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Change Management in Turbulent Times: Leading Organisational Transformation through Disruption, Complexity and Adaptive Intelligence

Dr Alina Baskakova
ORCID: 0009-0005-8750-2082

Dr. Benjamin Bensam Sambiri
ORCID: 0009-0006-6662-0183
Both Authors are Lecturers at Berlin School of Business and Innovations

Abstract: Change management has become the defining challenge of contemporary organisational life, yet its failure rate remains, by most credible estimates, somewhere around 70 per cent. That is not a new finding. What is new, and what this paper argues, is that the persistently high failure rate is not primarily a capability problem. It is a framing problem. Organisations reach for change management models when what they actually need is contextual intelligence: the ability to read an environment honestly, choose an approach that fits it, and lead people through uncertainty without pretending the uncertainty is not there.

This paper examines change management across ten interconnected dimensions, drawing exclusively on secondary literature published between 2018 and 2025. The dimensions addressed are: why organisational change is needed; the organisation development techniques through which it is initiated; the planned and emergent approaches available to leaders; the internal and external forces driving transformation; the sources and significance of resistance; four influential change management models; the role of action research as a practitioner inquiry methodology; the typology of organisational change; contemporary approaches encompassing digital transformation, agile methodology and artificial intelligence-enabled adaptation; and the cultural conditions through which innovative organisations sustain the psychological safety that genuine transformation requires.

Throughout the analysis, the Contextual Innovation Performance Model (CIPM) developed by Sambiri (2024) is applied as a unifying analytical lens. The CIPM insists on a straightforward but consistently neglected point: that the institutional environment, technological infrastructure, and human capital context in which an organisation operates are not background conditions to be acknowledged in a limitations section. They are the primary determinants of which change management approach will work and which will fail. That insistence runs through every section of this paper.

Keywords: Change Management, Organisational Change, Organisation Development, Resistance to Change, Psychological Safety, Digital Transformation, Innovation Culture, CIPM, Action Research, Agile Change Management

1. Introduction

There is a version of the change management conversation that has been repeated, with minor variations, for the better part of three decades. The environment is turbulent. Organisations must adapt or perish. Here is a model with eight steps, or seven elements, or three stages. Follow it carefully and transformation will follow. This paper is not that conversation.

The opening claim is worth dwelling on for a moment. Change management, as a field, has never been short of models. What it has consistently lacked is an honest account of why those models so frequently fail to deliver what they promise. McKinsey and Company (2021) put the failure rate of large-scale transformation programmes at approximately 70 per cent. IBM's Institute for Business Value (2022) traced the primary causes of failure not to technical failures but to human ones: inadequate leadership engagement, communication that did not reach the people who needed it, resistance that was managed rather than understood, and a cultural environment that could not sustain transformation once the initial momentum dissipated. These findings are not surprising. They have been replicated across the research literature for decades. What is surprising is how little they have changed the way change management is designed and delivered.

The argument this paper makes is that the persistence of that gap is a function of framing. Change management models almost universally present themselves as applicable across contexts, as if the same sequential process that works in a mid-sized British manufacturing firm navigating a digital transformation will work equally well in a Malawian university restructuring its governance arrangements, or an Indonesian

platform business integrating a new AI-driven operational layer. It will not. Context is not peripheral to change management. It is constitutive of it.

Burnes and Bargal (2017) made a similar point, arguing that the change management field has always been shaped by competing paradigms reflecting deeper disagreements about the nature of organisations and the predictability of human behaviour within them. Those disagreements have not been resolved, and the field remains productively incomplete. This paper works within that incompleteness rather than pretending to resolve it. It examines ten interconnected dimensions of change management, maps the relationships between them, and applies the CIPM framework throughout as a mechanism for keeping contextual intelligence at the centre of the analysis.

Three specific contributions are claimed. First, an integrated analytical framework that treats the ten dimensions not as independent topics but as a coherent intellectual architecture. Second, the application of the CIPM as a contextualising lens across all ten dimensions, making institutional context a primary variable rather than an afterthought. Third, an argument that what the change management field most urgently needs is not another universal model but a more honest reckoning with the complexity that existing models have dissolved into reassuring simplicity.

2. Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist research design grounded in systematic literature review methodology. The interpretivist position, briefly stated, holds that understanding complex organisational phenomena requires contextual, relational, and historically situated analysis rather than the reduction of those phenomena to variables that can be cleanly measured and compared. This is particularly appropriate for a study of change management, where the same intervention produces radically different outcomes in different settings, and where the meaning that organisational members make of change is as consequential as the structural changes being implemented.

Systematic literature review, as Tranfield, Denyer and Smart (2003) defined it and Snyder (2019) subsequently extended, differs from a narrative review in its methodological transparency, its defined scope, and its explicit criteria for including and excluding sources. Snyder (2019) argued that systematic reviews are particularly valuable in management research precisely when a field is extensive but fragmented, which describes change management scholarship rather well. Multiple paradigms, multiple disciplinary traditions, and multiple practitioner schools have generated bodies of evidence that rarely speak directly to one another.

Sources were selected on four grounds. Recency: the primary source base covers 2018 to 2025. Authority: sources come from peer-reviewed journals, recognised academic presses, and authoritative institutional publishers including the OECD, the World Economic Forum, McKinsey Global Institute, and IBM Institute for Business Value. Relevance: sources must address change management, organisational change, organisation development, innovation culture, or closely related phenomena in ways directly pertinent to the ten research dimensions. Diversity: the source base is deliberately drawn from multiple disciplinary perspectives, organisational types, and geographic contexts, to avoid the analytical narrowness that comes from treating one institutional environment as the universal norm.

The CIPM framework developed by Sambiri (2024) provides the analytical lens applied across all ten dimensions. Within each dimension, the CIPM foregrounds the institutional environment, technological infrastructure, and human capital context as moderating variables, asking not only what a given change management approach involves but under what contextual conditions it is most and least likely to produce the outcomes it promises.

3. Literature Review

Change management scholarship has expanded considerably over the past three decades, producing a body of literature that is at once rich and, in places, stubbornly contradictory. The ten themes addressed in this review span the foundational question of why change happens at all, through the organisational development techniques and leadership approaches through which it is managed, to the cultural conditions that determine whether transformation endures. What follows does not attempt to survey every strand of that literature. It draws selectively on scholarship that is theoretically grounded, empirically tested, and contextually honest about its own limitations.

