E-ISSN: 3108-4176

APSSHS

Academic Publications of Social Sciences and Humanities Studies
2026, Volume 7, Issue 1, Page No: 191-201
Available online at: https://apsshs.com/

Annals of Organizational Culture, Leadership and External Engagement Journal

What Sustains Successful Organizational Transformation? A Critical Review of Leadership, Culture, Inclusion, Employee Well-Being, and Stakeholder Engagement Evidence, 2017–2026

Ahmed Ben Ali[1]*, Samira Gharbi[1], Nabil Jebali[2]

1. Department of Organizational Transformation and Leadership, Faculty of Business, University of Tunis, Tunis, Tunisia.
2. Department of Culture, Inclusion, and Well-Being Evidence, Faculty of Management, University of Sfax, Sfax, Tunisia.

Abstract

Organizational transformation is often explained through favorable leadership, supportive culture, employee participation, workforce well-being, or stakeholder engagement, yet these literatures frequently treat their focal mechanism as if it were independently sufficient. This critical review examines how these five domains contribute to sustained organizational transformation while testing the assumptions that connect nominal practices to enacted mechanisms and short-term responses to durable organizational change. A structured critical-review approach was used to compare construct definitions, evidence types, levels of analysis, temporal designs, contradictions, and contextual boundaries across an eligible management and organization literature published from 2017 to 2026. The verified curated screening ledger contained 55 candidate articles, of which 39 were retained after claim-fit and eligibility screening; raw database-identification and duplicate-removal counts were not reproducibly available and were not inferred. The reviewed evidence indicates that transformation is better understood as a conditional and temporal organizational accomplishment than as the additive result of favorable practices. Leadership effects depend on how influence is enacted and received; culture operates alongside strategic and structural capabilities; participation can occur without consequential inclusion; implementation responses can diverge from employee well-being; and formal stakeholder arrangements may not produce substantive engagement. The review therefore develops a proposed integrative logic in which sustained transformation depends on compatibility among mechanisms operating across individual, organizational, and stakeholder levels. This synthesis is not a validated causal model. Its principal limitations arise from heterogeneous constructs, designs, contexts, time horizons, and uneven cross-level evidence.

Keywords: Organizational transformation, Change leadership, Organizational culture, Employee participation, Employee well-being, Stakeholder engagement

How to cite this article Ben Ali A, Gharbi S, Jebali N. What Sustains Successful Organizational Transformation? A Critical Review of Leadership, Culture, Inclusion, Employee Well-Being, and Stakeholder Engagement Evidence, 2017–2026. Ann Organ Cult Leadersh Extern Engagem J. 2026;7(1):191-201. https://doi.org/10.51847/ojQ1KcaYbT

Received: 21 April 2026; **Revised:** 27 June 2026; **Accepted:** 30 June 2026
Corresponding author: Ahmed Ben Ali
E-mail ✉ ahmed.benali@fsegt.rnu.tn

Introduction

Organizational transformation remains difficult to explain because successful change rarely corresponds to one intervention, leadership behavior, or implementation technique. Integrative evidence instead depicts organizational change as a configuration of practices whose effects depend on implementation and recipient responses [1]. The response literature is itself theoretically fragmented: employees may display supportive, resistant, ambivalent, or differently patterned cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions rather than occupying a single support–resistance continuum [2]. Transformation therefore cannot be evaluated solely through managerial intent or implementation milestones.

Time further complicates this problem. Everyday positive and negative events can alter how organizational change is interpreted even when they are not formal change milestones [3]. At broader process levels, turning points can reshape trajectories through how organizational actors connect past experience, present conditions, and anticipated futures [4]. These

© 2026 The Author(s).
Copyright CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

findings make sustained transformation a temporal and multilevel problem. This review critically examines leadership, organizational culture, inclusion and participation, employee well-being, and stakeholder engagement as distinct but interacting domains, asking not simply whether each is beneficial, but under what conditions its presumed mechanism remains operative over time.

Why organizational transformation research requires critical reassessment

A recurrent weakness in transformation research is the movement from an observed favorable association to an implied universal success condition. Organizational-change evidence does not support such simplification: implementation practices work through different mechanisms and recipient responses [1]. Likewise, theoretically distinct employee reactions are often compressed into generalized acceptance or resistance [2]. Event-level evidence further indicates that apparently minor experiences may redirect a change trajectory [3], while process research shows that turning points can reconfigure what subsequent actions mean [4].

The critical issue is therefore not whether leadership, culture, participation, well-being, or stakeholder engagement "matters." Each may matter. The more demanding question is whether the construct is measured at the appropriate level, whether its proposed mechanism is actually enacted, whether it persists through time, and whether favorable outcomes in one domain conceal deterioration in another.

Critical review questions and analytical lens

The review applies four linked questions. First, what does each transformation domain actually claim to explain? Second, which mechanism connects the focal construct to change-related outcomes? Third, at what level and time horizon is that mechanism evidenced? Fourth, which findings, contextual boundaries, or alternative explanations prevent the claim from being generalized?

Leadership research illustrates why this lens is necessary. Reviews of leaders' effects on organizational change identify substantial theoretical and methodological gaps between leader characteristics, follower reactions, and organizational outcomes [5]. A leader-level association should therefore not be translated automatically into organization-level transformation success. The same discipline is applied to culture, inclusion, well-being, and stakeholder engagement.

