Change Pressure on Organizational Commitment and Identification: Knowledge and Decision-making Competencies in Government Units

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Abstract. Staffs in government units may encounter problems of pressure when facing dramatic organizational changes. In an interesting context of administrative merge of Kaohsiung city and county, we examined the influences of change pressure on post-merger organizational identification and commitment. We further developed and investigated the detailed relationships from competence perspective, which emphasizes the importance of knowledge processing and decision making capabilities. Results followed. First, the hypothesized negative impact of change pressure on organizational identification was not supported. Second, change pressure has a significant negative influence on commitment. Third, identification influences on commitment positively. Fourth, the positive moderation role of knowledge capability in the relationship between pressure and identification was not supported. Fifth, the positive moderation role of knowledge capability in the relationship between change pressure and commitment was supported. Sixth, the positive moderation role of decision-making capability in the relationship between pressure and identification was not supported. Seventh, the positive moderation role of decision-making capability in the relationship between pressure and commitment was supported.

Keywords. Change pressure, Commitment, Identification, Knowledge competence, Decision-making competence, Government units.

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1. Introduction

Value creation and implementation for governmental organizations depend largely on the quality of its working staffs. The quality challenges are even greater when the governmental units are undergoing organizational changes such as restructuring. Many imperatives emerge in the progress of such strategic changes include commanding system changes, tasks re-design and re-definition, job rotation, human resource compositional changes, new culture, etc. Easily, these changes may cause pressure in task-related or psychological dimensions of the human resources, and then affects their identification and commitment. Even worse, change resistance consequently may lead to unexpected losses (Coch & French Jr., 1948). Based on this reason, suitable institutional or work practices for motivating the staffs for self-adjustment and pressure relief become important (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

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Beside physiological issues to be handled, competence aspect issues should also be cared. Indeed, it is critical to discuss the solutions for resolving change pressures from capability perspective. Even the psychological weakness has been filled up by motivational mechanisms, staffs still need to be equipped with competences that can make changes really happen. Nowadays the knowledge-processing and decision making have become two necessary competences for workers (Zack, 1999). In the context of facing rapid and dramatically organizational changes, members in the workplace need to be able to make agile decisions, based on their knowledge bases (Simon, 1979).

Put differently, competences are significant sources staffs can utilize well for reconciling psychological flaws. Competences are also critical for external assessment, when determining if a specific governmental unit can respond to change pressure well. Especially, in the context of governmental units, strategic changes are not as common as in other sectors (e.g., business industries). Thus, it is critical but lacking in existing literature of understanding the roles of knowledge and decision-making competences play in the relationship between change pressure and outcomes.

In sum, this paper offer discussions of the following issues in heeding the abovementioned gap proposed in the context of local governmental units: what is the influence of organizational change pressure on organizational commitment and identification? What is the essence of governmental staffs' knowledge and decision-making competences? What is the role of such competences plays in the relationship between pressure and psychological contributions?

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Impact of pressure during organizational change on organizational identity

An organization's employees are its most important asset and play a key role in the organization's success. In terms of the form of or strategy for organizational change, influencing factors include products and services, strategy and structure, technology, personnel and culture. However, regardless of the process of change in its various forms, "people" are invariably the key factor that determines the success of an organizational change (McCann, 1991). It is impossible for a change at the organizational level to succeed if the individual's change is neglected. Whether in government reengineering, administrative corporatization or even privatization, build–operate–transfer (BOT), BOO, OT or organizational changes of other types and degrees, all activities that result in changes must be performed by people. Only when employees can adopt the behavioral patterns that meet the exigencies of organizational change can such change be successfully implemented.

Numerous studies confirm that organizational commitment is closely related to organizational performance, member performance, member attendance and the demission rate. The uncertainty of organizational change is a source of occupational stress, decreases employee organizational commitment and job satisfaction and increases employee intention to resign (Vakola & Nikolaou, 2005). Stress that originates in organizational change also results in reduced levels of organizational identity in an organization's members (Wasti, 2005). Organizational change can create a feeling of job insecurity in employees and negatively affects job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Other studies have also shown that organizational reengineering generates job insecurity in employees, which negatively affects their organizational commitment. This research line reveals that when an organization undergoes change, its members are likely to experience role conflicts and stress due to uncertainty, which negatively affects the employee's identification with the organization (Lankau et al., 2006). Therefore, the following hypothesis (H1) is proposed:

H1: The pressure caused by organizational change has a negative impact on organizational identity.