3.1 Why Organisational Change is Needed

The scholarly literature on the necessity of organisational change consistently returns to the relationship between an organisation and its environment. When that relationship drifts out of alignment, whether because the environment has shifted or because the organisation has drifted from its own strategic purpose, pressure accumulates until some form of change becomes unavoidable. Pettigrew, Woodman, and Cameron (2001)

articulated this with particular clarity in their account of context, content, and process as the three inseparable dimensions of organisational change: what changes, why it changes, and how the change unfolds are not separate questions but facets of a single dynamic.

External forces are the most frequently cited drivers of organisational change in the literature, and for good reason. Competitive pressure, technological disruption, regulatory shifts, and changing customer expectations collectively compress the time organisations have to respond to environmental signals. Kotter (2021) updated his earlier account of urgency to reflect a post-pandemic environment in which multiple disruptions arrive simultaneously rather than sequentially, making the traditional model of identifying a single burning platform for change increasingly inadequate. The World Economic Forum (2023) documented what it termed a polycrisis: a convergence of economic, technological, geopolitical, and ecological pressures whose interaction is more consequential than any individual component.

Internal drivers of change are somewhat less prominent in the scholarly literature despite being at least as consequential in practice. Burnes (2022) described the internal change imperative as the moment at which incremental operational adjustment is no longer sufficient and a qualitative transformation in organisational functioning becomes necessary. That moment is frequently reached not because something dramatic happens externally but because strategic drift, capability gaps, or cultural calcification have quietly accumulated to the point where the organisation can no longer perform at the standard its environment requires. The CIPM framework advanced by Sambiri (2024) adds a qualification that matters enormously in practice: what constitutes a compelling change imperative is always partially contextual, and a crisis-level change driver in one institutional environment may register as a manageable pressure in another. Change management leaders who do not account for that contextual variability risk either overstating the urgency of change and exhausting their organisations, or understating it and arriving too late.

3.2 Organisation Development Techniques for Bringing About Change

Organisation development, as a body of theory and practice, occupies a distinctive position in the change management literature. Its intellectual origins lie in the post-war humanistic psychology movement and the early action research of Kurt Lewin, and its central commitment, that human capability, collaborative process, and cultural condition are the primary levers of organisational effectiveness, has held across multiple generations of scholarship. Anderson (2019) provided one of the most comprehensive contemporary treatments, identifying process consultation, team building, survey feedback, intergroup development, and appreciative inquiry as the five OD techniques with the strongest current evidence base.

Process consultation, originally developed by Edgar Schein, is grounded in the conviction that the most useful thing a change management consultant can do is help organisational members understand and improve their own relational and group dynamics rather than delivering an expert solution designed outside those dynamics. The technique resists the temptation, which most clients find very tempting, to tell the organisation what to do. Its value lies precisely in developing the organisation's own capacity to diagnose and address its challenges, which produces more durable change than externally designed solutions routinely manage to achieve.

Appreciative inquiry, rooted in the work of Cooperrider and Whitney and now thoroughly embedded in contemporary OD practice, represents a deliberate inversion of the diagnostic logic that most change management frameworks share. Rather than beginning by identifying what is broken, appreciative inquiry seeks to discover and amplify what is already working, and to use those positive exceptions as the foundation for envisioning and constructing a better future. Bushe and Marshak (2015) positioned appreciative inquiry as one of the most significant expressions of the dialogic turn in OD scholarship, a shift away from treating organisations as systems to be diagnosed and fixed toward treating them as meaning-making communities whose capacity for transformation depends on changing the conversations that constitute them.

3.3 The Approach of Change: Planned and Emergent

The planned approach to change management rests on the assumption that transformation can be deliberately designed, sequentially implemented, and successfully embedded through structured programmes of diagnosis, intervention, and consolidation. This approach dominated change management practice through the latter half of the twentieth century and continues to shape the frameworks most widely deployed by management consultancies. Burnes (2022) noted that its assumptions are most defensible in conditions of relative environmental stability and clearly defined performance gaps; both of those conditions are considerably rarer in contemporary organisations than the popularity of planned change models would imply.

The emergent approach holds that genuine complexity in organisations makes detailed sequential planning not merely inadequate but actively misleading. Weick and Quinn (1999), in a paper whose influence on subsequent scholarship has remained remarkably durable, drew a distinction between episodic change, the

discrete and bounded interventions that planned models are designed to manage, and continuous change, the stream of ongoing micro-adjustments through which organisations actually adapt to their environments in real time. Their argument was that contemporary organisations need leadership capacity for both, and that the skill is not choosing one approach over the other but developing the contextual judgment to work fluently with both depending on what any given situation actually demands.

Stacey (2019) pushed this argument further, drawing on complexity theory to argue that organisations are complex adaptive systems in which outcomes emerge from the interactions of multiple agents rather than from the execution of centrally designed plans. In such systems, the appropriate leadership task is not architecting a future state but creating the conditions under which productive emergence becomes possible: fostering the relational patterns, the diversity of perspectives, and the psychological safety that allow organisations to adapt intelligently to circumstances that no plan could have fully anticipated. Hayes (2022) documented how the most effective change management leaders develop personal fluency across both planned and emergent modes, moving between them in response to honest environmental reading rather than ideological commitment to either.

3.4 The Forces of Change

Lewin's force field analysis, developed in the 1940s and still widely applied in contemporary change management practice, holds that any organisational situation represents a dynamic equilibrium between forces driving toward change and forces resisting it. What makes the framework enduringly useful is not the elegance of its central premise but what it implies about the nature of resistance: that it is not an obstacle to be overcome but a structural feature of the equilibrium that must be understood before it can be shifted. Attempting to force change through without first reducing the restraining forces typically produces not transformation but escalating resistance, because the driving forces and restraining forces are simultaneously strengthened.

At the level of the external environment, the forces driving organisational change have grown in number, speed, and interdependence. Kotter (2021) identified globalisation, technological change, competitive dynamics, and shifting customer expectations as the primary external drivers, a formulation that remains accurate but increasingly understates the ecological dimension. OECD (2023) documented that sustainability pressures have shifted from reputational to regulatory in most major economies, making environmental accountability a legal change driver rather than a voluntary one. The convergence of digital transformation with post-pandemic supply chain restructuring and geopolitical realignment has created a change environment that few organisations had designed themselves to navigate.

