Exploring the sources and role of knowledge sharing to overcome the challenges of organizational change implementation

Abstract

Purpose

In recent times, organizations and leaders are focusing on new strategies to increase the success rate of organizational change (OC) implementation. Therefore, the study attempts to uncover the sources and role of knowledge sharing (KS) to overcome the challenges of OC implementation.

Design

For this research, data have been gathered from respondents based on their key designations by using unstructured interview method. Thematic analysis was then performed using the NVivo 11-Plus software.

Findings

It has found that employees in public sector organizations are opposing OC due to lack of effective communication, lower level of participation in decision making, and barriers of, for example, a cultural, social, structural, and political nature. Therefore, this study suggests how KS can employ to overcome the challenges of OC implementation.

Implications

KS has become necessary to ensure incremental and radical changes in the survival of dynamic businesses. The results are useful to enhance understanding regarding the role of KS in the context of OC among change leaders, researchers, academicians, and policy makers.

Originality

The study provides meaningful and novel knowledge regarding role of KS to overcome the challenges of OC implementation. No prior research that contributes practical and theoretical knowledge in the perspective of KS and OC has been found especially in the context of developing countries and Asian culture. Therefore, this investigation attempts to explore the role of KS and presented overarching conceptual framework in the real context of OC implementation.
**Keywords:** knowledge sharing (KS), organizational change (OC), challenges, public sector organizations.

Nomenclature

KS = Knowledge sharing

OC(s) = Organizational change(s)

ERP = Enterprise resource planning

SLIC = State life insurance corporation

NBP = National bank of Pakistan

GOP = Government of Pakistan

**Introduction**

KS has been recognized as a most significant construct of knowledge management (Hendriks, 1999; Baskerville and Dulipovici, 2006; Muqadas et al., 2016). KS is increasing viewed as an important feature of a successful organization (Vong, Zo, and Ciganek, 2016). It is found that KS among employees extensively influences the performance of both private and public sector organizations (Silvi and Cuganesan, 2006). In knowledge management studies, the public sector is an important research context (Massaro, Dumay, and Garlatti, 2015). A study is revealed that most of the researchers have focused on role of KS in private sector organizations (Sandhu et al., 2011). Other researchers argue that role of KS in public sector organizations have not yet gained substantial attention among researchers (Amayah, 2013; Willem, and Buelens, 2007).

KS has described as a positive intentions of employees to share knowledge with their colleagues (Gibbert and Krause, 2002). Some other researchers have explained KS as a process through which knowledge (i.e. information, expertise, and competencies) is shared among employees, families, friends, communities, and organizations (Alsam, Rehman, and Imran, 2016; Bosua and Scheepers, 2007).
Furthermore, KS refers to create task information, providing optimal solutions to resolve organizational issues and implementing policies, developing new ideas and facilitating synchronization among colleagues and supervisors (Alsam et al., 2016; Dorsey, 2003). In the context of progression of technology and competitive strategies, KS would be beneficially applied to bring new changes in an organization (Park and Kim, 2015). Knowledge management has focused on creating, managing, and sharing knowledge for resolving organizational issues i.e. resistance to the implementation of OC, low level of employee participation in organizational activities, and a lack of knowledge regarding the benefits of OC (Imran et al., 2016; Park and Kim, 2015). KS can enhance competency skills and enable employees to respond positively to OC (Fehér, 2004; Yang, 2007).

The concept of KS has been derived from three well-known theories: theory of planned behavior, theory of reasoned action, and social exchange theory (Razak et al., 2016). Theory of planned behavior focuses on employees’ intentions to perform a specific given behavior to foster KS practices in organizations, while theory of reasoned action explains employees’ intentions to share their knowledge, which can increase through different motivational factors. Social exchange theory focuses on rationale behavior, and employees engage in KS practices when they perceive that the benefits are higher than the actual costs. More specifically, in the context of OC, these theories suggest organizations must engage in promoting rewards, establishing a KS culture, and enhancing employees’ motivation to promote OCs. In the same vein, researchers state that knowledge creation, sharing, and application can offer various benefits such as idea generation, continuous innovation, and the accelerating of technology, business, and social changes (Connelly and Kelloway, 2003; Gurteen, 1999).