The analytical lens consequently distinguishes formal provision from enacted practice, individual experience from organizational state, association from mechanism, short-term response from sustained adaptation, and evidence-supported relationships from the integrative relationships proposed in this review. Convergence is treated as meaningful only when evidence streams support compatible mechanisms rather than merely using similar favorable language.

Review method

The article uses a structured critical-review design rather than a meta-analysis or an exhaustive systematic review. Review methodology should be matched to the purpose of the inquiry, with search, selection, and synthesis procedures made sufficiently transparent for readers to understand how the evidence base was constructed [6]. Management-review designs also differ in their aims and evidential claims; structured searching does not by itself convert a critical or integrative synthesis into a systematic or scoping review [7].

Accordingly, sources were examined for their direct ability to support a defined transformation claim, expose an assumption, identify a mechanism, reveal contradictory evidence, establish a construct boundary, or motivate a research need. The synthesis privileges claim-level fit over topical proximity. Evidence was compared qualitatively rather than pooled statistically because constructs, levels, contexts, and designs were not sufficiently commensurable to support a common effect estimate.

Search boundaries and eligibility criteria

The search was bounded to peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2017 through 2026 that directly informed leadership, culture, inclusion or participation, employee well-being, stakeholder engagement, organizational-change theory, or the review's methodological requirements. Journal standing, DOI verification, temporal eligibility, and exact claim fit were screened explicitly. Journal quartile was treated as a source-selection constraint rather than as evidence of methodological quality.

Eligibility additionally required that a source support a specific manuscript claim rather than merely mention organizational transformation. Studies were excluded where their empirical context would require unjustified transfer across sectors, countries, organizational forms, stakeholder groups, levels of analysis, or technologies. Digitalization research was retained only when it illuminated organizational transformation rather than technology adoption alone. Methodological transparency was prioritized because review conclusions are necessarily bounded by the search and synthesis decisions through which evidence is selected [6].These appraisal boundaries are organized in **Table 1** so that the five literatures are assessed through comparable questions without being treated as interchangeable domains.

Table 1. Critical appraisal tests for leadership, culture, inclusion, well-being, and stakeholder claims in sustained transformation

Domain or assumption	Claim critically tested	Evidence required	Common inference risk	Level/time focus	Appraisal question	Why it matters
Leadership	Influence sustains change	Enacted influence and responses	Leader effect → firm success	Leader–employee–organization; over time	Who experiences the influence?	Separates intent from effect
Culture	Supportive culture enables transformation	Cultural practice plus organizational change	Culture → sufficient cause	Organization; path dependent	What else must change?	Preserves strategic/structural conditions
Inclusion and participation	Voice improves transformation	Consequential voice and experienced inclusion	Participation → inclusion	Individual–team–organization; evolving	Does voice alter decisions?	Distinguishes presence from influence
Employee well-being	Successful change preserves employees	Demands, resources, and well-being evidence	Acceptance → well-being	Individual/work design; during change	What costs accompany adaptation?	Prevents implementation-only success
Stakeholder engagement	Engagement supports legitimacy/ adaptation	Reciprocal, enacted stakeholder relations	Consultation → engagement	Organization–stakeholder; dynamic	Whose interests affect action?	Separates contact from consequence

Study identification and screening

The selection process was reconstructed only from counts that could be verified. The curated candidate ledger contained 55 unique articles screened for date, peer-review status, journal eligibility, DOI integrity, article-domain relevance, and exact claim fit. Sixteen candidates were excluded because they were redundant with stronger selected evidence, insufficiently transformation-specific, excessively adjacent to the focal domains, or less useful for the planned claim than another eligible source. The resulting critical-review corpus contained 39 articles.

Raw search-engine or database-identification counts were not reproducibly available, and repeated publisher or search hits had not been maintained as a formal database-record set. A raw duplicate-removal count was therefore also unavailable. These values are not estimated. A separate formal report-retrieval stage was not used in this targeted critical-review workflow. This limitation is preferable to retrospectively manufacturing the appearance of systematic-review precision [7]. **Figure 1** presents the verified flow and makes the non-reportable stages visible rather than smoothing them away.

