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Building Halal-Ready Enterprises: An Integrated Framework of Organizational Change Readiness for Malaysian Small and Micro Firms

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ABSTRACT

The development of a robust halal ecosystem in Malaysia necessitates the active participation of small and micro food enterprises (SMiEs), who are often challenged by limited resources and organizational constraints in meeting halal certification requirements. Despite the comprehensive guidelines provided under the Malaysian Halal Certification Procedure Manual (MPPHM), many SMiEs remain unprepared to align their internal readiness with these technical compliance standards. This Halal-Ready study aims to introduce a conceptual framework that integrates both psychological and technical elements of organizational change readiness to explain SMiEs' readiness for halal compliance. Guided by the Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) theory, this conceptual paper adopts a qualitative synthesis approach to examine the influence of change valence and informational assessment, comprising task demands, resource availability, and situational factors, on the motivation and capability of organizations to implement halal standards. The principal contribution of this study lies in reframing halal requirements as technical change outcomes, thereby linking organizational cognition and structure with halal-specific compliance expectations. The proposed framework offers new theoretical insights by adapting ORC theory to the halal context and delivers practical implications for policymakers and support agencies aiming to strengthen halal readiness among SMiEs. This paper concludes that achieving halal compliance is not solely a technical process, but one deeply rooted in organizational readiness for change.

1. Introduction

Halal certification is a comprehensive process that requires companies to comply with Islamic principles and emphasizes cleanliness, safety, and quality (*tayyiban*) in product development. This process entails strict standards, thorough audits, and continuous post-certification monitoring [1–3]. Non-compliance may lead to suspension or revocation of certification, which can significantly impact

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a company's reputation [4,5]. As such, businesses must fully understand and consistently implement halal standards across their entire operational chain to ensure that their products meet the certification requirements [6-8].

In Malaysia, halal certification approval is granted or denied by the Halal Verification Panel following a structured three-stage process: document review, payment of certification fees, and an on-site audit (see Figure 1) [5,9,10]. The assessment covers a wide range of criteria, including the status of raw materials, product/menu naming, the presence of Muslim employees, sanitation and waste management practices, production processes, records of raw material procurement, packaging, labeling, processing and storage areas, as well as the organization's halal management system (Manual Prosedur Pensijilan Halal Malaysia (Domestik), 2020). Failure to submit the necessary documentation or to meet the required standards may result in rejection either during the document screening phase or at the panel presentation stage [11].

Post-certification, certified companies are subject to unannounced compliance inspections to ensure continued adherence to halal standards. This underscores the importance of maintaining a high level of ongoing commitment and not just to obtain, but also to retain halal certification. Such commitment and collective readiness are particularly critical because halal compliance often requires significant organizational changes, including adjustments to structure, operations, and workplace culture [12,13]. For instance, small and micro enterprises may need to invest in halal training, replace high-risk equipment, or modify existing production processes to align with halal requirements. These efforts go beyond technical compliance because they also demand cultural transformation and reallocation of organizational resources [14,15]. In this context, halal certification can be seen as a form of organizational innovation—one that necessitates a high level of readiness to change and strategic capability to manage transformation effectively.