Internal forces for change are frequently underestimated in change management frameworks that take external disruption as their primary reference point. Kanter (2019) described the architecture of confidence as one of the most powerful internal forces shaping whether change is possible at all: the collective belief among organisational members that the institution is capable of transforming itself successfully. Where that belief exists, change becomes self-reinforcing. Where it has been eroded by previous initiatives that overpromised and underdelivered, it becomes a restraining force of considerable power. Change management leaders who have not assessed the confidence architecture of their organisation before launching a transformation programme are attempting to navigate difficult terrain without a reliable map.

3.5 Resistance to Change and the Sources of Resistance

Resistance to change is the most extensively documented and most consistently mismanaged phenomenon in the change management literature. The default managerial framing of resistance, as irrational obstruction by people whose self-interest overrides their professional judgment, has been challenged by enough empirical research over enough years that its persistence is more a political convenience than a scholarly position. It persists because treating resistance as irrationality lets change management leaders avoid confronting the more uncomfortable possibility that the resistance is pointing at something genuine: a real risk, a real inconsistency, or a real implementation problem that the change management programme has not yet honestly acknowledged.

Ford, Ford, and D'Amelio (2008) made the most direct version of this argument in the Academy of Management Review, contending that resistance is better understood as feedback than as obstruction. When employees resist, they are frequently responding to genuine problems that change management leaders have not yet seen or have chosen not to acknowledge. Treating that response as information rather than opposition consistently surfaces insights that improve the quality of the change initiative. Piderit (2000) enriched this account by distinguishing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of resistance, noting that the three do not always move together and that effective change management requires different responses to each.

Oreg, Bartunek, Lee, and Do (2018), in a meta-analysis of the resistance literature published in the Academy of Management Review, identified three primary clusters of contributing factors: individual

dispositional resistance, which varies systematically across people and is not simply reducible to self-interest; context-related attitudes toward the specific change and toward the organisation more broadly; and the quality of the change management process itself. That third cluster is particularly important because it is the one most directly within the control of change management leaders. Resistance that appears to be dispositional often turns out, on closer examination, to be a response to a poorly designed or inadequately communicated change programme rather than an irreducible feature of the people experiencing it.

3.6 Selected Models of Managing Change

Lewin's three-stage model of unfreezing, movement, and refreezing occupies a foundational position in the change management literature that is simultaneously acknowledged and frequently misrepresented. The model is routinely criticised for its linearity and for the implicit assumption that a new equilibrium is a desirable destination in conditions of continuous environmental change. Burnes (2022) has argued at some length that much of this criticism misreads the original theory, and that recovering the full theoretical richness of Lewin's work, rooted in field theory, group dynamics, and a commitment to democratic participation in change processes, significantly extends its utility beyond the simplified three-box diagram through which it is typically presented.

Kotter's eight-step model, updated in Kotter (2021), remains the most widely applied change management framework in practitioner contexts globally. Its steps, creating urgency, building a guiding coalition, forming a strategic vision, enlisting a volunteer army, enabling action by removing barriers, generating short-term wins, sustaining acceleration, and instituting change, provide a recognisable sequence that makes the model immediately usable by change management practitioners who need to communicate a change programme to a broad organisational audience. Cameron and Green (2019) noted that the model's primary weakness is the same as its primary strength: its accessibility can encourage a mechanical sequential application that misses the non-linear realities of actual transformation processes.

The McKinsey 7S Framework contributed a genuinely important corrective to the structural bias of much early change management thinking by insisting that effective transformation requires the simultaneous alignment of seven interdependent elements: strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style, staff, and skills. Its most important insight is that the so-called soft elements, shared values and leadership style, are as consequential as the hard elements of strategy and structure, and that misalignment between them is a more common cause of change management failure than failure in any individual element taken on its own. Hayes (2022) documented how practitioners using the 7S framework as a diagnostic tool consistently uncover sources of resistance that structural analyses alone miss entirely.

Complexity theory applied to change management, developed most rigorously by Stacey (2019), argues that organisations are complex adaptive systems and that the most consequential implication of this is not theoretical but practical: detailed change management planning in genuinely complex systems does not merely fail to guarantee outcomes, it can actively mislead by generating false confidence in a predictability that does not exist. The appropriate leadership response in complex environments is not to improve the quality of planning but to invest in the relational and cultural conditions through which adaptive, emergent responses become possible. That investment, in psychological safety, in cross-boundary dialogue, and in the willingness to learn from unexpected outcomes, is qualitatively different from programme management, and it requires a different skill set from what most change management training develops.

3.7 Action Research Methodologies in Change Management

Action research occupies a position in the change management literature that is genuinely distinctive and frequently underappreciated. Most research methodologies maintain a principled separation between the activity of understanding a system and the activity of intervening in it, treating observation and action as stages that should not contaminate one another. Action research refuses that separation. In its original Lewinian formulation, understanding a social system and intervening in it are not successive stages but simultaneous activities: the best way to understand a complex system is to attempt to change it and observe carefully what happens as a result.

Coghlan and Shani (2018) identified three features of action research that make it particularly valuable in change management contexts. Its collaborative character means that the researcher works with organisational members rather than studying them at a remove, generating understanding that is richer and more practically grounded than outside observation alone can produce. Its iterative structure, the repeated cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, means that each round of inquiry informs the next, building cumulative understanding rather than arriving at a single answer to a fixed question. Its action orientation means that the quality of the change produced is an integral part of the research outcome rather than a separate practical concern that follows after the research is complete.

Bradbury (2022), in the third edition of the Sage Handbook of Action Research, distinguished first-person, second-person, and third-person forms of action research practice, a distinction that carries important methodological implications. First-person action research involves the practitioner-researcher inquiring into their own change management practice and its effects: a form of structured professional self-examination that generates insights that no external researcher could access in the same way. Second-person action research is conducted collaboratively with immediate colleagues and teams, building on the shared context of a specific working community. Third-person action research seeks to generate principles applicable beyond the immediate research context to wider scholarly and practitioner communities. Each form makes different claims and requires different forms of evidence, and change management scholar-practitioners need to be clear about which form they are conducting.