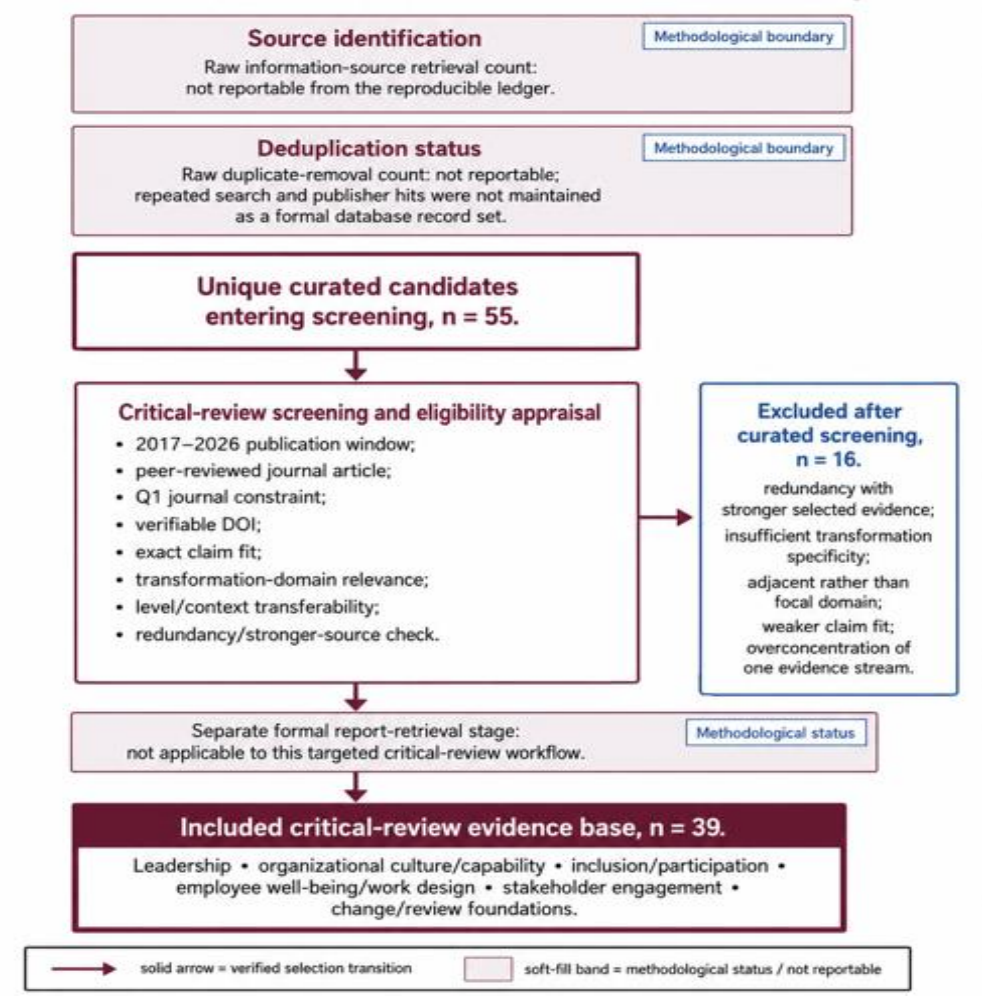

Figure 1. Study selection preserves leadership, culture, inclusion, well-being, and stakeholder evidence within a bounded critical-review corpus

Critical appraisal and coding

Critical appraisal focused on what each source permitted the review to claim rather than assigning an artificial universal quality score. Coding distinguished conceptual definition, empirical operationalization, level of analysis, study design, temporal structure, analytical method, contextual boundary, reported limitation, contradiction or null finding, and the difference between association and mechanism. Review methodology supports such explicit alignment between review purpose and synthesis procedure [6].

Particular attention was given to inferential slippage. Individual acceptance was not treated as an organizational transformation outcome; representation was not treated as experienced inclusion; technology adoption was not treated as transformation; stakeholder satisfaction was not treated as legitimate engagement; and formal leadership or governance arrangements were not treated as evidence that their intended mechanisms were enacted. Where the evidence supported only a contextual association or theoretical proposition, the permitted interpretation was correspondingly restricted. This appraisal logic allowed apparently compatible claims to be separated from claims that merely shared positive terminology.

Cross-domain synthesis method

The synthesis proceeded by comparing the five domains through a common analytical sequence while preserving their differences. For each domain, the review identified the dominant claim, the mechanism presumed to connect it to transformation, the principal level and time scale at which evidence was generated, the evidence pattern supporting or constraining that mechanism, and dependencies on other domains. The fragmented theoretical landscape of employee change responses demonstrates why findings cannot be integrated by simple accumulation [2]. Likewise, management-review methodology requires synthesis choices to remain appropriate to the type of evidence and the purpose of the review [7].

Cross-domain convergence was therefore recognized only when literatures implied compatible organizational requirements. Contradictions were retained when one domain's presumed success condition could undermine another, when evidence operated at mismatched levels, or when short-term implementation outcomes obscured later reversal. Missing links were

coded rather than filled by inference. **Table 2** records this evidential architecture and establishes the questions against which the subsequent domain analyses are evaluated.

Table 2. Evidential architecture of the five mechanisms implicated in sustained organizational transformation

Transformation domain	Dominant literature claim	Principal mechanism	Typical level/time scale	Evidence pattern	Dependency on another domain	Missing cross-level link	Sustained-transformation implication
Leadership	Direction enables change	Influence and sensemaking	Leader–employee; episodes	Conditional	Participation, culture	Leader behavior → organizational persistence	Direction must remain credible and enacted
Culture	Shared conditions enable adaptation	Norms, capability, renewal	Organization; path dependent	Contextual	Leadership, structure	Culture → individual experience	Culture cannot substitute for capability
Inclusion/participation	Voice improves adaptation	Belonging, safety, influence	Individual/team; evolving	Uneven	Leadership, governance	Voice opportunity → consequential action	Participation must alter experience or decisions
Well-being	Sustainable change preserves functioning	Demands, resources, work design	Individual/job; over change	Conditional	Culture, leadership	Employee strain → organizational trajectory	Adaptation costs cannot be hidden by compliance
Stakeholder engagement	External relationships support adaptation	Reciprocity, influence, relational resources	Organization–stakeholder; dynamic	Context dependent	Leadership, governance	Engagement practice → durable legitimacy/resilience	Formal contact must become substantive engagement