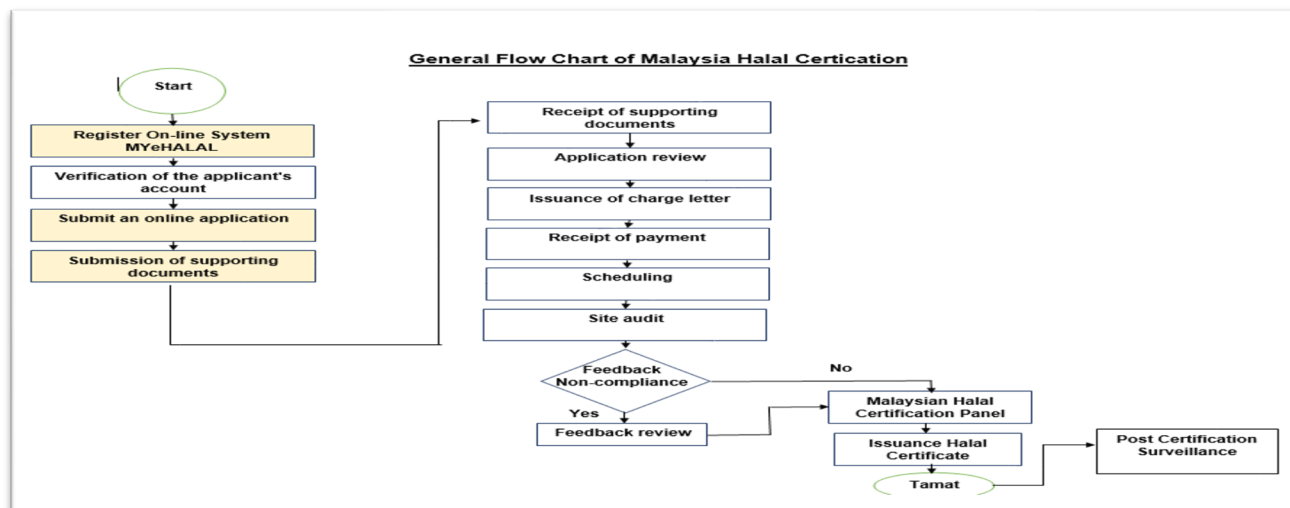


Fig. 1. General flow chart of Malaysia Halal Certification. Source: JAKIM [16]

Complying with halal certification standards is a complex and ongoing process that requires the full attention and commitment of an entire organization. However, planned changes within an organization often trigger uncertainty and anxiety among employees. These reactions are influenced by varying levels of experience, motivation, attitudes, and openness to change — factors that can disrupt the smooth implementation of compliance efforts [17-19].

For small and micro enterprises (SMiEs), one of the key challenges in meeting halal certification standards is the lack of awareness and understanding of the requirements [7,20,21]. This is

compounded by financial limitations, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient knowledge of procedural requirements, time constraints, and weaknesses in organizational management [22,23]. To address the challenges, many scholars have emphasized the need for ongoing support, technical guidance, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing internal capabilities [24-26]. In this regard, the literature consistently highlights several critical success factors that contribute to effective halal compliance. These include strong and sustained top management commitment, effective human resource practices, structured learning and training programs, a customer-centric approach, efficient management of production processes, and strategic collaboration with suppliers [10,27,28]. Collectively, these elements are instrumental in fostering consistent and robust implementation of halal standards across the industry.

At the core of these success factors is the organization's ability to implement internal transformation — a process that depends on its level of readiness to change. Organizational change, therefore, revolves around readiness, capability, and capacity to embrace transformation. Employees' trust and their perception of how prepared the organization is can significantly shape their response to change, ultimately determining the direction and success of the organization's transformation efforts [17,30]. In the context of halal standard compliance, assessing an organization's readiness to change is becoming increasingly important. In today's fast-paced and challenging business environment, the ability to adapt is no longer optional. Instead, it is a fundamental requirement for competitiveness and sustainability [31,32].

With this in mind, the present article proposes a conceptual framework identifying four key factors influencing Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) among Malaysia's small and micro enterprises in their efforts to comply with halal certification. Understanding these factors can better equip the halal industry to be more prepared, agile, and successful in both obtaining and maintaining Malaysia's Halal Certification (SPHM).

1.1 The importance of Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC)

The sustainability and competitiveness of an organization in today's dynamic business environment are heavily dependent on the success of its change initiatives. Therefore, achieving a high level of readiness from the outset is crucial especially for large-scale, system-wide transformations to ensure that plans are executed effectively and that goals remain realistic and attainable [33-35]. Without a doubt, Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) is a key driver of successful implementation, as it reflects both the organization's capability and willingness to adapt and transform.

