

Discomfort and organizational change as a part of becoming a world-class university

Discomfort and
organizational
change

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Fiona Niska Dinda Nadia and Badri Munir Sukoco

Department of Management, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia

Ely Susanto

Department of Public Policy and Management, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Ahmad Rizki Sridadi

Department of Management, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia, and

Reza Ashari Nasution

School of Business and Management, Bandung Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examined organizational change in universities as it relates to discomfort among the organization's members.

Design/methodology/approach – Using the critical incident technique (CIT), data was collected from the informants in an Indonesian public university that had been mandated by the government to enter the top 500 world university ranking. This would make it a “World-Class” university.

Findings – The findings describe the causes, courses and consequences of the discomfort felt in response to the organizational change in the university context. The causes of discomfort were categorized as a fear of loss, organizational culture, systems and policies, work overload and a lack of resources. Discomfort can manifest through negative affective, cognition and behavioral tendencies. Meanwhile, the consequences result in active and passive participation in the process of the organizational change itself.

Originality/value – Discomfort with organizational change is a new variable that has rarely been explored, thus it requires testing and validation using different methods and contexts, as offered by this study. We have also shown that in the initial stage of organizational change (unfreezing), discomfort will always emerge that must be immediately managed in order not to trigger resistance to change. Furthermore, this study exhibits the use of the critical incident technique in the context of organizational change. Finally, we offer comprehensive views by exhibiting the causes, the reactions shown and the consequences of discomfort with the change.

Keywords Organisational change, Discomfort, Resistance to change, Universities, Critical incident technique, Indonesia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Many studies have found that around 70% of change initiatives fail. The ability of an organization to manage and implement a change program is essential for there to be a successful organizational change (Gigliotti *et al.*, 2018; Amis *et al.*, 2004). The major determinant of successful organizational change is gaining acceptance and support from the organization's members (Rafferty *et al.*, 2013; Herold *et al.*, 2007). However, the process of changing an organization is inseparable from various problems, especially those related to any resistance to the changes that occur (Stanley *et al.*, 2005). It is considered to be the main



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cause of the failure of an organization's change efforts (Bovey and Hede, 2001; Prochaska *et al.*, 2001).

Resistance to change begins with discomfort with the change (Agboola and Salawu, 2011). This is because every process within the change will undoubtedly disturb the comfort zone of the organization's members (Holbeche, 2006). When their comfort zone is disturbed, the support for change will be less than optimal because of their unwillingness to contribute to the change process (Bovey and Hede, 2001). Moreover, the psychological aspect of an organization member, such as their discomfort, can have a dramatic impact on the effectiveness of organizational change (Battistelli *et al.*, 2014). It is therefore worth exploring the subject to examine the issue of discomfort with change so then the change manager can plan and intervene using the change strategies more effectively. They do this by dealing with the discomfort in accordance with the identified sources of discomfort. If the discomfort that is the primary trigger of resistance to change (Lewin, 1947) can be managed properly during the organizational change, then the probability of success will increase (García-Cabrera and Hernández, 2014).

Surprisingly, research into the discomfort with organizational change has rarely been done (Branch *et al.*, 2013; Bareil *et al.*, 2007). Bareil *et al.* (2007) found that there were two discomfort patterns associated with change: situational and dispositional. Branch *et al.* (2013) examined discomfort as a mediating variable between self-efficacy and the readiness to change. The previous research used more quantitative methods (e.g. surveys) which are inadequate to fully comprehend the concept of discomfort. Questions regarding why discomfort arises, the reactions to it and its consequences during organizational change have yet to be explored as demonstrated by the previous studies.

The opening up of the labor markets globally and the demands of an increasingly dynamic world community have led to dramatic changes in the character and function of universities in many countries (Deem *et al.*, 2008; Yang and Welch, 2012), especially in emerging countries (Zhang *et al.*, 2016). To increase national competitiveness, the Indonesian government has used the *World University Ranking* (WUR) as a benchmark for the performance and quality of its universities. The baseline for being called a *World-Class Universities* (WCUs) is being in the Top 500 WUR. The government of Indonesia, through the Decree of the Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education (MRTHE) No. 522b/M/Kp/IX/2015, mandated its five top public universities to enter the Top 500 WUR. The existence of WCUs is very important to attract the best talent, both national and international, as creative classes develop knowledge and enable the creative economy in Indonesia (Florida, 2005).

Two of the primary ranking institutions, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and the Times Higher Education (THE), emphasize research heavily. QS places 60% of their weighting to research quality (QS Top Universities, 2018) while THE does so for about 65% (The World University Ranking, 2018). Consequently, the top management teams (TMTs) of the five public universities as well as the other remaining universities have adopted the suggested research indicators and changed their policies. Another decree from MRTHE No. 20/2017 asserted that all associate and full professors in Indonesia must publish papers in academic journals that are indexed by Scopus. This is due to the use of this database by QS and the WUR. Based on Law No. 12/2012, lecturers in Indonesia have the main task of doing research, teaching and being in service to society in a balanced manner. This is known as "Tridharma" (Sandy and Shen, 2019). Changing from being teaching-oriented to research-oriented in a short time might make most lecturers feel discomfort in terms of the changes made for the sake of WCU status. Under these circumstances, we have explored the discomfort of gaining WCUs status in a public university in Indonesia.

Literature review

Organizational change involves large-scale changes that affect behavior and the more fundamental organizational culture (Bapuuroh, 2017). Organizational change results in

modifications to the organization's systems including its traditional way of working, values, structures and strategies (Rafferty *et al.*, 2013). Historically, a higher education institution's mission rests on three basic functions; teaching, research and service to society (Arias-Coello *et al.*, 2020; Montesinos *et al.*, 2008). The teaching mission describes the knowledge transfer used to improve the student's skills, enabling them to enter the labor market (Arias-Coello *et al.*, 2020). The aim of the teaching mission is to disseminate knowledge from generation to generation (Tran *et al.*, 2019). Meanwhile, the research mission related to scientific activities in order to expand the boundary of understanding through creating new knowledge (Tran *et al.*, 2019; Scott, 2006). The third mission, service to society, includes the contributions of higher education to both the economy and society (Sánchez-Barrioluengo *et al.*, 2019).

Initially, universities focus more on the teaching mission but along with the increased competition over the last decade, the research mission is prioritized (Castro-Ceacero and Ion, 2019). Hence, drastic organizational change is required. Teaching-oriented universities express there to be a certain tension when "the rules of the game" changes to be more research-oriented (Castro-Ceacero and Ion, 2019; Albert *et al.*, 2016). Scientific publication is one of the few measures of research productivity used to prove their academic talent to the world. As a research-oriented university, the number of publications is considered to be an important criterion for the lecturers related to appreciation, rewards and research grants (Sandy and Shen, 2019). It has caused conflicts regarding the different perceptions of the lecturers between their teaching functions and the new approach adopted by the university to manage their research functions (Castro-Ceacero and Ion, 2019).