The leadership assumption

Leadership is frequently treated as an initiating condition for transformation, but recent evidence supports a more conditional interpretation. Change-management requirements can expand under crisis and technological disruption, making preparedness part of the leadership context rather than a stable background condition [8]. Responsible-leadership scholarship further extends evaluation beyond internal execution toward stakeholder and ethical responsibilities [9]. Even within employee-facing change, however, desirable leadership behaviors are not simply additive: experimental evidence indicates that people- and task-oriented behaviors can interact conditionally rather than producing a universal optimum [10]. Leadership should therefore be understood as an influence mechanism whose effects depend on what followers experience, which demands are created or buffered, and whether leadership behavior remains compatible with organizational and stakeholder conditions.

The organizational-culture assumption

Culture is similarly easy to overstate. Digital transformation is broader than technology adoption [11] and entails strategic and organizational reconfiguration [12]. Sustaining such change may require continuing strategic renewal through dynamic capabilities [13]. Empirical research links culture with digital transformation and innovation, but such associations do not make culture independently sufficient [14]. Indeed, proposed mediation through digital leadership and culture has not always been supported [15]. Adoption and performance should also remain analytically distinct [16]. Transformation may become constrained by path-dependent organizational choices [17] and can involve structural reconfiguration beyond technological installation [18]. Culture therefore appears less as a singular driver than as part of an organizational configuration in which capabilities, structures, historical trajectories, and strategic choices determine whether supportive norms can be enacted.

The inclusion and participation assumption

Inclusion requires more than formal access. Inclusive-leadership theory distinguishes belongingness from being valued for uniqueness [19], while meta-analytic evidence identifies psychological safety as an important individual- and group-level condition associated with speaking up and other work outcomes [20]. Reviews nevertheless show substantial heterogeneity in how psychological safety is conceptualized and measured [21]. Voice also has a temporal problem: even longitudinal employee-voice research often under-theorizes how voice develops and changes over time [22]. Participation itself can involve silencing, balancing, or other unequal treatments of interests rather than inclusion by definition [23]. During digital transformation, willingness to participate additionally has employee-level psychological antecedents [24]. Consequently, the relevant transformation mechanism is not the existence of participation structures but whether people can safely exercise voice and whether that voice becomes consequential.

The employee well-being assumption

Transformation can achieve implementation milestones while imposing costs on employees. Job Demands–Resources theory provides a useful mechanism-level lens because changing demands and resources can activate both strain and motivational processes [25]. Work-design research likewise rejects technological determinism: automation and digital systems can improve or degrade work characteristics depending on design choices and context [26]. Workplace mental health and well-being are themselves multidimensional rather than reducible to one morale indicator [27]. In digital transformation, reducing employee resistance and protecting well-being are therefore analytically separate objectives [28]. Contemporary evidence concerning artificial intelligence reinforces the need to evaluate employee well-being independently rather than infer it from technological uptake [29]. Sustained transformation cannot reasonably be defined only by continuing implementation if the work system progressively erodes the resources required for employees to function within it.

The stakeholder-engagement assumption

Stakeholder engagement is also more demanding than contact or consultation. The field conceptualizes engagement as relational and processual [30]. Recent theorizing distinguishes participation, inclusion, and democratic quality as complementary but non-equivalent aspects of more holistic engagement [31]. Empirical process research further shows that heterogeneous stakeholders can move between engagement and disengagement during strategy development [32]. Formal multistakeholder structures do not guarantee substantive influence because leaders' sensemaking affects how engagement is enacted [33]. Stakeholder dialogue must likewise be distinguished from generic communication [34]. Political attribution and institutional conflict can reshape engagement practices [35], while multi-stakeholder settings introduce interdependencies that dyadic analysis can miss [36]. Stakeholder satisfaction is also distinct from internal organizational performance [37]. Finally, stakeholder-management practices can contribute to resilience processes as organizations evolve [38]. Engagement is therefore best treated as a dynamic external relationship whose value depends on reciprocity, influence, context, and continuing organizational responsiveness.

Convergences across transformation domains

Across the five domains, a consistent critical pattern emerges: nominally favorable arrangements are weaker evidence than mechanisms that are actually experienced and consequential. Complementary leadership behaviors are conditional rather than automatically additive; participation can coexist with silencing; and reduced resistance need not establish employee well-being [10, 23, 28]. Similar distinctions recur between technology adoption and transformation, formal stakeholder structures and enacted engagement, and organizational intent and employee experience.

The convergence is therefore not that five "success factors" should be accumulated. Rather, sustained transformation appears to require continuing compatibility among mechanisms operating at different levels. Leadership must be receivable, culture must coexist with adaptive capability, voice must influence something consequential, adaptation must remain tolerable for employees, and external engagement must survive beyond formal consultation. This compatibility claim is an original synthesis of the reviewed evidence and requires empirical validation.