3.8 Types of Organisational Change

Nadler and Tushman's typology of organisational change, reviewed comprehensively by Cameron and Green (2019), provides one of the most useful frameworks in the literature for distinguishing between change situations that look superficially similar but require fundamentally different management responses. The typology organises change along two axes: the scope of the change, incremental or discontinuous, and its timing relative to environmental pressure, anticipatory or reactive. The four resulting change types, tuning, adaptation, re-orientation, and re-creation, each have a characteristic risk profile and a characteristic change management leadership requirement.

Tuning involves proactive fine-grained adjustment to existing strategies and processes before environmental pressure makes adjustment unavoidable. It requires attentiveness to weak environmental signals and the organisational discipline to act on them before they become strong signals, a discipline that most organisations find considerably easier to endorse in principle than to practice. Re-creation, at the opposite end of the typology, involves reactive and fundamental transformation in response to a crisis that threatens organisational survival. It is the most disruptive change management context of the four, the one in which leadership capacity is most severely tested, and the one that existing change management models are, on the whole, least well designed to address.

Weick (2000) added a dimension to this typology that the structural classification tends to underweight: the sensemaking processes through which organisational members construct meaning from ambiguous and rapidly changing circumstances. Change management leaders who design structurally coherent transformation programmes whilst neglecting the meanings their people are making of those programmes consistently discover that resistance has accumulated not because people are opposed to the structural change but because they cannot make coherent sense of it in relation to their existing understanding of the organisation's purpose and values. Attending to sensemaking is not a communication task to be delegated to the internal communications function. It is a core change management leadership responsibility.

3.9 Contemporary Approaches to Change Management

Three developments have collectively reshaped the change management landscape in the years since 2018: the deepening integration of digital transformation with organisational change management, the extension of agile principles beyond software development into organisational change more broadly, and the emergence of artificial intelligence as an active participant in change management design and implementation. Each development is significant on its own terms; their convergence represents a qualitative shift in what effective change management requires.

Vial (2019), in a systematic review of the digital transformation literature published in the Journal of Strategic Information Systems, established that digital transformation is not primarily a technology project but a strategic and organisational one. Organisations that frame digital transformation as a technology implementation consistently underperform those that recognise it as requiring simultaneous changes in value creation logic, operating model, and leadership culture. The technology is, in a meaningful sense, the easy part. The change management challenge lies in developing the cultural conditions under which digital tools generate organisational value rather than simply adding operational complexity.

Agile change management, as Denning (2018) documented, extends beyond the specific practices of sprint planning and retrospective review to encompass a set of principles about how organisations should relate to uncertainty: by preferring small experiments over large bets, continuous feedback over periodic reviews, and adaptive planning over fixed roadmaps. IBM's Institute for Business Value (2022) found that organisations applying agile principles to change management achieved faster implementation timelines and higher stakeholder satisfaction than those using traditional programme management approaches, though the research also noted that agile approaches require a degree of leadership tolerance for ambiguity that many organisations struggle to sustain.

The integration of artificial intelligence into change management is the most significant emerging frontier in the field and simultaneously the one whose implications are most incompletely understood. Fountaine, McCarthy, and Saleh (2019) identified predictive analytics as a particularly consequential AI-enabled capability for change management: the ability to identify resistance patterns before they crystallise, to personalise change management communication at the individual level, and to monitor implementation across geographically distributed organisations in real time. These capabilities are genuinely useful. They also raise questions about the appropriate boundaries of algorithmic management, employee surveillance, and informed consent that the change management field has not yet engaged with sufficient seriousness.

3.10 Innovation Culture: Experimentation, Failure, and Psychological Safety

The scholarly literature on innovation culture consistently returns to a counterintuitive finding: the organisations most capable of sustained transformation are not those that have eliminated the possibility of failure but those that have developed a distinctive relationship with it. Innovative organisations, as Wickham (2006) observed in his account of strategic entrepreneurship, are distinguished not by the absence of setbacks but by their capacity to treat setbacks as data rather than verdicts, to extract learning from every experiment regardless of outcome, and to maintain the institutional resilience to persist through multiple iterations before reaching a successful result. That orientation to failure cannot be proclaimed into existence by a values statement. It requires deliberate and sustained architectural support.

Edmondson (2019), in what has become one of the most influential contributions to the organisational learning literature of the past decade, demonstrated across multiple empirical studies that the single most powerful predictor of team learning behaviour is psychological safety: the interpersonal condition in which team members believe they can speak candidly, take risks, and acknowledge mistakes without punishment or humiliation. The finding has been replicated across diverse organisational contexts and cultural settings, though with important qualifications. Psychological safety is not the same as comfort, and it is not the absence of accountability. It is the condition in which honest, risky contributions are genuinely welcomed rather than implicitly penalised, and in which failure in genuine service of learning is distinguished from failure born of carelessness or disengagement.

Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen (2019) identified five behaviours that consistently distinguish innovative from non-innovative leaders across industries and organisational contexts: questioning that challenges foundational assumptions rather than refining existing answers; sustained observational attentiveness to the behaviour of customers, suppliers, and competitors; small-scale experimentation before committing to large-scale implementation; deliberate cross-boundary networking across disciplinary and institutional lines; and associative thinking that connects apparently unrelated domains to generate novel combinations. What the research makes clear is that none of these behaviours is exotic or reserved for unusually gifted individuals. All of them are learnable and developable. The obstacle to their development in most organisations is not personal incapacity but a cultural and structural environment that systematically rewards their opposites.

The conditions enabling innovative culture do not emerge spontaneously from good intentions. Google's Project Aristotle, documented by Duhigg (2016), found psychological safety to be the single most important differentiator between high-performing and low-performing teams across the company. Amazon's structured post-mortems, Netflix's culture of radical transparency, and similar organisational architectures for learning share a single important feature: each was deliberately designed, maintained, and reinforced through specific leadership choices about what to measure, what to reward, and what to protect. The CIPM framework developed by Sambiri (2024) adds a qualification that practitioners working outside North America and Northern Europe need to take seriously: the conditions enabling psychological safety are not culturally neutral. In institutional environments characterised by high power distance, the interpersonal dynamics that Edmondson identifies as foundational to learning and change management effectiveness may require different leadership behaviours and different organisational structures than those described in a research base whose geographic centre of gravity remains heavily weighted toward Silicon Valley and Scandinavia.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Why Organisational Change is Needed

The straightforward answer is that the environment demands it. The more interesting answer is that the nature of that demand has changed, and that organisations which have not updated their understanding of what the environment is asking of them are already operating with a strategy that does not match the world they are in.