At its core, ORC is shaped by the collective attitudes, beliefs, and readiness of organizational members [35,36]. It highlights the importance of creating a sense of dissatisfaction with the status quo, reshaping the work environment, and crafting a forward-looking vision as foundational steps toward building readiness for change [37]. A critical component of ORC is implementation efficacy, which refers to the consistency and quality with which changes are executed.

On the other hand, organizations with low ORC levels are more likely to encounter strong resistance to change, significantly raising the risk of failure [38-40]. This makes assessing organizational readiness a vital cultural process, as it enables the early identification of potential barriers before they escalate into major issues [41,42]. Timely assessments allow for targeted interventions and adjustments, helping organizations avoid operational disruptions and strengthen their adaptive capacity [43,44]. Hence, a preventive approach to readiness assessment can help organizations align their resources and strategies more effectively, allowing for quicker and more strategic responses to emerging opportunities or threats [45-47]. In conclusion, adopting a

preventive readiness mindset emphasizes the importance of being prepared early and encourages a shift from reactive to proactive organizational behavior.

1.2 Theoretical Basis of ORC

Based on theory, ORC is a concept characterized by multiple definitions and diverse model approaches used to assess an organization's readiness for change. One of the earliest contributions to this field was by Armenakis *et al.*, [37], who proposed a readiness model focusing on the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of organizational members, as well as the dynamic interactions of social and interpersonal influences. Meanwhile, Holt *et al.*, [48] introduced a multidimensional construct that captures employees' belief-based evaluations of their readiness for change. This construct includes perceived change efficacy, change appropriateness, leadership commitment, and the personal benefits of change as experienced by organizational members. Weiner [49] later introduced a widely cited theory that conceptualizes organizational readiness as a shared psychological state, emphasizing collective commitment and change efficacy. While his model shifts the focus from individual-level beliefs to collective organizational capacity, it does not entirely exclude the role of individual perceptions

Furthermore, the level of analysis in ORC research varies depending on the measurement tools applied, reflecting the complexity of assessing organizational readiness for change [40,50]. At the individual level, readiness involves perceptions of change suitability, managerial support, self-efficacy, change-related competence, and the perceived value of anticipated outcomes [37,48]. These perceptions are also shaped by future vision, shared beliefs, and interpretations of the organizational context. At the organizational level, readiness is conceptualized collectively, encompassing human and physical resources, communication channels, formal policies, and the degree of task interdependence—all of which influence the most appropriate evaluation approach [40,51,52].

Conceptually, this article emphasizes organizational-level readiness, as this approach fosters collective learning, shapes positive perceptions of change, and promotes shared commitment towards more effective transformation. Among prominent scholars in this field particularly those who focus on organizational-level analysis Weiner's theory of Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) defines readiness as a shared psychological state among members of an organization who feel committed to implementing change and confident in their collective ability to do so. From a conceptual standpoint, organizational readiness reflects two fundamental components: commitment to change and change efficacy [35,53]. Commitment is shaped by how much value members place on the change itself, while efficacy is determined by their cognitive evaluation of task requirements, resource availability, and current organizational or situational conditions [49]. Therefore, key drivers of this readiness include how valuable the change is perceived to be (change valence), the assessment of task demands, the perception of available resources, and the broader situational context within the organization (See Figure 2).

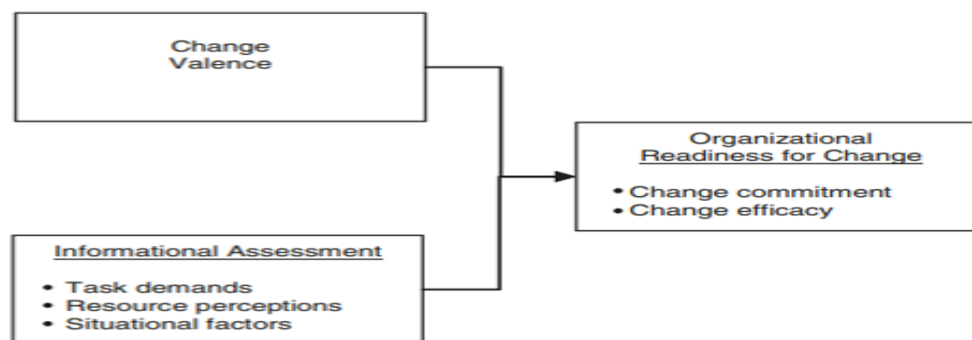


Fig. 2. Determinants of organizational readiness for change. *Adapted from Weiner, BJ. (2009), A theory of Organizational readiness for change

