 1964; Michaelsen, 1973; Fiedler, 1964); hence, the effectiveness of a particular leadership style depends on the characteristics of the situation and the followers. Accordingly, before choosing a leadership style, a leader needs to carefully analyze the environment, so his or her line of action responds directly to the specific circumstances of the situation at hand (Fiedler, 1964; Hersey and Blanchard, 1974; Hersey, 1964; Michaelsen, 1973).

Transformational leadership theory was initially introduced by Burns (1978) and Bass (1985). Burns (1978) defines transformational leadership as "process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation". Bass (1985, p. 22) defines transformational leader as a leader who "[...] induces additional effort by further sharply increasing subordinate confidence and by elevating the value of outcomes for the subordinate". The theory of transformational leadership is the most widely used in both practice and research (Northouse, 2007). The transformational leadership theory explains organizational change in the context of BPR and BPA projects, as organizational change often requires employees not only to modify the processes comprising their tasks but also to change their values and beliefs to raise their overall performance to a higher level.

### *Change management*

Change management is another theoretical perspective that can be used to foster success of BPR and BPA. Effective change management can produce a number of benefits for a BPR or BPA initiative at the individual and organizational levels (Schein, 1999). From the organizational perspective, clear change management approach can facilitate a solid understanding of why change needs to happen (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Gilley *et al.*, 2001). This perspective suggests sharing change plans with functional units, as this can result in better recognition of barriers to change and identification of workarounds. In addition to that, this perspective recommends participation of employees and functional units in the formulation of change plans with the purpose of ensuring their commitment (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). From the employees' perspective, understanding reasons behind change and participating in decisions with respect to change can transform

individuals from resistors to agents of change (Crowswell, 1991; Hesson, 2007). Employees' commitment to change can help in meeting the goals and objectives of BPR or BPA projects (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Dorthy and Kraus, 1985).

Commonly, change management is understood as a process that facilitates change within an organization (Kudray and Kleiner, 1997; Rothwell and Sullivan, 2005). For example, Rothwell and Sullivan (2005) define change management as "the process of helping a person, group or organization change". Kudray and Kleiner (1997, p. 18) view change management from a competition and market perspective, defining it as "continuous process of aligning an organization with its marketplace – and doing it more responsively and effectively than competitors". In this paper, change management is defined as follows:

[...] a process of communicating and enforcing a program consisting of clearly defined, time-framed actions needed to take an organization from an undesirable state A to a desirable state B, with both states being clearly defined and measurable (Taher *et al.*, 2012, p. 347).

The idea of change management was introduced by the "father" of scientific management – Taylor (1967). Taylor's initial ideas can be framed with four main concepts: BPR, compensation, communication and sponsorship. In the BPR area, Taylor (1967) claimed that to increase productivity of workers, optimization (or simplification) of individual jobs is required. He also stressed the importance of compensation as a motivating factor. As a part of this idea, he promoted the idea of "a fair day's pay for a day's work" – a cornerstone of the subsequent socialist movement in many countries across the globe. Taylor (1967) also noticed that to increase efficiency, the right people should be assigned to the right jobs. Managerial involvement and communication were suggested as techniques for assessing employee skills, assigning employees to the right task and directing employees in accomplishing a specific goal. Since Taylor's original work, numerous theories and approaches of change management have been proposed.

In 1952, Lewin added a significant social dimension to Taylor's rather mechanical perspective on change (Coghlan and Brannick, 2003). The Lewin model views change as a project involving the following three broad stages: unfreeze, transition and refreeze. Conceptually, Lewin shifted the focus from scientific management to social psychology in each of these phases (Gilley *et al.*, 2001; Papanek, 1973; Kritsonis, 2005). Although being quite popular up to the present moment, Lewin's model has been criticized for being applicable only for pre-planned and incremental change projects (By, 2005). Given the dynamic and unstable context of contemporary organizations, the usefulness and explanatory power of Lewin's model has been questioned (By, 2005).

Kotter proposes an eight-step model, which primarily focuses on ensuring employee commitment (or "buy-in") (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). This model deems employee resistance as the most important impediment to change. Thus, it highlights the relevance of ensuring key employees' commitment to change by explaining the benefits that the organization and individuals may gain as a result of the proposed change. It has been demonstrated that Kotter's model can be quite effective in organizations with a traditional hierarchical structure (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). This is due to the model's emphasis on commands from the top rather than participative decision-making. Yet, using Kotter's model can be quite challenging in decentralized organizations or in situations where change is non-linear and iterative. In these contexts, problems may



arise because of the steps not being followed in the right order or skipped altogether (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012).