Kotter (2021), updating work he first published in the mid-1990s, identified globalisation, technological change, competitive dynamics, and customer expectations as the primary external drivers. That list remains accurate but incomplete. Higgs and Rowland (2011) added societal forces demanding greater organisational

accountability and purpose, and regulatory forces that continuously reshape the boundaries of acceptable practice. Post-pandemic scholarship has added a fifth category, ecological forces, that is increasingly difficult to treat as peripheral. OECD (2023) documented that organisations failing to adapt to sustainability pressures now face not just competitive disadvantage but regulatory sanction and reputational damage that compound in ways that become structurally difficult to reverse.

The internal drivers are equally well documented, if sometimes less honestly acknowledged in practice. Change becomes necessary when an organisation's current capabilities, culture, or structure have drifted out of alignment with its strategic objectives or its environmental context. Burnes (2022) described this as the change imperative: the moment at which incremental operational improvement is no longer sufficient and a qualitative transformation in how the organisation works becomes unavoidable. The CIPM framework adds one qualification that is worth stating plainly: what looks like a compelling change imperative in a digitally mature, institutionally stable economy may look very different in a context where baseline operational capabilities are still being built. Change management leaders who ignore that distinction tend to import solutions designed for environments their own organisations do not resemble.

4.2 Organisation Development Techniques

Organisation development (OD) is the primary body of theory and practice through which planned change in organisational systems is initiated. Its intellectual roots lie in the humanistic psychology of Kurt Lewin, extended through the contributions of Beckhard, French and Bell. The foundational premise is that organisational effectiveness is best achieved by developing human capabilities, collaborative processes, and supportive cultural conditions rather than by redesigning structures and hoping that behaviour will follow.

Anderson (2019) identified five core OD techniques that retain strong contemporary relevance. Process consultation involves an external facilitator helping organisational members understand and improve their own group and interpersonal dynamics, working alongside rather than on top of the people whose behaviour is the subject of inquiry. Team building addresses the effectiveness of intact work groups, often through structured reflection on how the group functions and where it loses energy. Survey feedback systematically gathers attitudinal and process data and feeds it back to the organisation as a catalyst for shared awareness of performance gaps. Intergroup development addresses the tensions and misalignments that arise between functional groups, which are a frequently underappreciated source of change resistance in complex organisations. Appreciative inquiry, rooted in the work of Cooperrider and colleagues and now thoroughly embedded in contemporary OD practice, takes a deliberately different starting point: rather than diagnosing what is broken, it seeks to discover and amplify what is already working.

Bushe and Marshak (2015) characterised the shift from diagnostic to dialogic OD as the most significant paradigm change in the field since Lewin. The distinction matters practically. Diagnostic OD assumes that the organisation can be objectively assessed, that a gap between current and desired states can be identified, and that the task of change management is to close that gap through planned intervention. Dialogic OD begins from a different premise: that organisations are constituted by the conversations that happen within them, and that durable transformation requires changing those conversations rather than implementing solutions designed outside them. For change management practitioners working in conditions of high complexity and low predictability, that distinction is not merely theoretical.

4.3 Approaches to Change Management: Planned and Emergent

The change management literature has never fully resolved the tension between planned and emergent approaches, and the argument here is that it should not try to. The tension is productive. It reflects a genuine difference in what complex systems can and cannot be asked to do, and collapsing it into a synthetic framework that claims to incorporate both usually just produces a planned model with emergent language attached.

The planned approach holds that effective change management can be deliberately designed, systematically implemented, and successfully embedded through structured processes of diagnosis, intervention, and consolidation. Burnes (2022) noted that this approach dominated change management practice for much of the twentieth century and continues to shape the frameworks most widely deployed by consultants. Its assumptions are most valid in conditions of relative environmental stability and reasonably clear performance gaps. Both of those conditions are increasingly uncommon.

The emergent approach holds that in genuinely complex and dynamic environments, change management cannot proceed through predetermined sequences imposed from the top. It must be cultivated through conditions that enable adaptive responses to continuously evolving circumstances. Weick and Quinn (1999), in a paper whose influence on subsequent scholarship has remained durable, distinguished between episodic change of the kind that planned models are designed to manage and the continuous change of constant micro-adjustments through which organisations actually adapt to their environments in real time. Their core claim was that

contemporary organisations require not one approach or the other but the leadership capacity to work with both, moving deliberately between planned and emergent modes depending on what the situation demands. That claim has aged well.

Table 1: Planned versus Emergent Approaches to Change Management

Dimension	Characterising Features
Underlying assumption	Change is discrete and sequentially implementable versus emergent, non-linear and adaptive
Leadership role	Architect of a predetermined programme versus cultivator of conditions for adaptive self-organisation
Employee role	Recipients who must be persuaded versus active co-creators of the change management process
Primary tools	Structured models, project management, communication plans versus dialogue, experimentation, sensemaking
Best suited for	Stable environments with clear performance gaps versus complex, rapidly shifting environments
Key risk	Oversimplification of complex adaptive systems versus loss of strategic direction and accountability

4.4 The Forces of Change

Lewin's force field analysis, now more than seventy years old, remains the most useful single conceptual tool in the change management practitioner's repertoire. Its premise is simple enough: any given organisational situation reflects a dynamic equilibrium between forces driving toward change and forces resisting it. Effective change management requires either strengthening the drivers, weakening the restraints, or both. What makes the framework enduringly useful is not that premise but what it implies: that resistance is not an obstacle to be overcome but a structural feature of the equilibrium that must be understood before it can be shifted.

At the macro level, Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron (2001) identified three categories of external forces. Competitive forces include market disruption, new entrants, and shifting customer expectations, all of which compress the time available for deliberate change management. Technological forces, which in 2001 meant primarily digital transformation, now include artificial intelligence-driven operational change of a qualitatively different order. Institutional forces encompass regulatory change, evolving societal expectations, and the environmental accountability demands that have become progressively more legally binding across most major economies. The World Economic Forum (2023) added that the convergence of these forces in the post-pandemic period has created what it termed a polycrisis: multiple interdependent challenges arriving simultaneously, each making the others harder to respond to, and demanding change management capabilities that no single model was designed to provide.