Contradictions and incompatible assumptions

Several literatures contain assumptions that cannot simply be combined. Dynamic capabilities may coexist with digital leadership and culture without producing the expected mediation chain; stakeholder participation can be formally present without satisfying inclusion or democratic standards; and multistakeholder structures can exist while engagement is enacted unevenly [15, 31, 33]. These are not identical contradictions. One concerns an unsupported statistical mechanism, another a conceptual distinction, and another the gap between formal structure and practice.

The critical task is therefore to ask whether an apparent conflict reflects genuine incompatibility or a mismatch in level, time horizon, construct definition, or design. **Table 3** retains these distinctions instead of treating contrary findings as noise.

Table 3. When apparently compatible transformation assumptions diverge and what can reconcile them

Assumption A	Assumption B	Apparent contradiction	Level/time/context mismatch	Evidence needed for reconciliation	Unresolved remainder	Consequence for the proposed model
More supportive leadership improves change	Leadership combinations are conditional	Positive behaviors need not add linearly	Individual response vs organization outcome	Longitudinal multilevel leadership studies	Optimal combinations remain context dependent	Treat leadership as enabling, not sufficient
Supportive culture enables transformation	Capabilities/mediation may fail to operate as expected	Culture presence ≠ operative pathway	Firm-level constructs; often cross-sectional	Repeated capability–culture–behavior measures	Direction of influence remains uncertain	Separate cultural condition from mechanism

Participation produces inclusion	Participation may silence some interests	Formal voice ≠ consequential influence	Opportunity vs lived experience	Trace whose input changes decisions	Unequal voice may remain hidden	Require consequential participation
Low resistance indicates successful change	Well-being can deteriorate independently	Compliance ≠ sustainable functioning	Immediate response vs accumulated strain	Joint longitudinal resistance/well-being data	Delayed costs may be missed	Preserve well-being as separate criterion
Multistakeholder form produces engagement	Engagement depends on enactment	Structure ≠ substantive relationship	Governance form vs relational practice	Compare formal rights with actual influence	Legitimacy remains context dependent	Require enacted stakeholder responsiveness

Missing cross-level and temporal mechanisms

The literature is particularly weak where transformation crosses levels and unfolds over time. Longitudinal qualitative evidence from a planned workspace change shows that employees can display different cognitive, affective, and behavioral response patterns across the same change process rather than a stable reaction [39]. This matters because organizational claims are frequently inferred from measurements taken at one employee level and one moment.

Existing evidence demonstrates both the relevance of levels and the incompleteness of their integration: psychological safety operates across individual and group analyses, voice research still under-theorizes time, and repeated employee observations show response trajectories rather than fixed states [20, 22, 39]. What remains insufficiently established is how these micro-level changes aggregate into organizational persistence, how stakeholder reactions feed back into internal processes, and when accumulated strain or disengagement becomes a turning point rather than a temporary disturbance.

Toward an integrated model of sustained organizational transformation

The review therefore proposes that sustained transformation be treated as a compatibility state, not a collection of independent success factors. Five mechanisms must remain analytically distinct: enacted leadership and direction, adaptive organizational culture and capability, consequential inclusion and participation, resource-preserving work design and well-being, and substantive stakeholder engagement. The model does not claim that each is empirically necessary in every transformation.

Compatibility is temporal. Turning points can redirect organizational trajectories [4], and capability pathways can fail to operate as hypothesized [15]. Participation can become non-consequential [23], implementation responses can diverge from well-being [28], and stakeholder engagement can deteriorate into disengagement [32]. The proposed model therefore adds feedback and reversal: deterioration in one mechanism can constrain others even when formal transformation activities continue.

Figure 2 visualizes this distinction between evidence-supported domain mechanisms and the newly proposed cross-domain compatibility architecture.