The change management model used as the basis of this study is Lewin's Three-Phase Process. We used Lewin's Three-Phase Process because it is a robust approach to understanding the complexity of human behavior and how it can be changed, as mentioned by Burnes (2020). It is also well-known as being the most influential approach to organizational change (Burnes, 2004, 2020; Bartunek and Woodman, 2015).

As the name implies, Lewin's Three-Phase Process consists of three main stages; unfreezing, moving and refreezing (Lewin, 1947). The first stage, "unfreezing," is referred to as the start of the change process by forming the motivation to change in the organizational members (Burnes and Cooke, 2013). The second stage, "moving," is the implementation of change after preparing the organization through learning, support and communication (Paquibut and Al Naamany, 2019). The "refreezing" stage requires stabilizing and maintaining the change, when people start working using new ways and accept the change (Allaoui and Benmoussa, 2020).

In addition, Lewin (1947) explained that in the earliest stage of organizational change, the unfreezing stage, there are often various obstacles such as the emergence of discomfort, imbalance and anxiety due to the changes. The change process begins with a discomfort that occurs due to the anxiety of the organization members who will have to change their competencies, roles, positions of power, identity and group membership, thus leading to resistance to change. This concept is also supported by Erwin and Garman (2010) who explained that resistance to change results from the perceptions of the organization's members about a loss of "comfort" and privilege, individual versus organizational interests and job loss. A previous research study conducted by Bailey and Raelin (2015) also found that resistance to change occurs because they already feel too "comfortable" in their current position and fear that any changes will threaten their identity in the organization. In essence, they react not to the changes that occur but to the losses caused by the changes (Bailey and Raelin, 2015). This fear of loss is what causes discomfort.

The Psychological Model of Resistance (Agboola and Salawu, 2011) states that resistance to change is a concept that reflects the discomfort of the organizational members with the process modifications. It is in the nature of individuals to oppose any kind of change. The concept implies that what is opposed to by the members of the organization is not the change

itself but the consequences of it, such as losing their status, money or the comfort that has been obtained before the change process takes place. As a result, the individuals will feel frightened. The natural response is resistance (Agboola and Salawu, 2011).

Discomfort is defined as a natural reaction to change which considers that the change interferes with individual interests (Bareil *et al.*, 2007). In addition, discomfort is also interpreted as the negative perception of individuals due to uncertainty after the changes have happened (Cornescu and Adam, 2016). It is a challenging agenda for the change leaders to relieve the organizational members from the discomfort with change (Dumas and Beinecke, 2018; Fernandez *et al.*, 2016; Kets De Vries and Balazs, 1999).

Some researchers have examined discomfort in several contexts, such as Bareil *et al.* (2007). They examined discomfort with change patterns in terms of its organizational structure, workplace relocation and technological changes in health institutions in Canada. Furthermore, they found that there were two patterns of discomfort with change, namely situational and dispositional. Another research study by Branch *et al.* (2013) examined discomfort as a mediator between self-efficacy and the readiness to change referring to the curriculum, including how to change what must be taught and how to teach the students of the business schools in Canada and the United States.

Based on the empirical research, literature, concepts and theories that have been described, there are gaps that need to be investigated further, namely the exploration of the variable of discomfort itself. Discomfort is a variable that has been relatively rarely discussed and explored in-depth (Bareil *et al.*, 2007; Branch *et al.*, 2013; Cornescu and Adam, 2016). It has been investigated in several contexts of organizational change as described previously but the literature regarding the exploration of the concept of discomfort in the process of organizational change is still lacking.

Therefore, to fill in this gap, the researcher proposed the following research questions:

- RQ 1. Why does discomfort arise?
- RQ 2. What is the reaction shown when there is discomfort?
- RQ 3. What are the consequences of discomfort in relation to the process of organizational change?

Research method

Research context

The context of organizational change in this study is the organizational change that took place in the five best public universities in Indonesia seeking to achieve a place in the Top 500 WUR. The object examined in this study was a public university targeted by the government to become a top WCU. It has remained above 500 for the last 4 years. It has been disguised in this study as X University. X University is located in one of the largest megacities in Indonesia. X University was chosen as the research object because among the five universities that were given the mandate by the government to achieve WCU status, its number of international publications and international ranking was the lowest. This triggered the Rector (President) of X University to improve its performance by making new policies to measure performance based on university rankings. Consequently, the pressure to change in order to obtain the target prompted discomfort to happen in some places.

Sampling method

The informants of this study were 20 lecturers at X University. The lecturers were chosen as the informants because they were the most affected by the new policies arising from the change process toward WCU status. Lecturers are also the most crucial stakeholders in a

university because the core business of university is education services. This is mainly supported by the lecturers as they are the providers of the educational services provided to the students (Hakim and Fernandes, 2017).

Flanagan (1954) stated that there are no strict rules regarding the appropriate sample size for CIT. By using the purposive snowball sampling method, we interviewed 20 informants based on their knowledge (Cho and Palmer, 2013) and we reached data saturation (Table 1). The informant's criteria were that they experienced discomfort with the change indications, i.e. complaining, protesting and implying negative emotions when discussing about organizational changes towards WCU. This included those who were vocal when it came to criticizing the changes by posting on social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram.

Faculty	Age	Gender	Position	Rank	Informants
Faculty of Economics and Business	39 years	Male	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Assistant Professor	Informant 1
	60 years	Male	Lecturer	Associate Professor	Informant 2
Faculty of Psychology	34 years	Male	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Assistant Professor	Informant 3
Faculty of Public Health	49 years	Male	Lecturer and Head of Department	Associate Professor	Informant 4
Faculty of Veterinary	55 years	Female	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Professor	Informant 5
Faculty of Dentistry	68 years	Female	Lecturer and Head of Department	Professor	Informant 6
Faculty of Law	55 years	Male	Lecturer and Head of Department	Associate Professor	Informant 7
	43 years	Female	Lecturer and Head of Department	Assistant Professor	Informant 8
Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics	53 years	Female	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Associate Professor	Informant 9
Faculty of Vocational	42 years	Female	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Associate Professor	Informant 10
School of Postgraduate	36 years	Male	Lecturer	Assistant Professor	Informant 11
Faculty of Humanities	49 years	Male	Lecturer	Associate Professor	Informant 12
	41 years	Male	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Assistant Professor	Informant 13
Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics	55 years	Female	Lecturer	Assistant Professor	Informant 14
	43 years	Male	Lecturer	Associate Professor	Informant 15
Faculty of Economics and Business	61 years	Male	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Professor	Informant 16
Faculty of Social Sciences and Politics	55 years	Male	Lecturer	Assistant Professor	Informant 17
Faculty of Economics and Business	54 years	Female	Lecturer	Associate Professor	Informant 18
	52 years	Female	Lecturer and Head of Study Program	Associate Professor	Informant 19
Faculty of Veterinary	53 years	Male	Lecturer and Vice Dean	Assistant Professor	Informant 20

Table 1.
Informants

This study came to an end when data saturation was reached at the point of the 18th, 19th and 20th informants. Data saturation is a procedure that was adopted to decide when to finished collecting the data based on two main dimensions. First, the researcher continued the interview process until the data collected consisted mostly of repetition without new ideas emerging and no new insights are obtained. The second criterion is based on the research questions. If the results and findings are considered to be sufficient to answer the research questions then the research objectives can be considered to have been fulfilled (Guest *et al.*, 2006). The informants used in this study were from the faculties of science, medicine and social sciences in order to provide a broader insight into the conditions of discomfort throughout the entire university.