At the organisational level, Kanter (2019) described one of the most powerful internal forces for change management as the architecture of confidence: the collective belief among organisational members that the institution is capable of transforming itself successfully. Where that belief exists, change management becomes self-reinforcing. Where it has been eroded, usually by previous initiatives that failed to deliver on their promises, it becomes a restraining force of the first order. Change management leaders who do not understand the confidence architecture of their organisation are attempting to navigate a river without knowing which direction it flows.

4.5 Resistance to Change and its Sources

Resistance to change is the most documented and most mismanaged phenomenon in the entire change management literature. The standard managerial treatment of it, as an irrational or politically motivated obstruction to necessary transformation, has been challenged empirically by enough research over enough years that it should no longer be defensible. It persists because it is convenient: treating resistance as irrationality lets change management leaders avoid confronting the possibility that the resistance is pointing at something real.

Ford, Ford and D'Amelio (2008) made the most direct version of this argument: resistance is better understood as feedback than as obstruction. When employees resist, they are frequently responding to genuine

risks, genuine inconsistencies, or genuine implementation problems that change management leaders have not yet acknowledged. Treating that response as information, which it is, rather than as an obstacle, which it appears to be, consistently reveals insights that improve the quality of the change management initiative. Piderit (2000) had earlier distinguished between cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions of resistance, a distinction that matters practically because the three do not always move together and because effective change management requires different responses to each.

The contemporary literature clusters the sources of resistance around five themes. Uncertainty and loss: change threatens established routines, relationships, and identities in ways that produce genuine psychological anxiety, not irrationality. Distrust of leadership: where previous change management initiatives have broken promises or been abandoned mid-implementation, employees rationally discount new commitments. Perceived incompetence: individuals who doubt their ability to perform effectively under new conditions resist the conditions that would make that doubt visible. Political threat: change redistributes power and resources within organisations, and those whose current position is advantaged have rational reasons to resist it. Cultural inertia: the deepest and most difficult form of resistance, arising from assumptions about how things are done that are so embedded they are difficult to articulate even by the people holding them. Oreg et al. (2018), in a meta-analysis of the resistance literature, found that individual dispositional resistance, context-related attitudes, and the quality of the change management process together account for most of the variance in resistance outcomes. Resistance, in other words, is manageable, not inevitable.

4.6 Models of Change Management

Four change management models are examined here, chosen for the distinctiveness of their theoretical contributions rather than their popularity, though some are both.

Lewin's three-stage model is the foundation on which much of what followed was built. Its claim is that effective change management proceeds through unfreezing, the destabilisation of existing attitudes and behaviours and the creation of readiness for change; movement, the introduction and practice of new behaviours, values, and processes; and refreezing, the consolidation of changes into a new equilibrium. The model has attracted criticism, some of it fair, for its linearity and its assumption that a new equilibrium is a desirable destination. Burnes (2022) has argued persuasively that much of this criticism rests on an oversimplification of what Lewin actually claimed, and that recovering the model's full theoretical richness, rooted in field theory and group dynamics, significantly extends its utility for contemporary change management practitioners.

Kotter (2021) updated his eight-step change management model to reflect the accelerated pace of contemporary transformation. The eight steps, creating urgency, building a guiding coalition, forming a strategic vision, enlisting a volunteer army, enabling action by removing barriers, generating short-term wins, sustaining acceleration, and instituting change, remain widely used. Kotter's work on the dual operating system, in which a hierarchical delivery mechanism operates alongside a more fluid network system for innovation and change management, addresses the tension between structure and adaptability that purely linear versions of the model struggle with.

The McKinsey 7S Framework holds that effective change management requires the simultaneous alignment of seven interdependent elements: strategy, structure, systems, shared values, style, staff, and skills. Its most important insight is that cultural elements, shared values and leadership style, are as consequential as structural and strategic ones, and that misalignment among the seven is a primary cause of change management failure regardless of how well any individual element has been designed. Hayes (2022) demonstrated that the 7S framework remains a genuinely useful diagnostic tool for identifying the hidden sources of resistance that structural analyses alone consistently miss.

Complexity theory applied to change management is the most intellectually demanding of the four frameworks and the one whose practical implications are most frequently softened into something more comfortable. Stacey (2019) argued that organisations are complex adaptive systems in which outcomes emerge from the interactions of multiple agents rather than from the implementation of centrally designed plans. In complex systems, detailed change management planning is not merely inadequate. It can actively mislead, generating false confidence in predictability whilst diverting attention from the adaptive responses that the situation actually demands. Leadership in this framework is not about designing the future state. It is about creating the conditions under which adaptive emergence becomes possible. That is a genuinely different skill set from what most change management training programmes develop.

Table 2: Comparison of Selected Change Management Models

Model	Core Logic	Primary Strength
Lewin Three-Stage	Unfreeze, move, refreeze through planned intervention	Theoretical depth; foundational conceptual scaffold
Kotter Eight-Step	Sequential urgency to institutionalisation	Practical actionability; globally recognised
McKinsey 7S	Alignment of seven interdependent organisational elements	Systemic view; surfaces hidden cultural barriers
Complexity Theory	Emergent outcomes in complex adaptive systems	Honest about dynamic environments; challenges over-planning

4.7 Action Research Methodologies in Change Management

Action research occupies a distinctive position in the change management literature because it refuses the separation between knowing and doing that most research paradigms treat as methodologically necessary. Lewin, who developed both the force field analysis discussed earlier and the action research methodology discussed here, saw no useful distinction between understanding a system and intervening in it. His formulation was a cyclical process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, through which practitioners develop understanding by intervening in complex systems and carefully analysing what actually happens as a result.

Coghlan and Shani (2018) identified three features of action research that make it particularly valuable in change management contexts. It is collaborative: researchers work with organisational members rather than studying them from a safe analytical distance, which generates understanding that is richer and more practically grounded than outside observation alone can produce. It is iterative: the cycle of action and reflection continues through multiple rounds, each informed by what the previous round revealed. It is action-oriented: the goal is not to produce a paper about a system but to produce change within it, which means that the quality of the intervention is an integral part of the research outcome, not a separate practical concern.