2.2. Impact of pressure caused by organizational change on organizational commitment

According to social-identity theory, the identity relationship between the individual and the organization directly or indirectly affects differences in attitude toward their work among individual employees (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Regarding organizational commitment, the psychological relevance of the individual and the organization is the most important conceptual element (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Mowday, Porter & Steers, 1982) and expresses the individual's construction of resource commitment toward groups/organizations (van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

Given that organizational commitment is intrinsically related to an individual's resource commitment to the organization, pressure experienced during organizational change that affects the individual's resource commitment should also affect the individual employee's organizational commitment. Studies have revealed that stress negatively affects employee morale and can result in interpersonal conflict and "retreat", or failure by the individual to behave in a manner favorable to the organization (Peterson, 2003). Subsequently, the employee may exhibit decreased "willingness to contribute" with respect to organizational commitment (Sims & Kroeck, 1994).

H2: Pressure caused by organizational change has a negative impact on organizational commitment.

2.3 Impact of organizational identity on organizational commitment

Organizational identity and organizational commitment differ. Whereas the first concerns the psychological level, the second involves the link between the individual and the organization. Thus, the two concepts are completely different. Generally, organizational identity reflects the member's mental state with respect to the organization's image, attractiveness, relevance and satisfaction. In contrast, organizational commitment focuses on the individual's construction of his or her relationship to the group/organization (van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). The relationship between the two concepts can be described through the development process that is based on organizational behavior. For example, many studies note that when internal members of an organization are aware in a self-defined sense of all phenomena affected by the organization, organizational identity comes into being. In addition, when the organization's members reflect the psychological state of the organization to which they belong, the relationship construction (i.e., organizational commitment) between the individuals and the organization is strengthened (Ashforth & Maeel, 1989; van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006). In today's highly competitive, rapidly changing world, organizational identity also involves the willingness to maintain one's employment and the recognition of the organization's value by the individual. Therefore, organizational identity influences the individual's satisfaction while enhancing the organization's performance, in turn affecting organizational commitment (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis (H3):

H3: Organizational identity has a significant positive impact on organizational commitment.

2.4. Adjustment effect of knowledge ability

Self-efficacy is related to how individuals perceive themselves able to perform a certain task using existing skills (Bandura, 1986). Kankanhalli *et al.* (2005) defined knowledge effectiveness as the confidence that individuals have in successfully contributing their knowledge through organizational systems. Because knowledge activities are multidimensional and multi-procedural (Hansen *et al.,* 2005), in this study, we based our research on knowledge activities. However, we did not limit ourselves to knowledge contribution activities in defining knowledge effectiveness as the ability of the organization's members to perceive them selves successfully coping with new and old knowledge. This ability represents an important aspect of

an individual's self-perception in the workplace.

Kankanhalli *et al.* (2005) found that a high degree of self-efficacy in knowledge processing and a tendency to help others tend to encourage employees to take the initiative in activities for the organization's benefit (e.g., the contribution and use of the electronic repository studied in this research). When members recognize that they can effectively cope with knowledge activities, they become more confident in assessing their ability in all the skills that are required to accomplish the task assigned by the organization (Constant, 1994; 1996). In contrast, if the organization's members consciously perceive a lack of relevant knowledge to complete the task assigned by the organization or the lack of an ability to cope with new knowledge, their motivation to actively participate or execute temporary and unfamiliar tasks or tasks of a more complex nature will be significantly decreased. In this regard, municipal employees with a high level of knowledge effectiveness are better prepared to manage the negative feelings related to organizational identity or organizational commitment that result from the pressure caused by change. In addition, they are more prone to take the initiative to learn and participate to cope with the pressure of organizational change or the phenomenon of retreat in organizational identity and commitment caused by such pressure. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses (H4; H5):

H4: Knowledge ability plays a positive adjustment role with respect to the pressure on organizational identity caused by change.