The traditional paradigm of knowledge has been transformed into KS, dynamic organizations are exploring new KS practices to sustain and transfer knowledge and thereby foster OCs (Gurteen, 1999; Michael, 2007; Muqadas et al., 2016). It has been found that limited knowledge about the productive benefits of OC can provoke stress, depression, uncertainty, and insecurity among employees (Aslam et al., 2015; Oreg,
The majority of change programs have failed to achieve the desired outcomes (Erwin and Garman, 2010; Aslam et al., 2016). Few studies have found that 70 percent of change efforts are unproductive (Balogun and Hailey, 2004; Beer, 2000; Hammer and Champy, 1993). Other studies highlighted between 28 percent to 93 percent of change programmes have failed (Bridgeforth, 2000; Cândido and Santos, 2008). As a result, since inception, OC has been received significant attention among the government, leaders, and researchers (Aslam et al., 2016; Millar et al., 2012; Imran et al., 2016). Therefore, they are finding causes of failure, resolving issues related to OC, and searching new strategies to execute OC. This study focuses to integrate KS and OC so that the implications of this study would beneficially applied to non-financial and financial organizations undergoing OC.

OC process has numerous phases such as change initiation, pre-implementation, execution, and post-execution (Imran et al., 2016). Every OC phase has required special skills and specific type of knowledge to gain the desired goals. These types of knowledge can achieve through learning mechanisms and knowledge sharing practices. Change initiation requires basic knowledge regarding formulation of OC; pre-implementation needs important information to lessen the occurrences of resistance; execution and post-execution require core knowledge of OC to implement at a strategic level (Sune and Gibb, 2015; Jacobs et al., 2013). Knowledge is considered as the core competency to gain competitive edge over others (Appleyard, 1996; Nonaka et al., 1994). According to Smith and McKeen (2003), KS can increase bottom line saving, customer satisfaction, creativity and innovation, and shareholder value.

OC may be formulated and implemented frequently in high-tech industries such as insurance, telecom, and banking sectors (Millar et al., 2012). Change can bring reforms and fulfill market demand as required by the national context to survive in the global competition (Elrod and Tippett, 2002). The top managements of public sector organizations in Pakistan are implementing a number of OCs, including the following examples: computerized attendance systems, shifting manual work to computerized work, introducing enterprise resource planning (ERP) software in the State Life
Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLIC), launching the core banking application system in the National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), cost cutting tactics, and hiring HR consultants for rightsizing and downsizing before and after privatization. In the context of a technological change, ERP is a tool that is recognized as a cost-cutting tactic, integrates business processes, brings changes in structure and a culture of an organization, improves efficiency, enhances knowledge processing and KS, and reduces costs of decision making (Holsapple and Sena, 2001; Jones, Cline, and Ryan, 2006). However, radical changes such as cultural, structural, and technology change may not be easy because it requires changes in attitudes, values, and behaviors among employees in public sector organizations.

Smith and McKeen (2003) explain the importance of effective organizational culture that includes positive attitude, values, and behaviors for fostering OC, knowledge management initiatives, and KS practices among employees. Holsapple and Joshi (2004) noted, factors such as technology, structure, culture, OC, knowledge management, and leadership can influence KS practices in organizations. According to Lonner, Berry, and Hofstede (1980), theoretical contributions without taking into consideration the cultural aspect may be led to bias results. The organizational culture of public sector organizations in Pakistan vary with respect to implementation of OC, budget allocation, rules, procedures, processes, communication flow, decision making, KS practices, level of job security, trust, empowerment, satisfaction, and performance (Aslam et al., 2015; Aslam et al., 2016). Antecedents, motivators, or predictors of KS and successful change implementation vary across organizations and sectors. It is important to explore how KS can employ to overcome the challenges of OC implementation in the context of public sector organizations especially in the perspectives of power distance and collectivism culture in Pakistan.

A few studies that have conducted to explore the role of knowledge management in the context of OC (Fehér, 2004; Michael, 2007; Park and Kim, 2015). However, these studies did not analyze the problem in real context and focused on the analyses of previous literature. Until recently, no study has been found which explores the role of
KS for effective implementation of OC especially in the context of developing countries and Asian culture. Park and Kim (2015) suggested that future studies can explore how knowledge sharing contributes to different types of organizational change. Therefore, this study attempts to address the knowledge gape and explores how KS can establish a favorable culture to accept OC without resistance. The study focuses on exploring the answers of two major questions. First, How OC in public sector organizations can be managed via fostering KS practices? Second, what are the sources of KS practices to implement OC in public sector organizations?