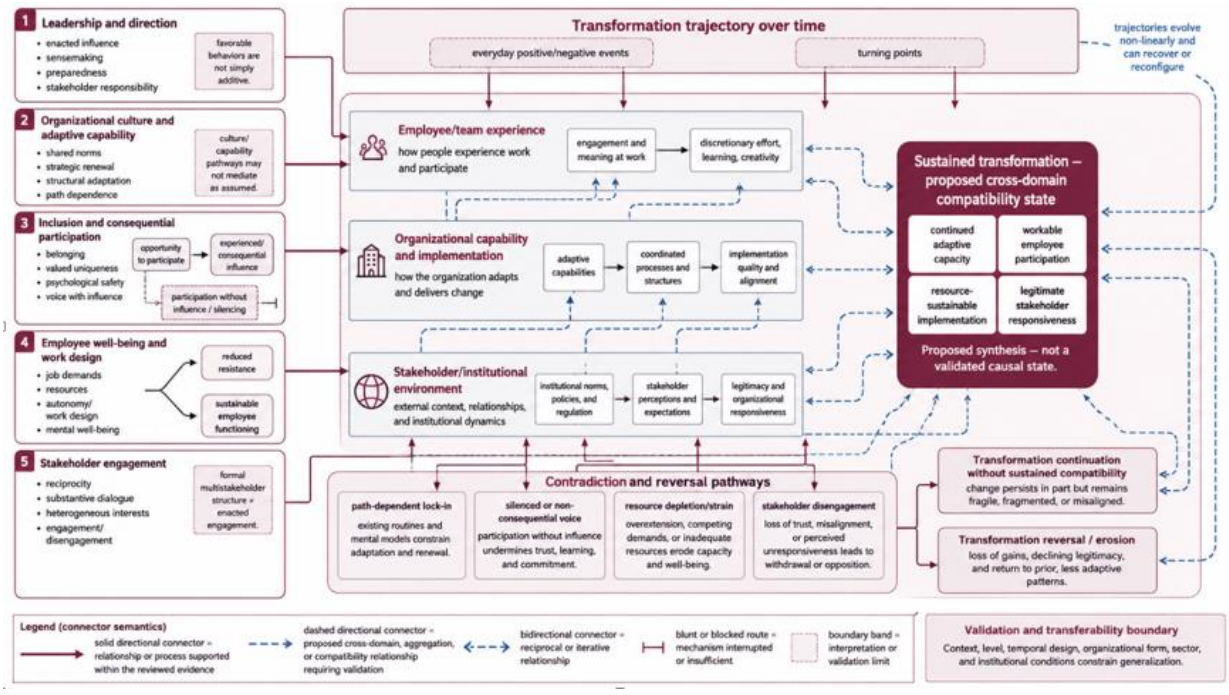

Figure 2. Sustained organizational transformation requires compatible leadership, culture, participation, well-being, and stakeholder mechanisms across time

Necessary, enabling, and context-dependent conditions

The evidence does not justify declaring a universal list of empirically necessary conditions. A more defensible distinction is proposed. Some conditions are enabling because they make a mechanism more feasible, such as psychological safety for voice or organizational resources for sustainable work. Others are context-dependent, including preparedness under crisis conditions or stakeholder practices under political conflict.

A condition should be described as necessary only after designs capable of testing necessity across relevant contexts support that inference. In the present synthesis, leadership, culture, participation, well-being, and engagement are therefore treated as interacting domains whose relevance and configuration can vary. The proposed compatibility state refers to the continuing viability of their operative mechanisms, not to the permanent presence of one prescribed practice in every organization.

Failure pathways and transformation reversal

Sustained transformation can fail without a single dramatic collapse. Path-dependent choices may progressively narrow organizational options [17]. Participation may remain formally available while interests are silenced [23]. Rising demands may exceed available resources even when employees continue to comply [25]. Stakeholders may shift from engagement toward disengagement [32]. Everyday events and turning points can then alter how these accumulating conditions are interpreted [3].

These pathways should remain distinct because their remedies and evidence requirements differ. The proposed model nevertheless treats them as potentially interactive. Resource strain may reduce participation; diminished participation may weaken detection of operational problems; stakeholder disengagement may amplify legitimacy or adaptation difficulties. Such cross-domain propagation remains a hypothesis requiring longitudinal multilevel testing rather than an established causal cascade.

A critical research agenda

Future research should discriminate among mechanisms rather than ask generally whether transformation "works." The voice literature already demonstrates the need for stronger theorization of time in longitudinal designs [22]. Similar requirements apply across domains: studies should follow leadership enactment and employee interpretation jointly, distinguish cultural conditions from capabilities, observe whether participation changes decisions, track well-being alongside implementation outcomes, and examine stakeholder engagement as a changing relational process.

The key methodological advance would be designs capable of rejecting parts of the proposed synthesis. **Table 4** therefore converts the review's major uncertainties into research programs specifying levels, temporal structures, comparisons, and evidence that could separate competing explanations.

Table 4. Research programs capable of discriminating among competing explanations of sustained transformation

Unresolved mechanism	Why current evidence cannot decide it	Required level(s)	Temporal design	Comparison or counterfactual	Key evidence/outcome	Consequence if resolved
Leadership enactment → sustained adaptation	Leader behavior and organizational outcomes are often separated	Leader, employee, organization	Repeated multiwave	Similar changes with different enacted leadership	Changes in interpretation, behavior, persistence	Tests whether leadership is enabling or merely correlated
Culture vs adaptive capability	Culture and capability constructs may overlap or be cross-sectional	Team, organization	Longitudinal process	Similar cultural profiles with different capability trajectories	Renewal, structural adaptation, implementation persistence	Clarifies operative mechanism
Voice opportunity → consequential participation	Opportunity does not establish influence	Employee, team, decision system	Event-linked longitudinal	Decisions with versus without traceable employee influence	Whose input changes decisions and later responses	Tests consequential-inclusion requirement
Implementation progress → well-being sustainability	Compliance and strain can diverge	Employee, job, organization	Repeated before/during/after change	Comparable implementation with different demand–resource profiles	Well-being, functioning, retention, adaptation	Tests hidden sustainability costs
Stakeholder structure → substantive engagement	Formal representation may differ from enacted influence	Organization, stakeholder ecosystem	Longitudinal comparative case	Similar governance structures with different relational practices	Influence, disengagement, responsiveness	Separates governance form from engagement mechanism

Cross-domain compatibility → persistence or reversal	No integrated causal model is validated	Individual through ecosystem	Longitudinal multilevel	Transformations with similar goals but different mechanism configurations	Persistence, recovery, reversal, boundary conditions	Directly challenges the proposed synthesis

Implications for organizational transformation practice

The review cautions against managing transformation through a dashboard of nominally positive indicators. High participation rates may conceal weak influence; low resistance may coexist with declining well-being; stakeholder meetings may not constitute substantive engagement; and favorable cultural language may not indicate adaptive capability.