Generally, change valence pertains to the perceived benefits, which significantly correlate with change commitment and efficacy, as demonstrated in a study of Malaysian accountants adjusting to digital transformation [54]. Task knowledge, or the comprehension of the change process and resource perception, is also essential in improving readiness [54]. Furthermore, a supportive culture of change and adequate resources for coping with change can strengthen this relationship [40,55]. Overall, these antecedents highlight the multifaceted nature of readiness, emphasizing the importance of individual and organizational factors in facilitating successful change initiatives [40, 56]. Generally, shared resolve is crucial in organizations, as change often requires collective, coordinated action from many people working as a team. Despite growing recognition of the importance of halal certification, limited research has examined the factors driving Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) among Malaysia's small and micro enterprises. Existing studies emphasize change valence, task knowledge, resources, and supportive culture, but their combined influence in the halal context remains underexplored. This study proposes a conceptual framework comprising two main constructs—change valence and implementation capability (encompassing task demand, resource availability, and situational factors)—to explain ORC for halal certification compliance, offering insights to strengthen industry preparedness, agility, and long-term certification success.

2. Literature of ORC for halal compliance in SMEs.

Organizational readiness to comply with halal standards is increasingly recognised as a crucial determinant of certification success, particularly among SMEs [57-59]. However, current literature remains fragmented and often addresses readiness in operational silos without a cohesive conceptual basis [60-63].

While SMEs play a significant role in the growth of the halal industry, they face a range of unique challenges that differ from those experienced by larger organisations. These include limited management capacity, financial and resource constraints, poor access to technology, and inadequate skill levels all of which hinder their ability to comply effectively with halal requirements [64-66].

Previous studies have shown that strong organizational readiness can help SMEs overcome these barriers to halal compliance [31,67,68]. However, despite widespread awareness of the importance of halal certification, there is still a noticeable gap in the literature when it comes to understanding the organisational readiness of SMEs for halal compliance [39,57,69].

While prior studies have acknowledged external motivators such as market opportunities, branding, and consumer trust [28,69,70] fewer have explored how internal dynamics, particularly psychological enablers like change valence and informational assessment interact with technical

expectations embedded within Malaysia's Halal Certification Procedure Manual (MPPHM 2020). While these factors are undoubtedly important, they do not fully capture the internal dynamics that influence an organisation's readiness for halal compliance. Internal factors such as the perceptions and attitudes of organisational members are equally crucial in shaping the level of readiness and ensuring sustained compliance [10,35,36,39]. Yet, these internal elements have received limited attention in current studies, even though they align closely with the comprehensive perspective offered by ORC theory [40,71].

Research by Giyanti *et al.*, [72] and Wahyuni [57] has underscored the importance of employee involvement and acknowledged varying levels of readiness among SMEs. However, their emphasis has primarily been on technical and operational aspects, rather than the psychological dimensions underpinning readiness. While some studies have assessed the influence of organisational readiness on performance, they tend to do so using broader frameworks such as the Technology-Organization-Environment (TOE) model, overlooking the more nuanced approach that ORC theory offers [28,73]. This gap indicates a clear need for more focused research on the predictive factors that shape an organisation's readiness for halal compliance, particularly in the SME sector [74,75].

In summary, previous studies have highlighted multiple factors influencing ORC in halal compliance, yet a clear synthesis that integrates these factors into a cohesive framework for Malaysian SMiEs remains lacking. This study responds to that gap by conceptually synthesising relevant literature to identify the most prominent antecedents.