Critical incident technique (CIT)

Organizational change is categorized as a critical incident because it is included as one of the critical moments within the organization due to the high level of failure of the organizational change itself (e.g. Gigliotti *et al.*, 2018; Amis *et al.*, 2004). CIT is a procedure used to facilitate research into unusual or unpleasant incidents, which in this context is the discomfort with change (Gremler, 2004). Therefore, we believe that CIT is the most appropriate method to investigate the discomfort with change.

We present the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) approach used to answer our research question, following the procedures performed by Grace (2007) adapted to the context of organizational change. However, for the data collection method, we decided to use in-depth interviews. This is different from Grace (2007) who used a self-reporting survey. The in-depth interviews were used to get more comprehensive answers and to make the informants more comfortable revealing the details of the discomfort experienced during the process of organizational change.

After the data was collected, it was analyzed using content analysis techniques. Content analysis has been proven to be the most appropriate analysis technique because it was used by the previous researchers who used the CIT approach (e.g. Grace, 2007; Gremler, 2004). The critical incidents (then called CI) that were identified later were categorized into first order concepts, second order themes and aggregate dimensions using NVivo 12 Pro software. NVivo 12 Pro was used for the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis. We categorized the identified CIs into themes with the help of the two expert judges.

Research trustworthiness

In this study, the validity of the data was adjusted according to the CITs which included several tests focused on objectivity, reliability and systematization as stated by Gremler (2004). For the used CIT method, the data validity test relied on expert judges to check the consistency of the theme that was formed. The number of expert judges used in this study was two. This amount is in accordance with the average CIT research that uses 2 to 3 judges (e.g. Flanagan, 1954; Gremler, 2004). Both judges were people who understood the context of university change towards WCU status which allowed them to act as a change actor.

Gremler (2004) stated that to improve the research trustworthiness of CIT studies, triangulation can be adopted. Data triangulation, source triangulation and theory triangulation were applied in this study. Furthermore, member checking was also conducted to ensure the credibility of the research (Fusch and Ness, 2015). In the triangulation stage, the two expert judges and four lecturers of X University acted as the triangulators. Source triangulation was carried out to explore the truth of certain information collected through several different sources of data. Besides the interview results, the researchers also used secondary data from the Internet posted by the lecturers of X University on their social media accounts, primarily Facebook and Instagram. This way, the

researchers got a different view of the discomfort phenomenon. These views allow for a broader knowledge basis to use to obtain the truth (Fusch and Ness, 2015).

Findings

Causes of discomfort

The findings have been presented in accordance with the research objectives and questions: causes, the reactions shown (courses) and the consequences of discomfort with change. The causes of discomfort were categorized into five themes: fear of loss, organizational culture, systems and policies, work overload and a lack of resources. The results for the identified causes of discomfort have been illustrated in Figure 1. After identifying the second-order themes and the first-order concepts of the causes of discomfort, the results of the study can be summarized as the percentage of CIs identified as described in Table 1.

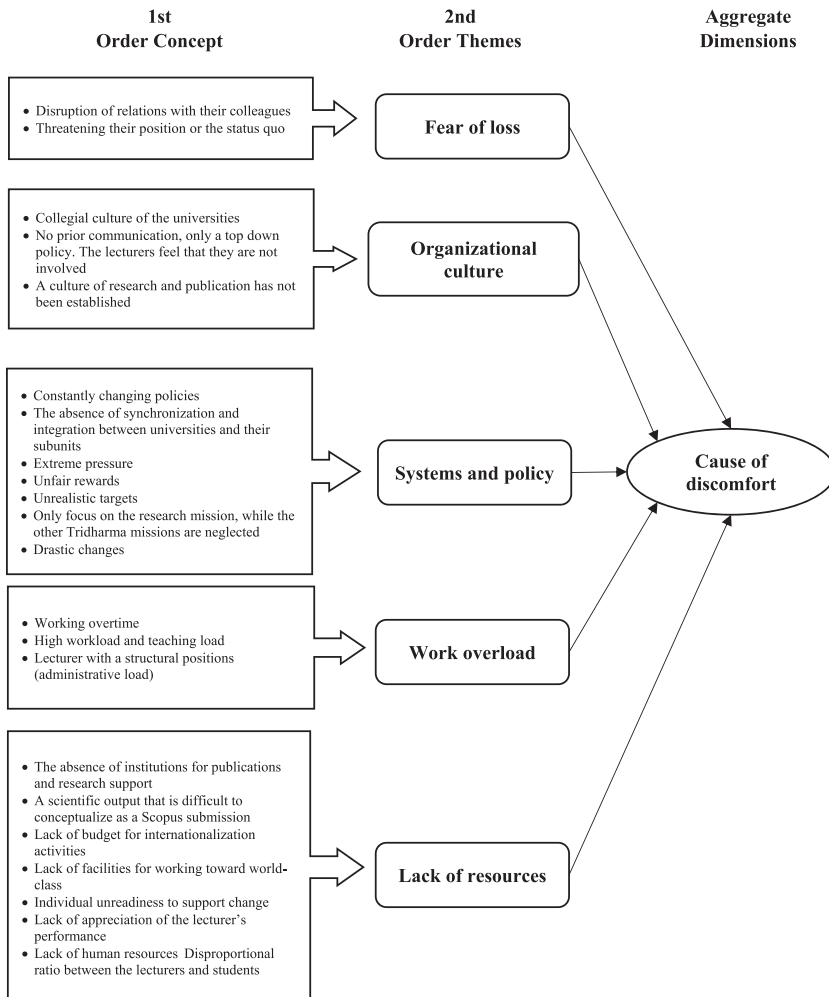


Figure 1. Causes of discomfort within the organizational change

According to Informant 1, the lack of resources was the most critical cause of discomfort with change. In this case, the most common problem was the lack of human resources. The lack of human resources resulted in the disproportional ratio between the lecturers and students, which then increased the workload (reported by 60%):

The ratio of the number of lecturers and students is not balanced. In this university, there are a lot of students and they keep on increasing but the number of lecturers is small and not increasing. This unbalanced ratio is not suitable for publication. (Informant1)

Other CIs found as a cause of discomfort from within the resource dimension were the individual unreadiness to support change (70%), a lack of supporting facilities for working toward world-class status such as laboratories and Internet networks (60%), the lack of budget for internationalization activities (50%), the lack of appreciation of the lecturer's performance (45%), a scientific output that is difficult to adjust for the purpose of Scopus submission (40%) and the absence of institutions for publication and research support (10%). The following are statements from a couple of informants regarding the lack of resources category.