A more defensible practice implication is to monitor mechanisms and trajectories. Leaders can examine whether employee voice changes decisions, whether workloads and resources remain viable, whether stakeholder relationships are strengthening or deteriorating, and whether everyday events or turning points are changing interpretations of the transformation. These are evidence-informed monitoring priorities rather than proven implementation prescriptions. Their value lies in detecting incompatibility early enough for reassessment rather than assuming that continued rollout demonstrates sustained organizational change.

Review limitations

This review is selective rather than exhaustive and does not constitute a meta-analysis. Its boundaries privilege peer-reviewed Q1 journal articles with verifiable DOIs published from 2017–2026, which necessarily excludes relevant evidence outside those constraints. The source base also spans conceptual articles, reviews, experiments, cross-sectional studies, qualitative process research, and context-specific empirical designs.

Consequently, apparent convergence may partly reflect differences in constructs and methods, while contradictions may arise from mismatched levels or time horizons. Raw identification and deduplication totals were not reproducibly available and were not reconstructed. The integrated compatibility architecture is therefore a critical synthesis of the selected literature, not a prospectively validated model. Its generalization across sectors, organizational forms, countries, technologies, and institutional environments requires direct testing.

Conclusion

Successful organizational transformation is not adequately explained by accumulating favorable leadership, culture, inclusion, well-being, and stakeholder practices. The reviewed evidence instead supports distinctions between formal arrangements and enacted mechanisms, short-term responses and temporal trajectories, and individual experiences and organizational or stakeholder-level outcomes. This review proposes that sustained transformation depends on continuing compatibility among these domains while remaining vulnerable to path dependence, silencing, resource strain, disengagement, and turning points. The proposed architecture is neither universally causal nor implementation-ready. Its value is analytical: it identifies where apparently positive transformation conditions can diverge, where evidence remains cross-level or temporally incomplete, and which empirical tests are required to determine whether compatibility genuinely sustains organizational change.

Acknowledgments: None

Conflict of interest: None

Financial support: None

Ethics statement: None

References

1. Stouten J, Rousseau DM, De Cremer D. Successful organizational change: Integrating the management practice and scholarly literatures. Acad Manag Ann. 2018;12(2):752-88. doi:10.5465/annals.2016.0095
2. Kanitz R, Gonzalez K, Fugate M, Venkatesh V. Making sense of employee responses to organizational change: Integrating the theoretical landscape across research communities. J Organ Behav. 2026:1-25. doi:10.1002/job.70080
3. Kiefer T, Barclay LJ, Conway N. Applying event system theory to organizational change: The importance of everyday positive and negative events. J Manag. 2025;51(3):1066-95. doi:10.1177/01492063241237221