Research Methodology

Research philosophy
This research is based on interpretivist/constructivist approach to the qualitative that aims to explore the meanings and experiences of respondents in the context of KS and OC. The increasing use of qualitative data analysis methods may be a consequence of the failure of quantitative methods to explore in-depth knowledge about beliefs, values, motives, attitudes, and behaviors. This study is based on the persistent changes in human-assigned meanings and experiences.

Population and sampling
This study has been conducted on state-owned insurance and banking sector organizations. The justifications behind the selection of these organizations include transferring ownership and launching new technological systems. These organizations have the culture of power distance and collectivism therefore it is important to explore how resistance can reduce through sources and role of KS during OC implementation. Furthermore, this study has designed to explore the way in which KS can enable employees to meet the OC without resistance. A sample of 40 respondents was selected from both organizations using a purposive sampling technique. The top management such as chairman, executive directors, and general managers are acting as a change agents to implement OC in these organizations.
Data analysis technique

Thematic analysis is a well-known method for investigation in qualitative studies, and it is performed in sequential order in order to complete objectives of current study. Thematic analysis is followed the assumptions of constructionist and essentialist paradigms (Boyatzis, 1998; Speziale, Streubert, and Carpenter, 2011; Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault, 2015). Data analysis methods are divided into two groups: interpretative phenomenological analysis and conventional analysis. Interpretative phenomenological analysis is followed the method (i.e. thematic analysis) that is not limited to any theory (Javadi and Zarea, 2016). According to Rayan et al. (2003), themes has been derived from inductive approach or by using prior theoretical understanding such as professional definitions took from literature review, theoretical orientations, and personal experiences. This study is followed the guidelines and assumptions of thematic analysis as given by famous studies (Rayan et al. 2003; Javadi and Zarea, 2016).

Theme can describe as a kind of agreement with main text but it is more concise, shorter, simpler, and accurate (Boyatzis, 1998; Javadi and Zarea, 2016). A theme can be repeated few times because it tries to answer the research questions (Javadi and Zarea, 2016). Rubin and Rubin (2011) argued that thematic analysis is an interesting and exciting because we discover themes using interviews data. Thematic analysis is used for recording, pinpointing, and examining data to extract meanings and concepts (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006). In thematic analysis, data can achieve through transcription of interviews, political documents, notes in the field, pictures, and videos (Joffe, and Yardley, 2004; Guest, MacQueen, and Namey, 2011).

For this study, the interviews with key respondents were recorded with their consent and transcribed into different emerging themes. The thematic analysis examines, interprets and presents meaningful themes and allows flexibility for researchers choice with regard to the conceptual framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Selective coding was used as the final phase of the coding process to combine the categories around the core category and develop the conceptual framework. The results regarding each variable are presented using a matrix tables and matrix coding query. We have followed the guidelines of Rehman (2015) to complete the steps of coding for thematic analysis.
Instrument

In interviews, open-ended questions are a useful tool for exploring the experiences of individuals and extracting meaningful results from the study. Data were collected using personal interviews that accurately explore the experiences of employees regarding KS practices and OC. Additionally, the problems of self-generated validity can be resolved using the unstructured interviews (Jarvenpaa and Todd, 1996).

The researchers designed nine unstructured questions to fulfill the aims of this study. These open-ended questions are designed using Delphi approach through extensive discussion with academic, insurance and banking experts. Furthermore, These research questions were constructed after a review of limited literature on KS and OC (Fehér, 2004; Michael, 2007; Park and Kim, 2015; Aslam et al., 2015). The questions are asked about KS through electronic media such TV channels and internet and social media such as whatsapp, viber, facebook, and twitter. Furthermore, they also asked about how training and workshops on productive benefits of OC can reduce stress, depression, uncertainty, and insecurity among employees.

Ethical considerations
This study was conducted on public sector organizations employees, change initiatives are to be carried within a specific time period.