2. Methodology

This study employs a conceptual research design to develop an integrative framework on Halal-Ready to explain organizational readiness for halal compliance among SMiEs in Malaysia. This paper addresses this gap by proposing a novel conceptual framework—Halal-Ready—that maps Weiner's ORC constructs onto the structured requirements outlined in Malaysia's halal certification standards (MPPHM). A narrative synthesis approach was adopted, whereby relevant literature on halal certification, SMiEs readiness, and organizational change was reviewed. Key constructs such as task demands, resource availability, and situational factors were extracted and re-contextualized within the technical halal compliance setting. The sources include peer-reviewed journals, conceptual papers, and the Malaysia Halal manual procedure.

The resulting framework positions halal certification as a technical change outcome and incorporates both cognitive and structural enablers to capture the readiness dynamic among SMiEs. This methodology enables the systematic integration of psychological and technical dimensions, offering a theoretically grounded model with practical applicability for policymakers and halal support agencies.

3. Result

Based on the narrative synthesis of relevant studies, two core antecedents of Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) emerged as central to halal compliance readiness among Malaysian SMEs: change valence and information assessment. The following sections present these findings in detail, structured according to ORC dimensions.

According to ORC theory, change valence represents a key psychological dimension that reflects both individual and collective motivation towards change [40]. This dimension encompasses factors such as confidence, optimism, perceived compatibility, efficacy, and the perceived value of the change itself. Specifically, the psychological readiness at the organisational level refers to a shared belief and intention among members to embrace and implement change, grounded in a common

understanding and appreciation of its significance. Elements such as collective confidence, optimism, flexibility, shared sense of compatibility, group efficacy, and overall organisational valence are critical components that shape this motivational dimension.

3.1 Change Valence and Readiness for Halal Compliance: Hypothesis 1

According to Weiner's Organizational Readiness for Change (ORC) theory, *change valence* refers to how much individuals within an organisation perceive a proposed change as valuable, beneficial, and relevant. This shared perception helps drive collective motivation to support, implement, and sustain the change [48].

In the context of halal certification, change valence reflects how management and employees of small and micro enterprises (SMicroEs) view halal compliance — whether they see it as something that brings value, such as enhanced consumer trust, access to new markets, a competitive edge, or alignment with religious obligations [59]. A positive perception of these benefits can spark early commitment and motivate firms to invest time and resources into compliance [57,67].

Studies have shown that participation in halal awareness or training programs can significantly improve change valence by helping firms understand the benefits of certification [20,76]. Beyond strategic benefits, these perceptions also influence operational readiness. For example, Masudin *et al.*, [67] found that employees who saw the benefits of halal logistics technology were more willing to adopt changes. Internal motivations, such as the desire to enhance product quality or business reputation, have also been found to drive greater readiness than external pressure like market demands or regulation [24,77]. When business owners perceive halal certification as a branding tool, an export strategy, or a competitive advantage, their readiness to comply increases [21,23,78].

In sum, change valence plays a pivotal role in shaping an organisation's readiness to pursue halal certification, particularly among SMiEs in Malaysia. When organizations perceive halal certification as a positive value and view it as aligned with their business goals, or customer expectations, they are more likely to engage actively in the certification process. This perceived value may stem from motivations such as enhancing brand reputation, accessing new market segments e.g., exports, or strengthening consumer trust. Thus, when the change is seen as beneficial, desirable, and meaningful, it fosters a higher degree of commitment and proactive behavior among SMiEs.

Grounded in Weiner's (2009) ORC theory, this conceptual understanding supports the proposition that change valence is not merely an abstract attitude, but a practical driver of organizational action toward halal compliance. Based on this rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1₁: Change in valence has a significant effect on the readiness of small and micro food enterprises in Malaysia to comply with halal standards

3.2 Assessment of Information Influencing Readiness for Halal Compliance: Hypothesis 2

Information assessment is a core component of ORC. As proposed by Weiner's [49], it operates alongside change valence to form the foundation of an organization's collective readiness to implement change. Although less commonly explored in earlier empirical studies, this concept has gained growing attention in contemporary research on organizational transformation.