Well, it's actually not prepared well. Suddenly the university immediately implements the policy. The lecturer is told to do research, publications and so on. But they are not ready. So those who aren't ready will feel discomfort, right? (Informant2)

Education facilities are often overlooked. The speed of the Internet is very slow. It is trivial things that are also important to get to world class. For example, why do other public universities have better rankings? Because they have a luxurious laboratory and the equipment is complete. (Informant6)

In addition, work overload was also one of the dimensions identified from CI that causes discomfort with organizational change (reported by 70%). It was found that work overload was a cause of discomfort based on the high teaching load of the lecturers (70%) in which the majority of informants claimed to have worked overtime during the change process towards WCU (30%). Moreover, the CI related to work overload is the administrative load of the lecturers within structural positions, eventually causing discomfort (60%). Interestingly, the majority of the informants were lecturers who were appointed to be middle managers, holding structural positions such as being a vice dean, head of department and head of study program (85%). This indicates that discomfort in the process of organizational change also occurs among the middle managers. The following quotes are examples of the work overload category.

What about lecturers who are given administrative responsibility (such as head of study program, head of department, etc.)? Administration tasks are demanding and a lot. But on the other hand, the burden of publication is also large, right? If it's still being attributed to us, don't hope that we have good publications. (Informant3)

More time is spent on work since the change occurred. Teaching on a weekend or on a day until the night. We can say that the lecturers working hours are now working for 24 hours. (Informant1)

Meanwhile, culture was also a category found to be a cause of discomfort with the change process towards becoming a WCU, as reported by 75%. The CIs categorized into culture include the culture of research and publication not being established (75%), the collegial culture of universities (25%) and there being no prior communication, so the policies change are top-down. This is where the lecturers feel that they are not involved in the process of change (50%). One of the informant statements below explains the culture category more clearly.

First, the lecturers are our colleagues. No-one is more superior than the others, just age seniority or when you a professor. But if there is none, then we are more collegial. When I push the person and he

doesn't want to, what do I do? Different from government institutions or ministry, you have power when you are a high position. (Informant8)

Systems and policy are also a cause category of discomfort with change as reported by 70%. This form of discomfort arises due to the policy only focusing on the research mission while the other Tridharma missions are neglected (70%), drastic changes (55%), unrealistic targets (55%), unfair rewards (50%), extreme pressure (40%), the absence of synchronization and integration between universities and their subunits (25%) and constantly changing policies (5%). Some of the informants specifically addressed the systems and policy category.

So what I feel is that the target given is not realistic. The targets need to be changed to make more sense. (Informant1)

If you ask me what I have given to support this university towards WCUs, many things. But what is the reward? Where is the welfare? Where? Nothing. On the contrary, honor and benefits are cut in half. (Informant10)

In addition, fear of loss was also one of the categories that was successfully identified (reported by 30%). This arises due to several CIs, namely threatening the position or status quo (30%) and the disruption of their relations with their colleagues (20%). The following informants' statements exemplify the fear of loss category.

Now, there are many new policies that make our careers stuck. For example, if you want to be promoted, you should be a doctor. Scopus's (publication database) requirements also make a career stuck. (Informant12)

We were terrorized. From now on, those who don't have a Scopus journal can't be a professor. Before this policy change, we could have a Scopus journal publication or not, and we can still be a professor. Also for the professors who do not write in Scopus journals, their professorship incentives will be revoked. Hm, why is this threatened? (Informant9)

Reactions of discomfort (courses)

Answering the second research question, the reactions shown due to the discomfort with change (course) formed several categories: negative affective reactions, cognitive reactions and behavioral tendency as described in [Figure 2](#) and [Table 2](#).

The first category of reaction to the discomfort was negative affective reactions. A negative affective reaction is an individual's negative reaction based on the emotions that arise involuntarily in response to the stimuli of discomfort. This is expressed as feeling like they are being treated as a "cash cow" (55% of informants), being unhappy with the changes (50%), negative emotions (50%), feeling dehumanized (45%) and being frustrated because of the changes (35%). The following are statements from several informants who showed an affective reaction to the discomfort that they felt.

I think that it is mental discomfort, because I feel treated like a cash cow, right? ... I am a person who is well aware that publication is a necessity for lecturers. But the approach and the method treats the lecturers as cash cows ... (Informant3)

I don't want to know anything. This is the target, if you want, I'll give you money. Hello, we are not laborers. We are human so treat us as a human too. Lecturers are knowledge workers. (Informant3)

Besides negative affective reactions, discomfort can also induce cognitive reactions. Cognitive reactions are rooted in rational thinking. The cognitive reaction is shown when the feeling of discomfort is founded in thinking that the change toward becoming a WCU must be done but that it should be done gradually (55%), thinking that the WCU is a good program but the approach is not (55%), thinking that the target will not be achieved (35%) and

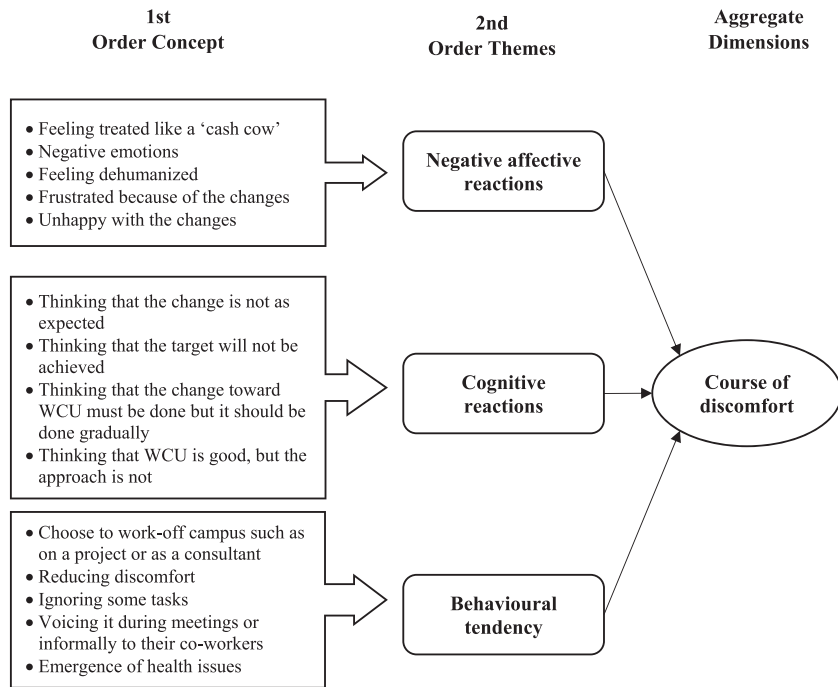


Figure 2.
Course of discomfort
within the
organizational change

thinking that the change is not as expected (reported by 30% of informants). The following statements gave rise to CIs related to cognitive reactions:

I think that the change was excessive. Excessive means that the resources are not ready and that the target was so high. (Informant7)

WCU is not a single policy with top-down orders, so the lecturers and students must write in a Scopus-indexed journal. That's crazy. It was a dream in a big hole I thought. Do not force it. Gradually. (Informant9)

In addition to the affective and cognitive reactions, discomfort with change is also manifested in the form of behavioral tendencies. Behavioral tendency refers to a controlled tendency to act in response to the stimulation of discomfort. The following are the reactions that were manifested in the form of a behavioral tendency according to the CIs as told by the informants:

I'm the most vocal person here. I always voice myself during meetings with other colleagues that I experiencing discomfort with this university, with the changes like this. (Informant6)

More to the psychological and maybe physical to the elders like me. Stress is important, so I also consume more vitamins because the workload is getting higher and higher. (Informant5)

Several informant statements also described the CI of behavioral tendency: ignoring some tasks (reported by 80%), voicing it during meetings or informally with their co-workers (55%), the emergence of health issues (55%), reducing discomfort (50%) and choosing to work off-campus on projects or as a consultant (25%) as described in the statements above.

Critical incidents causing discomfort		Informants ^a		References ^b		Discomfort and organizational change
		Count	%	Count	%	
Fear of losing	(1)	Disruption of relations with their colleagues	4	20.00	11	1.68%
	(2)	Threatening their position or the status quo	6	30.00	20	3.06
Culture	(1)	Collegial culture of the universities	5	25.00	12	1.83
	(2)	No prior communication, only a top down policy. The lecturers feel that they are not involved	10	50.00	24	3.67
	(3)	A culture of research and publication has not been established	15	75.00	34	5.20
Systems and policy	(1)	Constantly changing policies	1	5.00	3	0.46
	(2)	The absence of synchronization and integration between universities and their subunits	5	25.00	11	1.68
	(3)	Extreme Pressure	8	40.00	22	3.36
	(4)	Unfair rewards	10	50.00	37	5.66
	(5)	Unrealistic targets	11	55.00	41	6.27
	(6)	Only focus on the research mission, while the other Tridharma missions are neglected	14	70.00	49	7.49
	(7)	Drastic changes	11	55.00	21	3.21
Work overload	(1)	Working overtime	6	30.00	21	3.21
	(2)	High workload and teaching load	14	70.00	64	9.79
	(3)	Lecturer with a structural position (administrative load)	12	60.00	33	5.05
Lack of resources	(1)	The absence of institutions for publication and research support	2	10.00	5	0.76
	(2)	A scientific output that is difficult to conceptualize as a Scopus submission	8	40.00	31	4.74
	(3)	Lack of budget for internationalization activities	10	50.00	31	4.74
	(4)	Lack of facilities for working towards world-class	12	60.00	56	8.56
	(5)	Individual unreadiness to support change	14	70.00	47	7.19
	(6)	Lack of appreciation of the lecturer's performance	9	45.00	37	5.66
	(7)	Lack of human resources. Disproportional ratio between the lecturers and students	12	60.00	43	6.57
Total			20	100	654	100

Note(s): ^aPercent frequency for the informants corresponds to the count of incidents reported in the category/subcategory over the total of 20 informants that participated in the research

^bPercent frequency for the references corresponds to the count of references over the total of 654 references. References include both the CIs informed by the informants and the findings from the secondary sources

Table 2. Causes of discomfort within the organizational change

Consequences of discomfort

The third research question, which asks about the consequences of discomfort with change, formed two second-order themes: active and passive participation. Figure 3 and Table 3 illustrate the consequences of discomfort with change.

Several CIs were found in the active participation category: working according to their capacity and not really trying too hard (reported by 75%), conducting research and publications that are not Scopus-oriented (40%), taking part in international conferences and seeking a conference budget for students (40%), target publications delegated to their guidance of students (35%), and encouraging other lecturers to actively participate (10%). Real examples of active participation in reference to the consequences of discomfort were told by the following informants:

... , the target of Scopus is not even given to the lecturer, but it has been delegated to Master's and doctoral students. Closing your eyes is also possible because the regulation of students means that it

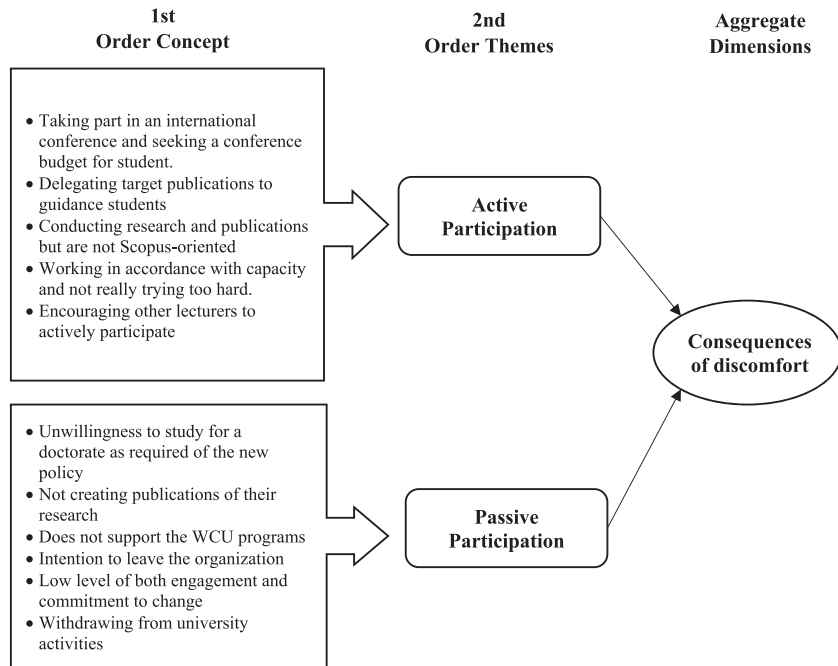


Figure 3.
Consequences of discomfort within the organizational change

Critical incidents in the course of discomfort			Informants ^a		References ^b	
			Count	%	Count	%
Negative affective reactions	(1)	Feeling treated like a “cash cow”	11	55.00	30	10.75
	(2)	Negative emotions	10	50.00	18	6.45
	(3)	Feeling dehumanized	9	45.00	33	11.83
	(4)	Frustrated because of the changes	7	35.00	12	4.30
	(5)	Unhappy with the changes	10	50.00	11	3.94
Cognitive reactions	(1)	Thinking that the change is not as expected	6	30.00	7	2.51
	(2)	Thinking that the target will not be achieved	7	35.00	28	10.04
	(3)	Thinking that the change toward WCU must be done, but it should be done gradually	11	55.00	19	6.81
	(4)	Thinking that the WCU is good but the approach is not	11	55.00	20	7.17
Behavior	(1)	Choose to work-off campus such as on a project or as a consultant	5	25.00	14	5.02
	(2)	Reducing discomfort	10	50.00	11	3.94
	(3)	Ignoring some tasks	16	80.00	35	12.54
	(4)	Voicing it during meetings or informally to their co-workers	11	55.00	17	6.09
	(5)	Emergence of health issues	11	55.00	24	8.60
Total			20	100	279	100