Researchers have not disclosed any confidential information to preserve the respondents’ anonymity.
Researchers have sought to ensure the integrity, and sincerity of the process in gathering, analyzing and interpreting the research data.

Demographic Information
Most of the selected respondents are working on key positions and responsible for fostering effective changes in public sector organizations. Twenty respondents work as general managers (GMs) and another five work as assistant general managers (DGMs) in the SLIC. A further five respondents are assistant vice presidents (AVPs), four are
managers (Ms), and the remaining six are staff members in SLIC and NPB. Of the respondents, thirty-five percent have experience of between eleven to fifteen years. Thirty percent respondents have association of chartered certified accountant (ACCA) and associate chartered management accountants (ACMA) qualifications, thirty percent have masters’ degrees, twenty percent have chartered accountant (CA) qualifications, and the remaining twenty percent have master of philosophy (M.Phil) and masters of science in business administration (MSBA) degrees. Furthermore, fifty percent respondents have the age between fifty-one to sixty years.

“Insert Table 1: The Main Features of Sample Here”

Findings

Theme 1

The government of Pakistan (GOP) and executive directors have decided to implement ownership and technological changes in public sector organizations. The ERP software that can convert manual work into a computerized system will be launched in my organization. Employees have fear to lose their job security and comfort due to these uncertain organizational changes. The executive directors and GOP did not convey the benefits of these organizational changes. In this situation, I have to build the trust and KS culture for implementation of OC. I should have to share information that the GOP and executive directors are not selling the administrative rights to private strategic partner. The ERP will bring improvement in employee as well as organizational performance. (Mr. H, General Manager).

The GOP is selling shares and implementing new technologies in my organization. The employees who are working as a staff may not ready to accept these organizational changes because these decisions are implemented without their involvement. They are feeling stress and uncertainty due to the fear of job insecurity, financial and non-financial benefits, and fear to lose the comfort zone after the implementation of OC. In this situation, I invite to staff and workplace union for satisfying their concerns and
uncertainty regarding these organizational changes. I can share number of positive reasons that how these technologies can improve the services and performance level of employees. (Mr. G, Manager).

We are not against formulation and implementation of OC. However, the government and top management are taking decisions without considering us. Furthermore, they did not convey whether new technology can become the reason to decrease a number of jobs and other benefits (Mr. E, Staff).

Organizational changes are not successful due to ineffective communication and lower level of participation in key decisions. I have to share my knowledge, experience, information and skills at lower level for understanding and acceptance of these change initiatives. Therefore, I should focus on fostering trust, communication and participation that can remove barriers for OC and foster KS practices (Mr. K, Deputy General Manager).

The GOP has signed an agreement against borrowed money and has assured the international monetary fund privatization under its economic reforms. Therefore, GOP aims to sell the shares of these public sector organizations. The SLIC is an organization with AAA-ranking organization and also has a profitable real estate business. The SLIC has a super normal profit and holds 66% of the market share, and it is thus meeting the goals of becoming the best insurance provider in Pakistan. However, the GOP wants to sell 15% of the initial public offering of the SLIC. The GOP and top management are facing resistance due to fears of job security, wage awards, medical benefits, golden handshakes, lower levels of employee participation in organizational activities, and a lack of trust and knowledge sharing about the benefits regarding OC. Therefore, the workplace union and employees are protesting because the government is not sharing relevant information or considering the stakeholders. The NBP employees are also facing the same problems. In this critical situation, building a trust between top management and employees, involvement in decision making, information sharing
culture, and meetings are essential for satisfying their concerns regarding job security and benefits of OC.

Theme 2

In my organization, the benefits of privatization and technological changes can share through discussions, organizational magazines, meetings, and presentations. The knowledge can foster regarding why these organizational changes are so productive for my organization (Mr. F, Assistant Vice President).

The notice boards, circulars, Facebook groups, emails, and meetings can reduce the uncertainty and fear regarding these organizational changes. I will be used these social media tools for fostering knowledge regarding the benefits of these organizational changes (Mr. G, Deputy General Manager).

The social media tools like viber, facebook, and whatsapp groups may be used to eradicate the resistance to OC. When I share the right information regarding the job security and other benefits then it should decrease the resistance to OC (Mr. H, Deputy General Manager).