At its core, information assessment refers to the degree to which members of an organization understand the need for change and how that change can be executed. It is a cognitive function that integrates knowledge of task demands, availability of resources, and situational factors influencing implementation [35,53,79]. Through this process, individuals evaluate whether their organization

possesses sufficient capacity to change, ultimately shaping collective confidence in the feasibility of implementation. An organization's ability to accurately assess these elements is critical, as it contributes to the development of targeted and effective change strategies [80,81]. Therefore, understanding information assessment is not only theoretically important but also practically relevant in shaping readiness for change—particularly when compliance with standards such as halal certification is involved.

Empirical evidence suggests that when organizational members have a high level of information assessment, they are more likely to be collectively ready to support change [82-84]. This includes readiness to adopt new compliance standards, such as halal certification. The component of task demand reflects how well members understand the extent of adjustments required in their roles, systems, or procedures within the digital education sector [85-87]. Therefore, it is clear task demands were linked to improved readiness for change.

Resource availability, on the other hand, refers to the belief that the organization has adequate human, financial, technical, and informational resources to support the change. Interestingly, in a study of Malaysian accountants, Philips [88] found there is significant link between resource perception and change commitment—suggesting that sectoral context may influence this relationship.

The third factor, situational context, includes external and internal influences such as government policies, top management support, organizational culture, or market conditions. Agile organizations are typically found to have higher levels of information assessment, allowing them to adapt more effectively to contextual factors [89,90]. Quantitative research by Philips, [88] supports this, showing that information assessment significantly influences organizational readiness scores. This finding is echoed in healthcare settings, where a clear understanding of resource adequacy has been shown to enhance readiness for adopting changes in maternity care practices [79,91]. Similarly, qualitative research by Wannasupchue, [68] confirms the importance of information assessment in shaping organizational readiness. In the context of user innovation, the study indicates that users' information-based readiness significantly impacts customer readiness and the intention to adopt self-service technologies, such as internet banking, highlighting its importance in gauging acceptance of service changes [92]. These studies collectively demonstrate that a high level of information assessment positively influences behavioural intentions toward change.

In the context of halal compliance among Malaysia's SMiEs, information assessment plays a critical role. The ability of business owners and employees to understand the requirements of halal certification (task demand), assess their capacity in terms of workforce, infrastructure, and finances (resource availability), and consider external factors such as government support, agency assistance, and consumer expectations (situational context) determines their readiness to comply with Malaysia's halal standards (MPPHM, 2020).

In summary, existing literature supports the idea that information assessment is a key predictor of organizational readiness for change. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1₂: Information assessment with dimensions of task demand, resource availability and situational factors has a significant influence on halal compliance readiness among small and micro food enterprises in Malaysia

3.3 Significance of the Conceptual Framework

The core of this theory lies in the understanding that strengthening ORC can be systematically guided through a conceptual framework designed to support halal compliance efforts, particularly within the context of Malaysian SMiEs. This framework is grounded in Weiner's [49] ORC theory and

integrates two core dimensions of psychological enablers (change valence and informational assessment) and technical readiness, which reflects key halal certification requirements extracted from the Manual Procedure for Malaysia Halal Certification (Domestic 2020).

While previous models have often positioned halal compliance as a purely technical checklist or approached readiness as a broad organizational construct, this framework seeks to bridge the internal psychological states of SMiEs with their operational readiness to meet specific halal certification standards. These include domains such as raw material control, documentation practices, facility management, packaging, and internal halal control systems, among others. The framework offers a holistic and contextually grounded approach by mapping beliefs, motivation, and perceived capacity against these structured certification requirements.

This perspective is especially relevant for SMiEs operating under resource constraints and informal structures, where psychological readiness often determines the success of technical implementation. Accordingly, while the framework is theoretically underpinned by the ORC literature, it is equally shaped by the practical realities and challenges encountered by SMiEs in the halal sector.