Prosci proposes the ADKAR model (awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement) that is considered to be a reliable change management model when it comes to focused change (i.e. there is a specific area where change needs to happen) (Hiatt, 2006). ADKAR provides a goal-oriented framework that helps managers to convey objectives of the proposed change before the process is initiated. The primary focus of Prosci's ADKAR model is to make individuals change. In addition, it emphasizes specific business results. The model practicality is further enhanced by a checklist-based formulation allowing organization's management to better manage proposed change. Yet, it overlooked the role of leadership to create direction to change.

### Change management plan

Drawing on the transformational leadership perspective and existing change management frameworks discussed earlier, the study proposes a new change management framework specifically for the UAE context. The proposed change management framework has a number of features that make it distinct from previously proposed approaches to change management and valuable for the UAE public sector context due to its ability to address the main individual and organizational resistance factors discussed above (Table II). First, the framework recognizes the utmost importance of leadership for instilling change in a context similar to that in the UAE (Peterson, 1977; Al-Khouri and Bal, 2007; Al-Yahya, 2009; Common, 2011; Hesson, 2007). Second, the framework gives stakeholder analysis – namely, analysis of how proposed change will impact individuals, units and organizations, including power relationships among them – a

Reasons for BPR and BPA resistance	Steps in the framework
<i>Organizational factor</i>	
Lack of organizational maturity and stability	Step 1: assign a project leader/sponsor
Bureaucracy and traditions	Step 2: instill communication
Lack of top management commitment	Step 3: capture the current situation with areas of concerns and related measures
Poor communication	Step 4: formulate the future desired situation with specific measures
Conflicting interpretations of how technology should be implemented and used	Step 5: create a detailed action plan for transition from the current situation to future situation
	Step 9: establish time frame for implementing the action plan
	Step 10: evaluate the results of implementing the action plan and, if necessary, repeat the change process
<i>Individual factor</i>	
Fear of losing power	Step 6: identify stakeholders who will be affected by change
Lack of required technical knowledge	Step 7: establish proper reward and deterrence mechanisms for impacted stakeholders
Threatened job security	Step 8: assign human resources to action items
Lack of perceived personal benefits	

**Table II.**  
Summary of  
framework in  
relation to BPR and  
BPA resistance

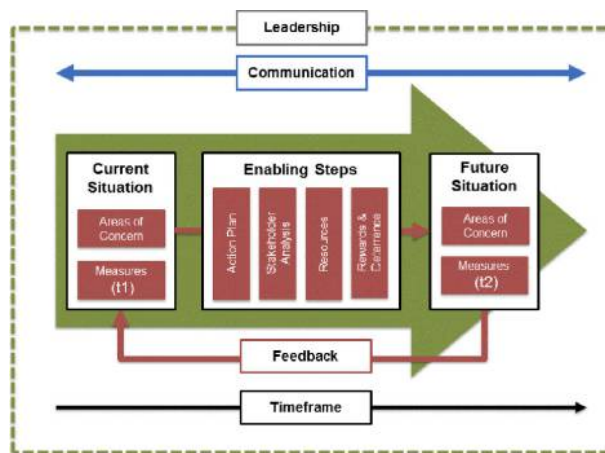
central place in the change management process (Barley, 1990; Bensaou and Earl, 1998; Crowswell, 1991; Issa-Salwe *et al.*, 2010; Al-Khoury and Bal, 2007). This is very important, given the relevance of power, power relations and fairness in the UAE context (Al-Yahya, 2009; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Third, the framework recognizes the fact that change usually does not happen at once (Hammer, 1993), as it requires continuous evaluation of results and several iterations of the change management process (Hesson, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Finally, the change management framework emphasizes the fundamental role of organization-wide communication and a specific time frame for each of the change iterations (Bai and Sarkis, 2013; Yaseen and Okour, 2012) (Figure 1).