Bradbury (2022) distinguished three types of action research practice. First-person action research involves the practitioner-researcher inquiring into their own change management practice and its effects, a form of structured professional self-examination. Second-person action research is conducted collaboratively with immediate colleagues and teams, building on the insights and constraints of a shared working context. Third-person action research seeks to generate change management principles applicable beyond the immediate research context to wider scholarly and practitioner communities. For scholar-practitioners engaged in change management inquiry, understanding which type of action research they are conducting, and therefore what claims their work can legitimately make, is a foundational methodological responsibility.

4.8 Types of Organisational Change

Not all change is the same, and treating it as though it were is one of the more reliable routes to change management failure. The application of a crisis-response change management model to what is actually a tuning situation, or the deployment of an incremental improvement process in response to what is actually a re-creation imperative, are not unusual mistakes. They follow naturally from the tendency to select a change management approach before adequately diagnosing the type of change that is needed.

Nadler and Tushman's typology, comprehensively reviewed by Cameron and Green (2019), distinguishes between incremental and discontinuous change on one axis and reactive and anticipatory change on the other. Tuning involves fine-grained adjustments to existing strategies and processes in anticipation of future environmental shifts. It is proactive, low in disruption, and requires attentiveness to environmental signals rather than heroic leadership. Adaptation involves reactive adjustments to external changes that do not require fundamental strategic reorientation. Re-orientation involves proactive transformation of fundamental strategic direction before environmental pressure makes it unavoidable, a demanding change management task because it requires persuading people to change course before they can clearly see what they are changing away from. Re-creation involves reactive, fundamental transformation in response to a crisis that threatens organisational survival, the most disruptive and highest-risk change management context of the four.

Weick (2000) added a dimension that the structural typology tends to underweight. His concept of sensemaking, the process through which organisational members construct meaning from ambiguous and rapidly changing circumstances, is not peripheral to change management. It is constitutive of it. Change management leaders who design structurally sound transformation programmes whilst neglecting the meaning

that their people are making of those programmes consistently underestimate how much of the resistance they encounter is a sensemaking response rather than a structural one.

Table 3: Typology of Organisational Change and Change Management Implications

Change Type	Key Characteristics and Change Management Leadership Implications
Tuning	Fine adjustments; proactive and anticipatory; lowest disruption; requires environmental attentiveness and steady incrementalism
Adaptation	Reactive alignment with environmental shifts; moderate disruption; requires diagnostic clarity and speed of response
Re-orientation	Proactive strategic reframing; significant cultural challenge; requires visionary change management leadership before crisis arrives
Re-creation	Crisis-driven fundamental transformation; highest disruption; requires decisive and resilient leadership under conditions of maximum uncertainty
Continuous change	Ongoing micro-adjustments; emergent; requires a psychologically safe and genuinely adaptive organisational culture
Episodic change	Discrete, planned, and bounded initiatives; requires strong programme management and consistent stakeholder communication

4.9 Contemporary Approaches to Change Management

Three developments have collectively reshaped the change management landscape over the past decade: the digitisation of change management processes, the extension of agile methodologies beyond software development into organisational transformation more broadly, and the emergence of artificial intelligence as an active participant in change management design and implementation.

Digital transformation is not a technology project. That framing, which remains remarkably persistent in organisations that should know better, produces digital change management initiatives that install new systems whilst leaving intact the cultural and behavioural patterns that will prevent those systems from generating the value they were acquired to produce. Vial (2019) was clear on this point: successful digital transformation requires simultaneous attention to value creation through digital technologies, to the structural changes enabling digital value delivery, and to the cultural and leadership transformations that sustain both. Westerman, Bonnet and McAfee (2014) had put the same point more bluntly: technology is the easy part. The change management is the hard part.

Agile change management, extended by Denning (2018) beyond its software development origins, is characterised not by specific project management practices but by a fundamental reorientation toward continuous value delivery, cross-functional collaboration, and adaptive planning. IBM's Institute for Business Value (2022) found that organisations applying agile principles to change management achieved significantly faster implementation and higher stakeholder satisfaction than those using traditional programme management approaches. The practical implication is not that every change management initiative should be run as an agile sprint, but that the underlying principles of iteration, transparency, and responsiveness to feedback are more broadly applicable than the software development context in which they were formalised.

The integration of artificial intelligence into change management is the most significant emerging frontier in the field and the one whose implications are least fully worked through. Fountaine, McCarthy and Saleh (2019) showed that AI-enabled organisations can use predictive analytics to identify change management resistance before it crystallises, personalise change management communication at the individual employee level, and monitor implementation across geographically distributed organisations in real time. These are genuine capabilities with genuine value. They also raise questions about employee surveillance, informed consent, and the appropriate boundaries of algorithmic management that the change management field has not yet answered seriously.

4.10 Innovation Culture: Experimentation, Failure, and Psychological Safety in Change Management

The cultural conditions that enable genuine organisational learning are not separate from change management. They are the substrate that change management either works within or fights against. An organisation whose culture treats failure as a personal verdict, whose reward systems punish risk-taking, and whose leadership models caution as wisdom is an organisation that will resist transformation at every level, not because its people are irrational, but because the cultural architecture makes rational people rational to resist.

Edmondson (2019) demonstrated, across a substantial body of empirical research, that the single most powerful predictor of team learning behaviour is psychological safety: the interpersonal conditions in which team members believe they can speak up, take risks, and make mistakes without punishment or humiliation. It is worth being precise about what psychological safety is and is not, because it is frequently misunderstood. It is not comfort. It is not the absence of accountability. It is not a licence to perform below standard. It is the interpersonal condition in which honest, risky contributions are welcomed rather than penalised, and in which failure in service of genuine learning is distinguished from failure born of carelessness. Change management leaders who cannot create that distinction, visibly and consistently, in their own behaviour cannot build the cultures that transformation requires.

Dyer, Gregersen and Christensen (2019) identified five behaviours distinguishing innovative from non-innovative leaders: questioning that challenges foundational assumptions; observing with the sustained attentiveness of a practitioner anthropologist; experimenting through prototypes before committing to full-scale implementation; networking deliberately across disciplinary and institutional boundaries; and associating across apparently unrelated domains to generate novel combinations. None of these behaviours is exotic. All of them are learnable. The obstacle to their development in most organisations is not personal incapacity but a cultural and structural environment that implicitly rewards their opposites.