H5: Knowledge ability plays a positive adjustment role with respect to the pressure on organizational commitment caused by change.

2.5. Adjustment effect of decision-making ability

Simon *et al.* (1987) argued that good decision making could be viewed as an important capability for the organization's employees because it involves processing large quantities of information and problem-solving. In an empirical study, Mann *et al.* (1998) revealed that individuals with different cultural backgrounds perform differently in terms of decision-making self-efficacy. Staff members raised in Western cultures have higher average decision-making self-efficacy than those raised in the Asian cultures. That is, comparatively, Asians lack confidence in their ability to make effective decisions, which makes it more necessary for them to strengthen decision-making self-efficacy than for Westerners. It is for this reason that we determined to conduct this study on municipal employees.

H6: Decision-making ability plays a positive adjustment role with respect to the pressure on organizational identity caused by change.

H7: Decision-making ability plays a positive adjustment role with respect to the pressure on organizational commitment caused by change.

3. Methodology

The questionnaire used in this study included four constructs: "knowledge ability", "decision-making ability", "organizational identity" and "organizational commitment". Control variables were also used. Overall, the scales used in the study were revised versions of those employed in previous studies, which enhanced the validity of our variable measurements (Stone, 1978). The variables, definitions, measurement items and measurement methods for each construct are described as follows:

In this study, two scales were adopted. (1) The Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) of Poter, Steers & Mowday (1974) was used to measure organizational commitment. The OCQ items included "I am willing to make a lot of extra effort to help the merged government unit", "I am very concerned about the future development of the merged government unit", "I am very pleased that I chose to work in the merged government unit", "I told my friends and family that the merged government unit is an organization highly worthy of servicing", "I will be proud to tell people that I am part of the merged government unit", and "I found

my values are mostly similar to those of the merged government unit". A 5-point Likert scale was used, and the higher the score was, the higher the degree of organizational commitment. (2) According to Meyer & Smith (1993), organizational commitment can be sub-divided into affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment. The following items were designed to measure affective commitment: "Since the merger, I am more willing to combine my future career planning with the objectives of the government unit", "Since the merger, I feel that the problems faced by the government unit are my own problems", "Since the merger, the organization makes me feel that I have no identity", and "Since the merger, I feel as if I am a member of a large family". The following items were used to measure continuance commitment: "I have made a lot of effort in the government unit and will not leave because of the reorganization" and "There is virtually no other job opportunity available to me if I leave the government unit". The following items were used to measure normative commitment: "Even if there are better job opportunities outside the government unit, I will not leave", "I will feel guilty if I leave the government unit now", "Since the reorganization, the government is worthy of my increased loyalty" and "I will not leave the government unit now because I feel that my colleagues get along well with one another." The two scales were weighed and modified according to the design process of the questionnaire. The 5-point Likert scale was used for all the items, whereby the higher the score was, the higher the degree of organizational commitment.

This scale was modified from the scales of Kankanhalli *et al.* (2005), in which knowledge effectiveness was operationally defined as the self-perception by an organization's members of their level of confidence with respect to accomplishing a knowledge-related activity or goal. To avoid perfunctoriness or answer bias due to fatigue during the survey, certain items employed negative wording. The main items were as follows: "I am confident that I can provide knowledge that is deemed valuable by others in the organization", "I have the relevant skills to provide valuable knowledge", "It makes no difference for other members whether I provide knowledge" and "The majority of the members in the organization can provide knowledge that is more valuable than that offered by me."

The measurement of this variable was modified from the decision self-esteem scale developed by Mann *et al.* (1998). The main items are as follows: "I have confidence in my ability to make decisions", "I feel that I have a poorer ability to make decisions than others" and "I think I am a good decision maker".

The control variables in this study included gender, age, experience, marital status, education, salary, rank (including elementary, senior and junior levels; senior, intermediate and junior grades in the case of police rank) and different levels of agency (i.e., commission, division, bureau).

Because several control variables used a nominal scale, in this study, marital status (0: married, 1: unmarried), ethnic group (0: indigenous; 1: non-indigenous), education (0: non-college; 1: college) and job title (0: supervisor; 1: non-supervisor) were set as dummy variables for the regression analysis.