*Step 1: assign a project leader/sponsor*

Management commitment is a crucial factor in introducing and managing change in the UAE context (Al-Khoury and Bal, 2007; Hesson, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Assigning a project sponsor or leader who has influence within the organization and demonstrates transformational leadership characteristics can be seen as a demonstration of senior management’s commitment to BPR or PBA (Davies, 2011; Layton, 2012; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Davies (2011) argues that the more influential a project sponsor is, the less resistance from functional units and individuals the organization will experience. Transformational leadership behavior exhibited by the project sponsor can help overcome organizational bureaucracy and resources scarcity (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Northouse, 2013; Badawy, 1980).

*Step 2: instill communication*

Instilling the importance of effective communication is a crucial step in managing change in the UAE public sector, as it helps in educating employees about the purpose of BPR and ensuring their commitment (Layton, 2012; Davies, 2011). Communication is essential to conveying top management concerns about current performance within a particular area of a public organization (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012). The sponsor should also use communication to eliminate fears of termination (among the expatriates) or



**Figure 1.**  
Ten-step framework  
for leading change in  
the UAE public  
sector

decreased legitimacy (among the UAE nationals). Finally, communication can be a vehicle to reconcile difference of opinions among the functional units as to what the main goals and objectives of change are and how they should be achieved (Barley, 1990; Bensaou and Earl, 1998).

*Step 3: capture the current situation with areas of concern and related measures*

Understanding and capturing specific process inefficiencies is an important millstone of change (Schein, 1999). In the UAE public sector, most of the process inefficiencies are related to length or complexity of processes (Badawy, 1980; Hesson, 2007; Hesson *et al.*, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Upon detecting inefficient processes, the initiative sponsor (in collaboration with the functional units “owning” the process) should capture the current practices and performance metrics in relation to the process (Crowswell, 1991; Hesson, 2007). This step helps to formally acknowledge specific process inefficiencies and eliminate possible disputes with the defenders of the existing ways of doing things. The current “as is” situation will also be used as a baseline to measure the success of the proposed change (Yaseen and Okour, 2012).

*Step 4: formulate the future, desired situation with specific measures*

Having identified the areas of concern, the initiative sponsor should formulate a vision for the desired future state in these areas (Biygautane and Al-Yahya, 2010, 2011). The formulation is necessary to help team members to understand the nature of change required and to focus on attaining this future vision. Moreover, key performance indicators shall be set to measure the intermediate success of the proposed change (Hammer, 1993; Hesson, 2007; Layton, 2012). The defined performance measures should consider incremental progress to improve chances of the buy-in among the public sector employees. In the absence of small incremental changes, a milestone proposed change may be viewed as overwhelming, and thus resisted by employees (Krotov *et al.*, 2011).

*Step 5: create a detailed action plan for transition from the current situation to the future situation*

After specifying the desired future situation, a detailed action plan needs to be formulated. The action plan should specify the necessary steps to move from the current organizational state to the desired “to be” situation. The plan should include action descriptions, execution approaches, measures, initial resource plans and time frames (Biygautane and Al-Yahya, 2010, 2011; Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Likewise, the sponsor should seek the plan’s approval from the highest possible authority within the organization. This is critical for legitimizing the plan and ensuring employee commitment. The plan, if approved, will allow the sponsor to mitigate potential barriers created by poor commitment of employees or bureaucracy (Al-Yahya, 2009; Yaseen and Okour, 2012).

*Step 6: identify stakeholders who will be affected by change*

In the UAE public sector, just like in any other context, resistance to BPR often comes from people who are directly or indirectly impacted by the change (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012; Hesson, 2007; Crowswell, 1991; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Thus, the needs and interests of the impacted stakeholders should be properly addressed to ensure the success of the BPR (Al-Mashari and Zairi, 1999; Dixon *et al.*, 1994; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Identification of stakeholders who will be impacted by the change and

introducing incentives down the road will help the sponsor eliminate individual resistance factors that might appear during the course of change. For example, a project sponsor should analyze how the proposed change will impact power, authority and legitimacy of key UAE nationals and expatriates.