Around two third of respondents have been explained the means of KS practices through meetings (Inside office, outside office), discussion (viber, facebook, whatsapp), related to privatization and ERP software. OC can be successful when employees share positive knowledge and experience. Furthermore, these organizations have usually top down communication therefore circulars, notice board and organizational magazines also highlight the milestone related to OC which can reduce uncertainty about change.

Theme 3

Senior staff employees cannot understand technological changes (i.e., new software), and they habitually work manually. Therefore, I have to conduct meetings and presentations regarding the benefits of technological advancement. The knowledge
sharing culture that is based on trust and effective communication can be useful to eradicate cultural, political, and resistance to change (Mr. I, Assistant Vice President).

My organization is facing problem such as employee resistance, a cynical attitude towards organizational change, working on the same job for many years, political involvement, workplace union involvement, and power distance that can create problems in effectively implementing change. Therefore, the building a level of trust in change leaders, ensuring employee participation in decisions, and effectively communication can lead to implement these changes (Mr. K, Staff).

I am not understanding that why these changes are necessary for my organization. I have not any information regarding the benefits of these changes. Furthermore, whether or not these changes can damage the existing benefits and comfort zone. The government and top management should share the relevant information and also involve us in decision making (Mr. B. Staff).

Employees should be involved in decision making and information sharing regarding these OC. The effective involvement and knowledge sharing can reduce the uncertainty regarding technological and ownership changes (Mr. A, General Manager).

OC usually bring stress, depression, uncertainty and insecurity because of move from comfort level. Therefore, employees of these organizations are resisting against the change initiatives. They have the opinion that the GOP has not share the knowledge regarding the benefits of privatization. Furthermore, employees have no trust in the fairness of the process of privatization and their workplace unions have given press statement regarding the personal interest of the GOP in selling shares of these organizations. Therefore, the government and executive directions have to involve their employees in organizational activities and decisions making.

Theme 4
If government and executive directors share the knowledge regarding the OC then staff and workplace union will not resist to these OCs. As a stakeholder, we have right to involve in organizational activities and decision making that can reduce our uncertainty and build a trustable environment in my organization (Mr. N, Staff).

Employees should be involved in decision making and information sharing regarding formulation and implementation of OC. The effective involvement and knowledge sharing can reduce the uncertainty regarding technological and ownership changes (Mr. A, General Manager).

Top management should establish a culture of knowledge sharing that is based on trust, participation, and effective communication. Knowledge sharing culture can be useful to discuss the positive benefits of OC and eradicate resistance to change (Mr. O, Staff).

The public sector organizations are varying with respect to ownership, conflict level, control, funding, authority, level of trust, culture, incentive system, and political influences compare to private sector organizations. It is not easy to eradicate political involvement in hiring’s, promotions, transfers and assigning tasks. After privatization, cultural, structural and technological changes can brush up the human assets, employees who are unable to work in these changes and they will be taken golden handshake and exit from organization in near future. However, KS can create employees readiness to change and promote the effective working environment in these organizations.

The matrix coding query results has derived from interview data using the Nvivo 11-Plus. The results reveal that KS practices can develop high level of trust, high level of participation in decision-making and effective communication between employer and employees (See Table 2). Furthermore, these organizations have usually top down communication thus circulars, meeting, notice boards, magazines, viber and whatsapp groups can share knowledge and highlight the milestone related to OC which can reduce uncertainty about change (See Table 3).
The concept map and matrix coding query- NVivo chart derived from the interview data. In Table 2 and 3, we have captured frequencies of themes based on particular words repeated under a particular code. In Table 3, it is found that respondents are more focused on improving the employee participation in OC decisions and level of trust. In Table 4, electronic media such as TV channels and internet are more useful tools to foster KS to overcome the challenges of OC implementation in public sector organizations.

In figure 1 and 3, we are exhibiting how sources of KS can foster trust, communication, and involvement of employees in change initiatives. Furthermore, the results are showing that how a good level of trust, effective communication, and involvement in decision making can reduce uncertainties and overcome the challenges of OC implementation (See Figure 3).