Table 3.
Course of discomfort within the organizational change

Note(s): ^aPercent frequency for the informants corresponds to the count of incidents reported in the category/subcategory over the total of 20 informants that participated in the research
^bPercent frequency for the references corresponds to the count of references over the total of 279 references. References include both the CIs informed by informants and the findings from the secondary sources

is required for them to graduate with a Scopus journal publication requirement. The student is the victim. (Informant4)

We are among those who are somewhat different from their thoughts, not joining this WCUs thing, right? But we still follow. So we make our own standards. We don't have to go along with Scopus. In fact, we often pay dollars for predatory journal publication, because the important ones are Scopus-indexed publications. (Informant11)

Meanwhile, the theme of passive participation was formed as a consequence of discomfort with change. The CIs that form the passive participation category were withdrawing from university activities (reported by 40% of informants), the low level of both engagement and commitment to change (30%), not publishing their research (30%), not support the WCU programs (30%), the intention to leave the organization (10%) and an unwillingness to study for a doctorate as required of the new policy (reported by 5%). The following are some of the informants' statements related to the category of passive participation as a consequence of their discomfort with change.

I can't afford it and I am not given training to improve my skills to support WCUs, right? The university is currently referring to targets, targets and targets. ... We are targeted but our skills are not supported. How can we participate? (Informant2)

Finally, I feel. . . ah whatever, I will be apathetic. (Informant6)

At some points, I withdraw from university activities. ... Psychologically, the effect is that my commitment is not to the university or WCUs, but to my students. (Informant3)

I have thought I'd want to leave here immediately. What's wrong if I dedicate my knowledge in a place that more appreciates me, unlike here? But it is difficult administratively because the number of professors is still lacking. If I leave, there will be less. (Informant6)

Discussion

Causes of discomfort

There are five categories related to the causes of discomfort: fear of loss, organizational culture, systems and policy, work overload and a lack of resources. The fear of loss category is related to the fear of losing out on opportunities to be promoted. After the change process occurs, new policies tighten up the indicators that must be met for the lecturers who want to be promoted, especially those who have ambitions to attain a professorship, thus causing discomfort. The findings of the fear of loss category support the results of [Erwin and Garman \(2010\)](#) and [Bailey and Raelin \(2015\)](#). They found that a fear of loss often occurs in the process of organizational change that disturbs the comfort zone of the organization members. This is also supported by [Buller \(2015\)](#) who stated that "People don't really fear change. They fear loss." This finding is also supported by [García-Cabrera and Hernández \(2014\)](#) who explained that organization members who respond negatively to the change are a pessimistic group where the process of change will threaten the position that they have achieved or what was expected before the change.

The second category is organizational culture. Universities have a unique culture that is collegial. Collegial autonomy tends to emphasize a high level of freedom and equal relations among academics ([Wang et al., 2018](#)). Furthermore, a collegial culture emphasizes a sense of family as a colleague is upheld as the primary value rather than hierarchically being in relationships with other organization members. After the change, collegiality is not a feature in universities in a rapidly changing environment that requires a more autocratic executive style ([Gleadle and Bridgman, 2007](#)). The policy change required to achieve WCU status is top-down, so the lecturers—as the target of the change—did not feel involved in the planning

changes. Top-down communication is not suitable to apply in universities. This is because lecturers are knowledge workers who need a special approach in terms of dealing with the change process. Consequently, top-down changes often lead to resistance due to a lack of resources and preparation to implement the change (Mason *et al.*, 2001). In addition, a new research culture injected suddenly due to its high priority in terms of the WUR criteria disrupts the teaching culture. The process of changing the culture of universities from its role as a teaching university to becoming a research university requires a long process (Sandy and Shen, 2019). When they were subsequently required to reach WCU status within a period of 5 years (2015–2019), several universities were not ready to change because they did not have a research and publication culture yet.

The third category is systems and policies as it relates to the system of implementing the changes. Referring to the study of Marginson and Sawir (2006), one of the infrastructures that establishes the global capacity of a university is the systems and policies of the institutional and academic leaders. Therefore, the systems and policies involved in implementing the changes are very important as it is a means of managing the process of change in universities (Meister-Scheytt and Scheytt, 2005).

Work overload was identified as the fourth category. This is related to the high workload of lecturers and also to the additional load of the lecturers who have structural positions that force them to work for longer hours. Thus, the lecturers felt discomfort. Based on Branch *et al.* (2013), organizational change can lead to new tasks, resulting in differences in the workload, role and responsibilities. Organizations expect the organization members to work harder when they are in the middle of a change process (Branch *et al.*, 2013). This then causes and escalates the discomfort focused on the change (Vakola and Nikolaou, 2005). Sandy and Shen (2019) also found that the limited time available to do quality research due to a high workload among the lecturers in Indonesia had an impact, particularly when it came to balancing the three main duties under “Tridharma.” When there was no reduction in the teaching duties, adding on the research obligation to this creates a heavy load. Another interesting finding related to the work overload was when one female informant revealed that the high workload conditions after the changes were inappropriate for female lecturers. This is because they have the extra role of being a mother and wife when at home and a lecturer when at work. This is supported by Sandy and Shen (2019) who stated that changes in university policies can affect the staff’s personal lives, especially for women lecturers who must balance their life as a “working mother.” Policy changes to focus on the publication of quality research results lead to less time to meet their personal needs or spending time with their family. This disrupts the work-life balance.

Finally, there is a lack of resources, both facility and human, as a cause of the discomfort with the change needed to become world class. This result is supported by Wiedner *et al.* (2017) who explained that the availability and amount of resources needed to facilitate change greatly determines the success of the change itself, while the financial support from the government remains the same. In other words, TMTs have to manage their existing resources to support the change. Moreover, the previous research conducted by Sandy and Shen (2019) found that the implementation of research in Indonesia was still considered to be a difficult because of the limited facilities and funds. The availability of resources is very important for supporting change. This should have been planned for in the unfreezing phase of the change. Many changes fail because of the unavailability of resources to support the change (Lewin, 1951).

Based on Bareil *et al.* (2007), there are two patterns of discomfort with change: situational and dispositional. Both patterns are distinguished from the cause of discomfort itself. Situational discomfort is caused by the organizational elements and how the organization itself implements the change. Dispositional means that the source of discomfort comes from the individual. One of the research questions in this study aimed to find the causes of

discomfort with change. The result showed that the pattern of discomfort that occurs in the context of the changes in X University as a part of becoming a WCU is mostly of a situational pattern (approximately 70% of informants), thus originating from the organizational elements. The elements included a lack of resources, work overload, organizational culture and systems and policies. Meanwhile, dispositional discomfort occurs because of the fear of losing in some way. This is an individual source that was approximately found for 30% of the informants.