*Step 7: establish proper reward and deterrence mechanisms for impacted stakeholders*  
Creating appropriate rewards and disciplinary mechanisms motivates impacted employees to contribute to the desired change and eventually helps with institutionalizing this change (Dorthy and Kraus, 1985; Pacific Council, 2002; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). This is relevant in the context of our framework, as the UAE public sector often fails to adopt rewards and deterrence mechanisms for employees that are impacted in change initiatives (Darwish, 1998; Yaseen and Okour, 2012; Al-Yahya, 2009). Reward and deterrence mechanism can turn employee's resistance into involvement and commitment (Badawy, 1980; Dorthy and Kraus, 1985; Kudray and Kleiner, 1997; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). It is critical not only to formulate these reward and deterrence mechanisms but also to educate employees on how these mechanisms are aligned with the broader organizational goals (Hesson *et al.*, 2007; Silva, 2007; Silva and Backhouse, 2003). Once instilled and communicated, these mechanisms will help employees to self-monitor their attainment to tasks as related to the change initiative (Al-Yahya, 2009; Silva, 2007; Silva and Backhouse, 2003; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Those who fail to cooperate should be recognized as resisters, and appropriate deterrence mechanisms could be applied to them consistently, ensuring a sense of fairness among those who actually put effort into implementing change.

*Step 8: assign human resources to action items*

Allocation of adequate resources, especially human resources, is one of the key elements of a successful BPR project in the UAE context (Davies, 2011). Impacted functional units should be obliged to assist the initiative sponsor with employees who can be made responsible for implementing the change in their respective units. Accordingly, assigned employees should be authorized to implement changes, use the allocated resources and request additional ones, if necessary (Carroll, 2012; Layton, 2012; Al-Yahya, 2009). Assigning human resources to specific areas of change is necessary not only for actual implementation of these changes but also for ensuring employee commitment to change. Employees, when assigned to implement changes, often take ownership of the new processes and advocate the same level of commitment among their peers.

*Step 9: establish time frame for implementing the action plan*

Actions in a project are associated within a time frame (Davies, 2011; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). In the UAE public sector, changes in business operations and business processes should be given enough time to produce expected outcomes (Hesson, 2007). Extra time is needed due to the bureaucracy (Al-Yahya, 2009; Hesson, 2007; Muna, 1980) and lack of organizational maturity (Al-Khoury and Bal, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012) that are often found in the UAE public sector. The initiative sponsor should also be authorized to shift the previously agreed upon time frames to accommodate unforeseen events. However, it is extremely important to communicate the original time frames and stick to them as much as possible. In the UAE context, change can easily remain "in progress" forever, more so than in other contexts (Project Management Institute, 2008).

*Step 10: evaluate the results of implementing the action plan and, if necessary, repeat the change process*

Evaluating the results produced by induced changes in organizational processes is critical for ensuring the attainment of goals and objectives of a BPR project (Carroll, 2012; Layton, 2012). This entails conducting continuous evaluations of the impact caused by changes on specific employees and functional units. Unfortunately, the UAE public organizations often lack stability and maturity to make continuous evaluations an integral part of normal operations (Al-Khoury and Bal, 2007; Al-Yahya, 2009; Hesson, 2007; Muna, 1980; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). Yet, evaluation is crucial for determining whether the intended changes produced the intended results or not (Al-Yahya, 2009; Hesson, 2007; Yaseen and Okour, 2012). If the necessary results were not achieved, Steps 3-9 should be repeated (many times if necessary) to bring the organization closer to the desired “to be” situation.

### **Implications for research**

The main contribution of this study is translating techniques to change management that have been predominantly developed in the West to the specific context of the UAE public sector. The proposed framework offers a practical advice that can help managers successfully introduce and manage change in the UAE public sector context. Further research is needed to test the framework. As power is very important in the UAE organizational context, future research could concentrate on understanding the power component of change. Moreover, given the ambitious nationalization (or Emiratization) targets in the UAE public sector workforce, future research should investigate the impact of technology-driven BPR and BPA on the older generation of the UAE nationals. Given the small proportion of UAE nationals in the population, many of the public organizations will have no choice but to find ways of integrating the older generation within the new processes. Thus, future research is needed to understand how technology-driven change impacts the older generation of employees and how IT competencies can be nurtured in this demographic subgroup.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the rapid socioeconomic development of the UAE over the past few decades, the culture of the UAE is still Bedouin at heart. This culture places extreme importance on leadership and power, values personal communication and puts great emphasis on understanding peoples’ needs and concerns. The UAE public sector workforce is increasingly comprising UAE nationals. Therefore, these aspects of Emirati culture require special attention when implementing change. Failure to take into account these elements of the UAE social and organizational culture often brings BPR or BPA projects to a standstill, with the exact causes of the stalling often remaining a mystery (especially for those managers practicing Western style of management).

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