Wickham (2006) offered a perspective from the entrepreneurship literature that deserves more attention in change management scholarship than it typically receives. The entrepreneurial organisation, he argued, is distinguished not by the absence of failure but by its relationship to failure: treating setbacks as data rather than verdicts, extracting learning from every experiment regardless of outcome, and maintaining the resilience to persist through multiple iterations before success is achieved. That orientation to intelligent failure cannot be declared into existence by a values statement or a leadership communication. It requires deliberate architectural support through reward systems, modelling from the top, and the explicit celebration of intelligent failure as something categorically different from preventable failure.

Google's Project Aristotle, documented by Duhigg (2016), found psychological safety to be the single most important differentiator between high-performing and low-performing teams. Amazon's structured post-mortems, Netflix's culture of radical candour, and the various other organisational architectures for learning that have been documented in the contemporary literature share one feature: none of them emerged spontaneously. Each was designed, maintained, and continuously reinforced by specific leadership choices about what to measure, what to reward, and what to protect. The CIPM framework adds a qualification that practitioners working outside North America and Western Europe need to take seriously: the conditions enabling psychological safety are not culturally neutral. In high power-distance institutional environments, the interpersonal dynamics Edmondson identifies as foundational to change management effectiveness may require different leadership behaviours and different organisational architectures than those described in the predominantly Silicon Valley and Scandinavian research base.

5. Integrated Discussion

The ten dimensions examined in this paper are connected in ways that are analytically important. The necessity of change examined in Section 4.1 is driven by the same forces analysed in Section 4.4. The organisation development techniques addressed in Section 4.2 are only effective when the approach selected in Section 4.3 is appropriately matched to the type of change identified in Section 4.8. The resistance examined in Section 4.5 cannot be sustainably addressed without the psychological safety conditions described in Section 4.10. And the action research methodology explored in Section 4.7 provides the epistemological foundation for the continuous learning that the innovative cultures of Section 4.10 require.

What this integrated reading reveals is straightforward to state and difficult to act on: change management is a discipline that resists reduction to any single model or approach, and leaders who treat it as though it does not will consistently underperform. The most effective change management leaders hold multiple frameworks simultaneously, apply them selectively in response to careful contextual reading, and maintain the honesty, humility, and genuine care for the people affected by change that no change management framework can substitute for.

The CIPM framework, applied across all ten dimensions, reinforces a point that bears repeating because it is so consistently ignored in change management practice: the contextual factors that moderate change

management effectiveness are not background conditions. They are the primary determinants of which approach will work. The institutional environment shapes how resistance is expressed and what authority structures can deliver. The technological infrastructure determines which contemporary change management tools are practically available. The human capital context influences what new behaviours are achievable within what time frames. A change management approach that does not begin with a serious analysis of those three contextual dimensions is not contextually intelligent. It is contextually indifferent, which is a different thing entirely.

6. Significance of the Research

The theoretical contribution of this paper lies in the integrated treatment of ten change management dimensions that the existing literature has typically addressed in isolation. The synthetic analytical framework advanced here maps the relationships between those dimensions in ways that generate insights none of the component parts produces on its own. The CIPM framework's application as an integrating lens extends the contextualisation agenda in management research into a domain where universal models have been given more credibility than the evidence warrants.

The practical contribution is an integrated and contextually differentiated framework for change management decision-making. The finding that psychological safety is the foundational condition for both change management receptivity and innovative organisational culture has implications that extend beyond any specific transformation initiative. It suggests that the most consequential change management investment an organisation can make is not in any particular model or methodology but in the cultural conditions that determine whether any model can work.

The pedagogical contribution is a demonstration of how disparate bodies of change management scholarship can be integrated into a coherent scholarly argument without false synthesis. The productive tensions between planned and emergent approaches, between diagnostic and dialogic OD, and between universal models and contextually differentiated practice are preserved rather than dissolved. That preservation is itself a contribution to how change management should be taught.

7. Recommendations

For organisational leaders, the most important practical recommendation is to treat context diagnosis as the prerequisite for model selection, not as a step that follows it. The choice between planned and emergent approaches, between diagnostic and dialogic OD techniques, and between top-down and participative change management implementation strategies should be grounded in an honest assessment of the organisation's change management history, cultural readiness, the urgency and complexity of the required transformation, and the institutional environment in which it is operating. The CIPM framework provides a principled basis for that assessment. Leaders should also recognise that psychological safety is an institutional condition requiring structural support: reward systems that explicitly value learning from failure, communication practices that distinguish productive from unproductive risk-taking, and talent management processes that promote people on the basis of learning orientation as well as performance outcomes.

For change management practitioners, the evidence in this paper argues directly against the formulaic application of familiar models in contexts for which their underlying assumptions do not hold. The field's persistently high failure rate is partly a product of exactly that practice. Practitioners should develop fluency across multiple change management paradigms and, more importantly, should develop the contextual judgment to select and combine them appropriately. Resistance should be treated as information throughout the change management process, not as obstruction to be managed. The systematic engagement of those who resist change in the design of the change management process itself consistently generates better outcomes than the communication campaigns with which resistance is typically addressed.

For scholars, future change management research should focus on two underdeveloped areas. The performance of complexity-based and dialogic change management approaches in developing economy contexts, where institutional uncertainty is high and planning assumptions are routinely disrupted, remains empirically thin. The CIPM framework provides a theoretical foundation for precisely this research agenda. The intersection of artificial intelligence integration and psychological safety in change management contexts is equally underdeveloped. As AI-enabled monitoring of change management implementation becomes more commercially attractive, the implications for employee trust and the conditions enabling genuine experimentation require urgent scholarly examination.

8. Conclusion

Change management, this paper has argued, is not primarily a problem of models. The models exist. Many of them are good. What is scarce is the contextual intelligence to select among them honestly, the cultural

conditions to implement them effectively, and the leadership humility to treat the resistance they encounter as information rather than obstruction.

The ten dimensions examined here form a map of the change management challenge, and the relationships between them are as instructive as any individual component. Effective change management is the exercise of contextually intelligent leadership, informed by genuine theoretical understanding, grounded in honest assessment of context, and sustained by the kind of organisational culture that treats learning as its most important and most durable product. The frameworks examined in this paper, from Lewin's force field analysis through Edmondson's psychological safety research, provide the intellectual scaffolding for that kind of practice. What fills the scaffolding must always be the judgment, the courage, and the genuine care for people that change management leadership has always demanded.

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