4. Hernes T, Feuls M. Organizing in the folding of time: Shaping organizational change trajectories at turning points. Organ Stud. 2024;45(9):1325-48. doi:10.1177/01708406241272935
5. Oreg S, Berson Y. Leaders' impact on organizational change: Bridging theoretical and methodological chasms. Acad Manag Ann. 2019;13(1):272-307. doi:10.5465/annals.2016.0138
6. Snyder H. Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. J Bus Res. 2019;104:333-9. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039
7. Grønstad A. Scoping reviews vis-à-vis systematic reviews and integrative reviews in management research: Guidelines for good practice. Rev Manag Sci. 2026;20(1):221-50. doi:10.1007/s11846-025-00901-1
8. Gaile A, Zaumane I, Stibe A, Kivipõld K. Expanding the success factors of change management by incorporating crisis preparedness in the emerging AI world. Rev Manag Sci. 2026. doi:10.1007/s11846-026-00979-1
9. Heim I, Laker B, Tabaeifard SJ. Responsible leadership: A systematic literature review, theoretical framework, and future research directions. J Bus Res. 2026;203:115801. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115801
10. Weber E, Büttgen M, Bartsch S. How to take employees on the digital transformation journey: An experimental study on complementary leadership behaviors in managing organizational change. J Bus Res. 2022;143:225-38. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.01.036
11. Vial G. Understanding digital transformation: A review and a research agenda. J Strateg Inf Syst. 2019;28(2):118-44. doi:10.1016/j.jsis.2019.01.003
12. Hanelt A, Bohnsack R, Marz D, Antunes Marante C. A systematic review of the literature on digital transformation: Insights and implications for strategy and organizational change. J Manag Stud. 2021;58(5):1159-97. doi:10.1111/joms.12639
13. Warner KSR, Wäger M. Building dynamic capabilities for digital transformation: An ongoing process of strategic renewal. Long Range Plann. 2019;52(3):326-49. doi:10.1016/j.lrp.2018.12.001
14. Cao G, Duan Y, Edwards JS. Organizational culture, digital transformation, and product innovation. Inf Manag. 2025;62(4):104135. doi:10.1016/j.im.2025.104135
15. Held P, Heubeck T, Meckl R. Boosting SMEs' digital transformation: The role of dynamic capabilities in cultivating digital leadership and digital culture. Rev Manag Sci. 2026;20(5):1687-715. doi:10.1007/s11846-025-00919-5
16. Kallmuenzer A, Mikhaylov A, Chelaru M, Czakon W. Adoption and performance outcome of digitalization in small and medium-sized enterprises. Rev Manag Sci. 2025;19(7):2011-38. doi:10.1007/s11846-024-00744-2
17. Brekke T, Lenka S, Kohtamäki M, Parida V, Solem BAA. Overcoming barriers to transformation in manufacturing firms. A path-dependence perspective of digital servitization. Rev Manag Sci. 2024;18(2):385-412. doi:10.1007/s11846-023-00641-0
18. Shahzad K, Imran F, Butt A. Digital transformation and changes in organizational structure: Empirical evidence from industrial organizations. Res Technol Manag. 2025;68(3):25-40. doi:10.1080/08956308.2025.2465706
19. Randel AE, Galvin BM, Shore LM, Ehrhart KH, Chung BG, Dean MA, et al. Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. Hum Resour Manag Rev. 2018;28(2):190-203. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.07.002
20. Frazier ML, Fainshmidt S, Klinger RL, Pezeshkan A, Vracheva V. Psychological safety: A meta-analytic review and extension. Pers Psychol. 2017;70(1):113-65. doi:10.1111/peps.12183
21. Newman A, Donohue R, Eva N. Psychological safety: A systematic review of the literature. Hum Resour Manag Rev. 2017;27(3):521-35. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2017.01.001
22. Guarin AD, Townsend K, Wilkinson A, Edwards M. Time to voice? A review and agenda for longitudinal employee voice research. Hum Resour Manag Rev. 2025;35(1):101059. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2024.101059
23. Ressi E, Weiss S, Ortlieb R. Whose interests matter? The role of participation in inclusive organizational behavior. J Organ Behav. 2024;45(9):1364-96. doi:10.1002/job.2767
24. Abhari K. Employee participation in digital transformation: From digitalization sentiment to transformation predisposition. Inf Manag. 2025;62(8):104212. doi:10.1016/j.im.2025.104212
25. Bakker AB, Demerouti E. Job demands–resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. J Occup Health Psychol. 2017;22(3):273-85. doi:10.1037/ocp0000056
26. Parker SK, Grote G. Automation, algorithms, and beyond: Why work design matters more than ever in a digital world. Appl Psychol. 2022;71(4):1171-204. doi:10.1111/apps.12241
27. Khalid A, Syed J. Mental health and well-being at work: A systematic review of literature and directions for future research. Hum Resour Manag Rev. 2024;34(1):100998. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2023.100998
28. Valtonen A, Holopainen M. Mitigating employee resistance and achieving well-being in digital transformation. Inf Technol People. 2025;38(8):42-72. doi:10.1108/ITP-05-2024-0701

29. Valtonen A, Saunila M, Ukko J, Treves L, Ritala P. AI and employee wellbeing in the workplace: An empirical study. J Bus Res. 2025;199:115584. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2025.115584
30. Kujala J, Sachs S, Leinonen H, Heikkinen A, Laude D. Stakeholder engagement: Past, present, and future. Bus Soc. 2022;61(5):1136-96. doi:10.1177/00076503211066595
31. Wenzel M, Trittin-Ulbrich H, Edinger-Schons LM, Castelló I, de Bakker FGA. Toward holistic stakeholder engagement: Integrating participation, inclusion, and democracy. Bus Soc. 2025;64(6):1055-76. doi:10.1177/00076503251341209
32. Bader V, Schneider AL, Kaiser S, Loscher G. The engagement and disengagement of heterogeneous stakeholders: A relational practice perspective on strategy development. Bus Soc. 2025;64(6):1111-48. doi:10.1177/00076503241271295
33. Radoynovska N. Expectations meet reality: Leader sensemaking and enactment of stakeholder engagement in multistakeholder social enterprises. Bus Soc. 2025;64(6):1185-228. doi:10.1177/00076503231221537
34. Acuti D, Glozer S, Crane A. What is (and is not) stakeholder dialogue in CSR? A review and research agenda. Int J Manag Rev. 2024;26(4):518-35. doi:10.1111/ijmr.12363
35. Esper SC, Barin-Cruz L, Gond JP. Engaging stakeholders during intergovernmental conflict: How political attributions shape stakeholder engagement. J Bus Ethics. 2024;191(1):1-27. doi:10.1007/s10551-023-05448-3
36. Civera C, Casalegno C, Morelli B, Chiaudano V. Multi-stakeholder marketing: Mapping the field. Rev Manag Sci. 2025;19(10):3229-62. doi:10.1007/s11846-025-00849-2
37. Fernández-Portillo A, Ramos-Vecino N, Ramos-Mariño A, Cachón-Rodríguez G. How the digital business ecosystem affects stakeholder satisfaction: Its impact on business performance. Rev Manag Sci. 2024;18(9):2643-62. doi:10.1007/s11846-023-00720-2
38. Giaccone SC, Picone PM. From entrepreneurs to firms: How stakeholder management shapes resilience. Rev Manag Sci. 2026. doi:10.1007/s11846-026-01010-3
39. Breutner N, Roth A. How employees perceive planned organizational change: Insights from a workspace change project in the German insurance industry. J Appl Behav Sci. 2025;61(3):573-613. doi:10.1177/00218863241290892