Data analysis

Principal component analysis was employed. To facilitate the subsequent hypothesis testing, the items of the basic constructs, such as organizational commitment, pressure caused by change and organizational identity, were reduced based on the scores for the variables obtained in the questionnaire survey. Regarding reliability and validity, the reliability of each construct and the level of the effectiveness of the measurement of variable connotation were tested. The primary condition of the validity measurement was that it should have reliability, and reliability was the necessary condition of validity. After the reliability analysis, the consistency of the items was confirmed. Subsequently, the validity analysis was conducted to determine whether the measured variables were in line with the research variables to be measured. For validity, two aspects were emphasized: first, whether the measurement tool in fact measured the concept that it was intended to

examine but not others; second, whether the measurement could in fact correctly measure the concept. The validity analysis included content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity. "Content validity" refers to whether the connotations of the items can appropriately represent the concept to be investigated. "Criterion-related validity" refers to the degree of correlation between the measurement results and the criterion. "Construct validity" refers to the degree of the construct that is measured by the measurement tool.

The correlations and interactions between and among the measured variables were analyzed through correlation analysis and multivariate regression analysis. The correlation analysis was performed on the variables to investigate the degree and direction of the correlations. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was adopted in this study, which was in the range of -1 to 1. The closer the coefficient was to -1 or 1, the higher the negative correlation or positive correlation it represented. Regression analysis is a statistical method that uses one or more independent variables to explain another dependent variable, to interpret and predict and to understand the strength and direction of the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable.

4. Results and discussion

In this study, 281 questionnaires were issued in the form of a traditional paper questionnaire via on-site distribution or through the personal network of the investigators. Subsequently, all 281 questionnaires were retrieved, with no invalid questionnaires resulting from incomplete answers. Thus, the recovery rate was 100%.

After collection, the data were immediately re-checked and processed manually or using statistical software to quickly locate data input error and thus a void wasted time and effort. In the manual data re-checking, questionnaires were randomly selected and examined with respect to the correctness of the data entry by work-study students. In cases of missing information, the relevant subject was re-examined. In re-checking using statistical software, the basic statistical distribution of the data was examined (e.g., whether the data matched the normal distribution). In addition, to avoid sample loss or estimation bias caused by missing data or data bias, open-ended questions (i.e., "other cases") were included in certain questionnaire items so that the respondents could provide other answers when they were unable to make a choice. Additionally, outlier values were excluded from the analysis.

In Table 1, organizational identity is the dependent variable. The table showsthat the pressure experienced during organizational change did not affect employee organizational identity. Thus, H1 was not supported. This outcome likely occurred for the following reason. When the employees experienced the new exigencies of changes in organizational structure, procedure and business content (caused by a merger of counties and cities), although they perceived that they likely had to make adjustments, they undertook psychological adjustment to avoid cognitive disorders since they remained in the organization and their posts. They also enhanced their identification with the municipal government to motivate themselves in coping with the challenges posed by the change. Because the adjustment process requires time, the impact of the organizational change on organizational identity did not appear.

H4 and H6 hypothesized that knowledge ability and decision-making ability play a positive adjustment role in the relationship between the pressure caused by the change and organizational identity. That is, the negative impact on the organizational identity of the pressure caused by the change weakened under high levels of knowledge ability or decision-making ability. In this study, the hierarchical regression method was used to test the previously noted hypotheses. Model 1 was integrated with the control variables. Model 2 was integrated with the variable of the pressure caused by the change. Models 3 and 5 were integrated with the adjustment variables of knowledge ability and decision-making ability. Models

4 and 6 were integrated with all the antecedent variables and the interaction items for the pressure caused by the change and knowledge ability and for the pressure caused by the change and decision-making ability. The results reveal that the interactions were statistically insignificant. Therefore, H4 and H6 were invalid.