Discussion

Unquestionably, each dynamic organization, whether in the private or public sector, in manufacturing or service sector, profit making or non-profit, focuses on fostering KS to implement OC and survive the competition of the dynamic business environment (Muqadas et al., 2016; Vong, Zo, and Ciganek, 2016; Park and Kim, 2015). However, launching information technology, fostering knowledge sharing behaviors and a knowledge intensive culture, requires changes in the structure, culture, processes, and
policies of an organization (Connelly et al., 2014; Berends, 2005; Fehér, 2004; Park & Kim, 2015). Furthermore, rightsizing, privatization, mergers, technological innovation, organizational renewal, customization, and changes in behaviors are necessitating changes in processes and policies of organizations (Aslam et al., 2015; Aslam et al., 2016).

This study conducted on public sector organizations that are in the process of dynamic business changes. According to Bruton and Lau (2008), despite volatile economic changes and stiff business competition in Asia, most studies have been conducted in the west side and have ignored the importance of Asia. There is lack of research that explores the role of KS for effective implementation of OC in the context of KS in developing countries. Furthermore, scant research is available related to the role of KS in overcoming the challenges of OC has been found in the context of public and private sector organizations. The public sector organizations in Pakistan are selling shares, transferring ownership, and introducing the latest technologies. However, limited knowledge, an unsupportive culture, a lower level of trust, and low involvement in organization activities are the hurdles that prevent implementing the effective changes.

The results have suggested that an understanding the sources and role of KS can reduce the negative consequences of OC, i.e., a resistance to change in ownership, a lack of acceptance of technological changes, a lower level of participation, a lack of trust, and an unsupportive culture. KS can enable employees to learn from each other, help to use the latest technologies, enhance performance, bring new ideas, and show positive attitudes towards OC. Based on prior literature, KS can beneficial to obtain positive organizational outcomes, i.e., creativity, technological innovation, managerial effectiveness, organizational success, organizational performance, organizational learning, problem solving, and OC (Cardinal, Alessandri, and Turner, 2001; Chien and Tsai, 2012; Imran et al., 2016; Park and Kim, 2015). Change leaders perform an important role because their skills and knowledge level can create favorable culture to execute an OC (Brandi and Elkjaer, 2011). These results are useful to increase the
understanding of the role of KS in the context of OC between organizational practitioners, change leaders, researchers, consultants, strategic managers, academics, and policy makers.

**Conclusion**

KS includes rich information, expertise, and competencies to fostering collaboration, establishing a knowledge sharing culture, enhancing mentoring, improving communication, developing new ideas and learning, and bringing new changes in organizations. The results of this research can facilitate OC via the effective use of KS, and it also lays a foundation for the top managements of public sector organizations to understand the benefits of KS in the context of OC. This study presented an overarching and unique conceptual framework on the sources and factors of KS to overcome the challenges of OC. It has found that KS, via different sources, can reduce resistance and build trust in change leaders. Furthermore, when employees are involved in planning and execution of OCs, the result is effective communication and participation. Effective communication and involvement in organizational activities can reduce resistance to change and transform an unsupportive culture into a KS culture. In future, this conceptual model would be tested and analyzed using statistical techniques that can enhance the validity and generalizability of these results.

**Delimitations and limitations**

This study has yielded several productive findings, but also has its limitations and delimitations. First, this study has focused on one aspect of knowledge management only (i.e. KS) in the context of OC. Second, this study has confined itself to interviews and data was only collected from employees of public sector organizations. Third, the data was collected using a purposive sampling technique that decreases the generalizability of the findings. Forth, the respondents’ answers for starting questions may influence the answers of ending questions and respondents’ answers are also influenced by question format that ultimately limited the generalizability of results.

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Figure 1: Matrix Coding Query - NVivo Chart

Figure 2: Matrix Coding Query - NVivo Chart
Figure 3: Concept Map

Knowledge Sharing

- Electronic Media
  - Viber, Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter
- Workshop and Training Programs
- Notice boards, Meetings, Circulars
- Pamphlets, Magazines, Handbooks

Improve in level of Trust

Foster Communication

Enhance participation in Change Decisions

Remove Structural, Cultural, Political and Social Barriers of Change

Manage Technological and Ownership Changes
### Table 1: Matrix Coding Query

<table>
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<th>Foster effective Communication</th>
<th>Enhance Participation in Decision Making</th>
<th>Remove the Structural, Cultural, Political, and Social Barriers of Change</th>
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