Notably, the framework reveals how organizational readiness to engage with technical processes is influenced by shared values, collective efficacy, and perceptions of compatibility with halal practices. When combined with contextual antecedents such as task demands, situational enablers, and resource availability, this framework enables more granular, dynamic assessments of readiness. This provides policymakers and certification authorities with a useful analytical tool to tailor interventions and track readiness levels according to the capacity of individual firms.

That said, the framework has certain limitations. While it effectively addresses motivational and contextual dimensions, it does not yet account for how readiness is sustained over time or how it translates into long-term behavioral compliance. Moreover, the framework has yet to be empirically tested. Future research employing longitudinal or mixed-method designs could serve to validate its practical application within various halal industry sectors.

Nonetheless, the framework offers a valuable foundation for developing diagnostic instruments, targeted training programmes, and policy mechanisms that support halal certification efforts. By combining the human dynamics of organizational change with the technical rigour of halal compliance, this model provides a dual-lens perspective that is both theoretically informed and practically grounded. This will make it well suited to the evolving needs of Malaysia's vibrant SMiEs landscape.

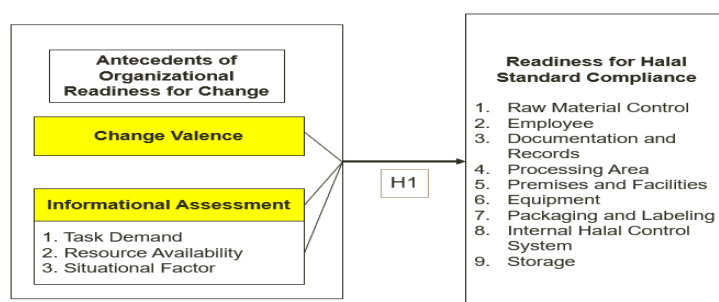


Fig. 3. Conceptual framework

4. Conclusions

To the best of our knowledge, this paper is among the first conceptual studies to propose an integrated framework that links organizational readiness for change (ORC) with halal certification

compliance among Malaysian SMiEs. Anchored in Weiner's (2009) theory of organizational readiness, this framework brings together two essential components: change valence (shared motivation) and informational assessment (task demands, resource availability, and situational context). This dual perspective enables a holistic understanding of what drives halal readiness at both psychological and technical levels.

What sets this framework apart is its adaptation to the realities of SMiEs, where informal structures and resource constraints dominate. The readiness construct as a dependent variable is operationalized based on efficacy and commitment to the latest Malaysian halal standard (MPPHM 2020). This variable covers key dimensions such as control of raw materials, roles of employees, hygiene of premises, documentation, and internal halal control systems. This makes readiness more measurable and directly aligned with the actual requirements of halal certification.

From a theoretical standpoint, the proposed model extends Weiner's ORC theory by contextualizing it within the halal ecosystem and tailoring its application to SMiEs. It demonstrates how readiness is not merely an abstract psychological state but can be translated into structured operational practices and decision-making in regulated contexts like halal.

From a practical perspective, this framework has the potential to serve as a diagnostic and developmental tool for SMiEs seeking halal certification. It emphasizes the need for integrated support not just in the form of financial aid and policy incentives, but also through capacity-building initiatives such as training and awareness programs. At the same time, it underscores the irreplaceable role of intrinsic psychological readiness—including belief, confidence, and value commitment in making halal adoption a sustainable reality.

While this study offers a meaningful conceptual advancement, there remain key gaps to address. In particular, future research should examine how internal organizational factors such as leadership commitment, employee involvement, and halal literacy moderate or mediate the path from readiness to actual compliance. Empirical validation, field testing, and iterative refinement of the framework across diverse SMiEs contexts would strengthen its utility and robustness. In the evolving halal landscape, readiness is no longer optional. It is a strategic imperative for competitiveness, trust, and long-term viability. This framework offers a timely contribution, both in theory and in practice, towards building halal-compliant enterprises from the ground up.

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