Table 1. *Regression analysis of organizational identity*

	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5	Model6
Constant						
age	0.026	-0.003	-0.033	-0.033	-0.077	-0.088
gender	-0.127	-0.142	-0.111	-0.112	-0.091	-0.092
Marriage	0.062	0.042	0.036	0.041	0.041	0.053
Education	-0.086	-0.081	-0.069	-0.069	-0.055	-0.058
Ethnics	-0.06	-0.031	0.025	0.019	0.044	0.025
Tenure	-0.075	-0.013	-0.038	-0.037	0.009	0.026
Old employer	-0.012	-0.006	-0.023	-0.021	-0.039	-0.042
Position	-0.198	-0.222	-0.198	-0.2	-0.116	-0.131
Change pressure		0.211	0.23	0.061	0.164	-0.25
Knowledge competence			0.232	0.105		
Decision competence					0.318	0.023
Pressure x Knowledge				0.197		
Pressure x Decision						0.522
F value	1.05	1.64	2.28	2.07	2.83	2.64
R2	0.06	0.1	0.14	0.14	0.17	0.17
$\triangle$R2	0	0.04	0.08	0.07	0.11	0.11
	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5	Model6
Constant						
age	0.026	-0.003	-0.033	-0.033	-0.077	-0.088
gender	-0.127	-0.142	-0.111	-0.112	-0.091	-0.092
Marriage	0.062	0.042	0.036	0.041	0.041	0.053
Education	-0.086	-0.081	-0.069	-0.069	-0.055	-0.058
Ethnics	-0.06	-0.031	0.025	0.019	0.044	0.025
Tenure	-0.075	-0.013	-0.038	-0.037	0.009	0.026
Old employer	-0.012	-0.006	-0.023	-0.021	-0.039	-0.042
Position	-0.198	-0.222	-0.198	-0.2	-0.116	-0.131
Change pressure		0.211	0.23	0.061	0.164	-0.25
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Pressure x Knowledge				0.197		
Pressure x Decision						0.522
F value	1.05	1.64	2.28	2.07	2.83	2.64
R2	0.06	0.1	0.14	0.14	0.17	0.17
$\triangle$R2	0	0.04	0.08	0.07	0.11	0.11

Notes: The numbers in the table represent standardized regression coefficients. * $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$.

H3 addressed the relationship between organizational identity and organizational commitment. Tables 2 and 3 shown that the coefficients of organizational identity for the general or emotional commitment to the organization were significant in all models. Therefore, H3 was valid. H5 and H7 hypothesized that knowledge ability and decision-making ability play a positive adjustment role in the relationship between the pressure caused by change and organizational commitment. That is, the negative impact on the organizational identity exerted by the pressure caused by the change weakened under high levels of knowledge ability or decision-making ability. In this study, the hierarchical regression method was used to test the previously noted hypotheses. Model 1 was integrated with the control variables. Model 2 was integrated with the variables of the pressure caused by the change and organizational identity. Models 3 and 5 were integrated with the adjustment variables of knowledge ability and decision-making ability. Models 4 and 6 were integrated with all the antecedent variables and the interaction items for the pressure caused by the change and knowledge ability and for the pressure caused by the change and decision-making ability. When the dependent variable was general commitment to the organization, the coefficients of "the pressure brought by the change * knowledge ability" and "the pressure brought by the change * decision-making ability" had negative signs. This result indicated the negative impact on the general commitment to the organization of the alleviation of the pressure during the organizational change by knowledge ability and decision-making ability. Therefore, H5 and H7 were valid.

Table 2. *Regression analysis of the general commitment to the organization*

	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5	Model6
Constant						
age	-0.074	-0.098	-0.12	-0.121	-0.152	-0.13
gender	-0.204	-0.125	-0.108	-0.103	-0.1	-0.097
Marriage	0.074	0.028	0.025	0.007	0.048	0.023
Education	-0.063	-0.006	0	0.003	0.014	0.022
Ethnics	-0.141	-0.095	-0.058	-0.031	-0.025	0.014
Tenure	0	0.065	0.048	0.042	0.086	0.053
Old employer	-0.001	0.008	-0.003	-0.012	-0.008	-0.002
Position	-0.217	-0.095	-0.086	-0.073	-0.012	0.017
Identity		0.65	0.616	0.619	0.574	0.584
Change pressure		0.057	0.077	0.827	0.028	0.842
Knowledge competence			0.159	0.723		
Decision competence					0.3	0.88
Pressure x Knowledge				-0.875		
Pressure x Decision						-1.029
F value	1.99	14.924	14.613	14.037	17.61	17.188
R^2	0.101	0.516	0.536	0.55	0.584	0.601
$\triangle R^2$	0.05	0.481	0.5	0.511	0.551	0.566

Notes: The numbers in the table represent standardized regression coefficients. * P <0.05; ** P <0.01.