Reactions to discomfort (courses)

The second research question was answered using the three categories of reactions shown when the organization members experience discomfort with change: negative affective, cognitive and behavioral tendency. Affective reactions are related to how someone feels because of the change from an emotional aspect, such as good or bad and like or dislike (Yagil and Shultz, 2017). The results showed that the discomfort with change was shown through affective reactions that tended to be negative. Affective States Theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) details that negative affective reactions will influence the behavioral tendency that often arises from those who resist change. Negative affective reactions, depending on whether they will be threatened by the changes (Bailey and Raelin, 2015), mean that the informant struggles to face the demands of the additional tasks caused by the change (Rafferty and Jimmieson, 2017). The reactions are often manifested in the form of frustration, hopelessness and disappointment because of the organizational change (Holbeche, 2006), as found in this study.

Moreover, another reaction shown in discomfort with change was the informant's cognitive reactions. Cognitive reaction refers to the individual beliefs about the change (Piderit, 2000), either negative or positive. The explanation of the inconsistencies between affective and cognitive reactions is that they know that the change is positive but, emotionally, they still feel that they are missing something (Piderit, 2000) because of the discomfort. Inconsistent affective and cognitive reactions will affect the formation of a behavioral tendency towards change. The behavioral tendency can be positive or negative depending on the reaction that is dominantly held (Harmon-Jones *et al.*, 2015). In addition, when focusing on individual factors in the context of organizational change, differences in the cognitive reactions will affect their response in the face of change. For example, individuals with analytical cognitive thinking tend to accept change while others with more intuitive thinking tend to resist change (Bourmistrov, 2016).

In contrast, behavioral tendencies are also a part of the reactions to discomfort such as the controlled tendency to act or the intention to act due to the stimulation of the discomfort with change. This can include complaining about the change or trying to convince other members that the change is bad (Oreg, 2006). This can be controlled consciously such as through verbal responses and exiting the profession (Grace, 2007). This is in accordance with what was stated by Lewin (1947) in "Lewin's Three-Phase Process"; if the discomfort is not managed properly then it will trigger resistance to change. Oreg (2006) stated that avoiding work is one form of resistance to change. In this study, we found that the discomfort of the lecturers tended to reduce the intensity of their work on campus and they begin to prefer to do off-campus work such as working on projects and consulting. This is perceived as having more economic value. Moreover, other forms of resistance to change include reduced work effectiveness (Oreg, 2006). It was also found that the discomfort of the lecturers leads to them ignoring some of their tasks (approximately 80% of the informants).

Another interesting finding is the emergence of health issues, which was shown in the form of several complaints that were both physical and psychological because of the discomfort. Psychological issues were found to be more dominant. This result is supported by

Sandy and Shen (2019) who found that the pressure to implement change turned out to affect the psychological health of the academics. The rational reason for this is because of the high pressure and the impact of change, such as doing quality research that requires more time allocated for writing. The lack of time remaining due to the implementation of other jobs then affects the psychological condition of the academics (Tozer and Summers, 2015).

Consequences of discomfort

The third research question was answered using the two categories of consequence that are due to the discomfort with change, namely active and passive participation in the change process (Figure 4). The results showed that 60% of informants chose to be active and the remaining 40% were passive. Some forms of active participation found as a consequence of discomfort with change contribute to the changes made as a part of becoming a WCU in an improper way. Other ways may not be done optimally because of the discomfort. For example, those who are in discomfort keep on trying to contribute towards the change but in improper ways such as paying to be published in Scopus-indexed international predatory journals. These predatory journals will actually result in a decline in the organization's reputation because the quality of predatory journals is doubtful. Another form of active participation in an improper way is delegating the publications target to their advisees without any proper guidance (reported by 35%). Some of these examples are proof that the extreme pressure to publish research has a negative impact on scientific practices, namely by creating a particular atmosphere and increasing the temptation for researchers to allow violations in order to increase the possibility of their journals being published in international journals (Tjinkink *et al.*, 2013). Consequently, implementing changes in an improper way and not in a manner that is done optimally is a form of "active non-action" participation (Bruch and Ghoshal, 2002).

The second category for the consequences of discomfort was passive participation. The findings exhibit that there was a low level of engagement and commitment to change (30%) and that the sample population had withdrawn from university activities (40%). The main reason for this is that they are less involved because the changes are top-down

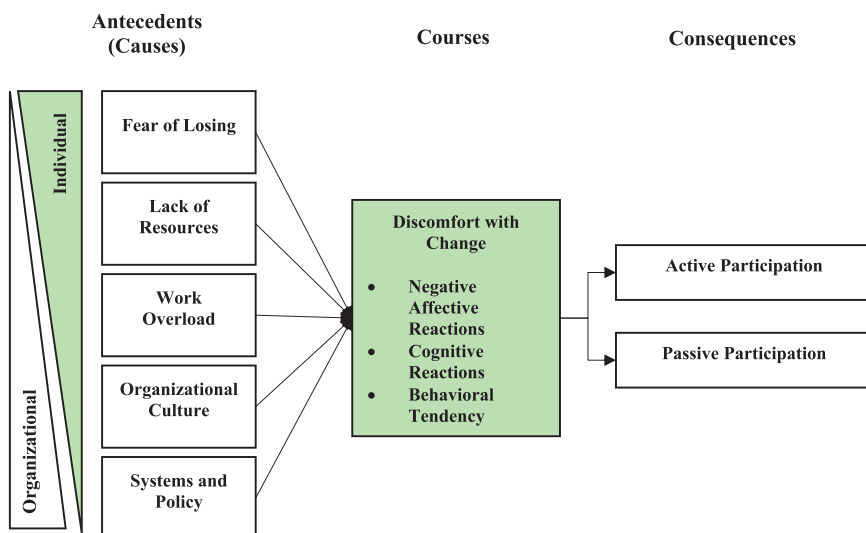


Figure 4.
Integrated model of
discomfort within the
organizational change

Critical incidental consequences of discomfort			Informants ^a		References ^b	
			Count	%	Count	%
Active participation	(1)	Taking part in an international conference and seeking a conference budget for students	8	40.00	13	7.65
	(2)	Delegating target publications to guidance students	7	35.00	18	10.59
	(3)	Conducting research and publications that are not Scopus-oriented	8	40.00	32	18.82
	(4)	Working in accordance with capacity and not really trying too hard	15	75.00	54	31.76
	(5)	Encouraging other lecturers to actively participate	2	10.00	3	1.76
Passive participation	(1)	Unwillingness to study for a doctorate as required of the new policy	1	5.00	2	1.18
	(2)	Not creating publications of their research	6	30.00	9	5.29
	(3)	Does not support the WCU programs	6	30.00	9	5.29
	(4)	Intention to leave the organization	2	10.00	2	1.18
	(5)	Low level of both engagement and commitment to change	6	30.00	12	7.06
	(6)	Withdrawing from university activities	8	40.00	16	9.41
Total			20	100	170	100

Note(s): ^aPercent frequency for the informants corresponds to the count of incidents reported in the category/subcategory over the total of 20 informants that participated in the research

^bPercent frequency for the references corresponds to the count of references over the total of 170 references. References include both the CIs informed by informants and the findings from the secondary sources

Table 4.
Consequences of discomfort within the organizational change

(Heyden *et al.*, 2017) and that the changes are considered to be coercive social controls (Ford *et al.*, 2008). This is contradictory to the collegial culture of universities. Meanwhile, choosing to be apathetic by withdrawing from university activities is also a manifestation of resistance to change (Gilley *et al.*, 2009). Another extreme consequence of discomfort is the intention to leave the organization (10%). Oreg (2006) explained that those who are stressed, anxious and angry because of change tend to have a greater intention to leave the organization. Interestingly, despite the discomfort experienced by the members, many who have negative cognitive reactions to change are also less likely to remain in the organization.