When the dependent variable was emotional commitment to the organization, the coefficient of "the pressure brought by the change * knowledge ability" had a negative sign. This result indicated the negative impact on the general commitment to the organization of the alleviation of the pressure during the organizational change by knowledge ability and decision-making ability. Therefore, H5 and H7 were valid.

Table 3. *Regression analysis of the emotional commitment to the organization*

	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4	Model5	Model6
Constant						
age	-0.052	-0.082	-0.103	-0.104	-0.151	-0.141
gender	-0.175	-0.11	-0.094	-0.088	-0.076	-0.075
Marriage	0.132	0.086	0.083	0.062	0.098	0.087
Education	-0.058	-0.006	0	0.003	0.015	0.019
Ethnics	-0.08	-0.03	0.007	0.037	0.047	0.065
Tenure	0.043	0.12	0.103	0.096	0.142	0.128
Old employer	-0.009	0.001	-0.011	-0.021	-0.025	-0.023
Position	-0.16	-0.06	-0.051	-0.036	0.032	0.045
Identity		0.573	0.539	0.543	0.487	0.491
Change pressure		0.116	0.136	1.004	0.084	0.451
Knowledge competence			0.156	0.808		
Decision competence					0.333	0.595
Pressure x Knowledge				-1.012		
Pressure x Decision						-0.464
F value	1.165	9.64	9.432	9.233	11.895	10.942
R^2	0.062	0.408	0.427	0.427	0.486	0.489
$\triangle R^2$	0.009	0.365	0.382	0.397	0.445	0.445

5. Conclusions, recommendations and future research

Based on the results, the following recommendations are offered. First, the results of the empirical study show that in 2012, sometime after the merger of counties and cities, the employees had well adapted to the pressure caused by the change. The successful adjustment reflects the effective implementation of well-designed support by the government. This outcome also demonstrates that the adjustments and reforms adopted by the municipal government in recent years in human resources management in response to the change have been effective and that the relevant policies and measures should continue being implemented. Second, organizational identity does in fact affect employee commitment to the organization. Therefore, we recommended that in image management, such as internal publicity (e.g., cultural promotion or narratives that describe the merger of counties and cities), image building and promotional activities for municipal governments, employee benefits, and key leadership roles (e.g., mayor and heads of various offices), efforts should be made for sustainability and innovativeness so that employee identification with the municipal government can be maintained.

Our findings also indicate that for certain employees who experience pressure

during organizational change, knowledge ability and decision-making ability could effectively mitigate the negative impact of the stress on organizational identity and organizational commitment. Mann *et al.* (1998) found that Asians are more prone to adopt an avoidant decision-making style than Westerners. This outcome reveals that because they are affected by cultural characteristics, employees from Asian cultures tend to exhibit inadequate engagement in decision-making. Moreover, in addition to the processing of routine business in contemporary organizations, knowledge ability has been the main factor facilitating the growth of competitiveness based on constant learning by the employees. This phenomenon indicates that municipalities and academic as well as research institutions should collaborate to understand the situation and provide practical measures to enhance the previously described self-efficacy and ability-related activities according to the survey results. Today's public organizations should no longer exclusively rely on the custom of subordinates following the example of their supervisors. On the contrary, it is desirable for employees at all levels to possess the skills of self-learning, task interpretation, problem-solving and decision making. Therefore, it is recommended that municipal governments and other public-sector organizations should value and invest in human and intellectual capital. In addition to improving their staff's general knowledge and decision-making ability through traditional education and training/learning workshops, knowledge management (including practical implementation and system construction), practical communication, intelligent capital assessment and decision-making simulation courses should be introduced to enhance employee abilities in knowledge processing/learning and independent/team decision-making in diverse scenarios. In this manner, municipal governments can develop a unique competitive advantage over governments of other counties and cities in areas such as policy implementation and administrative services.

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