Conclusion

This study contributes to identifying the CI that causes discomfort, the reactions shown and the consequences of discomfort in the context of organizational change. This study responds to the recommendations of Branch *et al.* (2013) and Bareil *et al.* (2007) that there is a need for further research to assess discomfort through different methods, different samples and different contexts. The previous studies used a survey method, whereas this study tried to use the CIT approach. The previous research was contextualized in profit organizations, whereas this study tried to capture the context of a non-profit organization. In addition, this study also used Indonesia as the context. Indonesia is a big country but its mysterious existence is due to a dearth of published research in high-impact international journals (Horton, 2016). Thus this context is unique and therefore very interesting to study.

Uniquely, a new interesting finding from this research is that discomfort is experienced not only by the organization members but also by the middle managers. This is possible because the middle managers experience a high level of dilemma pressure as they are the change agents (Giangreco and Peccei, 2005). The organizational culture is collegial (Wang

et al., 2018). Moreover, discomfort with change can lead to various forms of resistance to change, the intention to leave, low engagement and low commitment to change. Thus, managing discomfort is one of the correct strategies to undertake in order to increase the success of an organizational change process.

We offer several academic contributions. First, this paper contributes to the body knowledge by answering the call of *Branch et al.* (2013) and *Bareil et al.* (2007). *Branch et al.* (2013) stating that discomfort is a new variable that is rarely explored and thus it requires testing and validation using different methods. The previous research used surveys whereas this study used CIT for the in-depth examination of discomfort with organizational change. Furthermore, *Bareil et al.* (2007) called for a review discomfort in different contexts, which was a university in this case. Second, we have provided empirical evidence of "Lewin's Three-Phase Process" showing that in the initial stage of organizational change (unfreezing), discomfort will always emerge that must be immediately managed in order to not trigger resistance to change (*Lewin, 1951*). Third, this study exhibits the use of CIT (*Flanagan, 1954; Grace, 2007; Gremler, 2004*) in the context of organizational change, which has previously been used more in service marketing research. Finally we offer comprehensive views by exhibiting the causes, the reactions shown and the consequences of discomfort with change. In most of the prior studies, only a few have discussed the consequences of the discomfort with organizational change such as the intention to leave, withdrawal behavior, low level of engagement and low commitment to change.

We also offer valuable practical contributions to help the practitioners to deal with and manage the discomfort with organizational change. First, it relates to the policy changes that are top-down in nature. The university should be the originator and change manager in order to take a personal approach in all organizational lines. The most important point for an acceptable change is that the organization members need to feel that the change is important to them, what the risks are that will occur if the organization does not make the changes and that the changes are appropriate for what they do (*Armenakis et al., 2007*). In other words, TMTs should explain "What's in it for me?" so then every member of the organization understands the importance of change and feels involved in the process of change itself (*Isett et al., 2013*). Second, by knowing the factors that cause the discomfort with change, it is easier for the change managers to prepare the right mechanisms to manage the change itself. For example, this can be related to the resources that they have to support the change. Change managers must plan carefully in advance regarding the availability and amount of resources needed, such as the number and skills of the human resources and facilities required to support the change (*Zhao and Goodman, 2018*). In this context, this was done to achieve WCU status. Meanwhile, planning to provide the appropriate facilities is also very important for the operational line; if they are supported by adequate facilities, then a research and publication culture will begin to form.

Third, practitioners can also take advantage of the results of this paper to manage discomfort with change in order to set up appropriate policies and regulations to achieving their goals and the strategy of for the organization, which is especially useful for universities in developing countries as well as in developed education. This study has an impact on higher education especially for universities in developing countries that have planned to improve their ranking through their publications. They need to consider their plan, goals and strategy before applying the policy in the university. Managing the discomfort with change will lead to improving the individual's readiness to change (*Branch et al., 2013*).

The results of this study must be considered in light of some of the limitations. First, discomfort is a sensitive issue that makes people relatively not open to expressing it. The cultural values of Asian countries, including Indonesia, are about limiting outward expressions because there are social norms such as saving face involved. The small number of informants who were willing to speak up was also a weakness of this study. Discomfort in

terms of organizational change is an interesting topic and it still needs to be studied further with different research objectives, for example, studying the relationship between discomfort and commitment to change, discomfort and withdrawal behavior or discomfort and the intention to leave using the survey method. It is also recommended to use other unique methods such as ethnographies and netnographies to explore the discomfort issues presented. Second, further research can examine in which stage of organizational change that the discomfort with change occurs. Does it occur in the change process, and does it change the context of learning? Third, this study is the first step to revealing the discomfort with organizational change using the exploratory method. Future studies can develop measurement items of discomfort that also can contribute to the empirical studies so then the managers can go on to developing the necessary managerial actions to handle it.

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About the authors

Fiona Niska Dinda Nadia (fiona.niska.dinda-2017@feb.unair.ac.id) is a Doctoral candidate from Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Airlangga University. Her current focus of research is on dynamic capabilities and organizational change.

Badri Munir Sukoco (badri@feb.unair.ac.id) is a Professor at Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Airlangga University. He received his PhD from National Cheng Kung University. His major research interests include Strategic Alliance, Competitive Behavior, and Innovative/Imitative Behavior. He has published numerous papers, such as International Journal of Human Resource Management, R&D Management, Expert Systems with Applications, among others. Badri Munir Sukoco is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: badri@feb.unair.ac.id

Ely Susanto is an Assistant Professor at Department of Public Policy and Management, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He received his PhD from National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan. His current research interests include emotional intelligence, conflict management, innovative work behavior and bureaucratic reform. He has published his work at the international journal of conflict management Journal of Applied Psychology, International Journal of Human Resource Management, among others.

Ahmad Rizki Sridadi (ahmad-r-s@feb.unair.ac.id) is an Associate Professor at Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Airlangga University. He received his PhD from Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia. His major research interests include change management and compensation system. He has published numerous papers in human resources field.

Reza Ashari Nasution (reza@sbm-itb.ac.id) is an Associate Professor at the School of Business and Management, Institut Teknologi Bandung. He received his PhD from University of Twente, The Netherlands. His major research interests cover competitive strategy, digital transformation and customer experience. He has published numerous papers in strategy and marketing journals.