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Protecting Employee Well-Being During Organizational Change: An Integrative Review of Leadership, Work Design, Participation, and Resource-Preservation Mechanisms, 2017–2025

Rafael Mendoza^{1*}, Isabela Cruz¹, Carlos Lopez²

1. Department of Employee Well-Being and Change Management, Faculty of Business, National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico.
2. Department of Resource-Preservation and Leadership, Faculty of Management, Monterrey Institute of Technology, Monterrey, Mexico.

Abstract

Organizational change can alter employees' workload, autonomy, social relations, employment security, participation, and access to support at the same time that organizations expect adaptation and sustained performance. Yet the literature on employee well-being during change remains distributed across leadership, work-design, voice, change-reaction, and resource theories, making it difficult to distinguish mechanisms that preserve resources from those that merely accompany successful implementation. This integrative review synthesizes conceptual and empirical research published from 2017 to 2025 to examine how leadership, work design, participation, perceived control, resource loss, and recovery jointly shape employee well-being during organizational change. The synthesis treats well-being as multidimensional and change as a heterogeneous, temporally unfolding exposure rather than a unitary event. Across the evidence, protective conditions operate through distinct but interacting pathways: leaders can shape relational safety and resource access; work design determines whether changed jobs add demands or usable resources; participation can increase control only when voice is safe and consequential; and recovery can restore depleted resources without substituting for prevention of avoidable loss. The article develops a proposed resource-preservation framework in which these mechanisms may complement, substitute for, or interfere with one another across change stages. Deterioration is correspondingly understood as potentially configurational rather than attributable to one missing resource. The review is bounded by heterogeneous constructs, predominantly observational evidence, context-specific studies, and limited direct tests of cross-mechanism interactions. Implications therefore concern evidence-informed HRM and change design rather than universally effective prescriptions.

Keywords: Organizational change, Employee well-being, Leadership, Work design, Employee voice, Resource preservation

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Corresponding author: Rafael Mendoza

E-mail ✉ rafael.mendoza@unam.mx

Introduction

Employee well-being has become a central HRM concern because work can affect psychological functioning, health, relationships, and employees' capacity to sustain effective participation in organizational life. Contemporary workplace research also shows that well-being is not adequately represented by a single symptom, attitude, or mental-health indicator; organizational conditions can support or undermine several dimensions of functioning simultaneously [1]. For change



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scholarship, this creates a demanding analytical problem: the outcome of interest is broader than acceptance of change, yet many change processes are evaluated primarily through implementation, performance, or attitudinal reactions.

A multidimensional view is therefore necessary. Recent conceptual work distinguishes materially grounded, relational, activity-based, and self-realization aspects of employee well-being, illustrating why low distress cannot be assumed to mean that employees are thriving [2]. During organizational change, these dimensions may diverge. A redesign that increases learning opportunities may also intensify workload; a restructuring that improves strategic coherence may still create insecurity; and a participatory initiative may provide voice without meaningful influence.

Change itself should likewise not be treated as a uniform exposure. Event characteristics and personal conditions may shape uncertainty and insecurity; subjective perceptions of change are associated with affective reactions and well-being; and repeated positive and negative events can accumulate across an unfolding change process [3–5]. This review therefore asks how four domains—leadership, work design, participation and control, and resource preservation and recovery—can be integrated without collapsing their distinct mechanisms. Its contribution is a proposed resource-preservation account that separates evidence-supported relationships from cross-domain synthesis and keeps temporal, contextual, and level-of-analysis boundaries explicit.

Conceptualization of employee well-being during change

Employee well-being during change is defined here as a multidimensional condition of psychological, relational, and work-related functioning experienced while organizational structures, practices, technologies, roles, or expectations are being altered. This definition follows evidence that workplace well-being encompasses more than mental ill-health [1] and uses multidimensional organizing logic to avoid treating job satisfaction, distress, functioning, and social connection as interchangeable outcomes [2]. It also prevents change acceptance or resistance from becoming proxies for employee welfare. Change-related uncertainty, insecurity, and affective resistance are analytically important, but they are not themselves identical to well-being. Recent change theory positions uncertainty and insecurity as plausible pathways through which change-event and personal characteristics may influence employee functioning [3]. Longitudinal evidence similarly links subjective change perceptions and affective reactions with insomnia and psychological well-being, while leaving room for reciprocal appraisal processes and unmeasured contextual stressors [4]. The review therefore distinguishes exposure, appraisal, resource processes, change reactions, and well-being outcomes. This separation is necessary because a mechanism can explain deterioration without constituting the outcome, and because different well-being dimensions may respond differently to the same organizational intervention.

Integrative review method

An integrative review design was used because the question requires theoretical integration across heterogeneous evidence rather than estimation of a pooled effect. Literature reviews in management are research designs in their own right when search, selection, evaluation, and synthesis decisions are aligned with the purpose of the review [6]. The present review therefore combines conceptual articles, integrative and systematic reviews, and empirical studies when each source contributes directly to a definition, mechanism, boundary condition, methodological distinction, contradiction, or research need.

The review was organized around four substantive mechanism domains: leadership; work design; participation, voice, and perceived control; and resource loss, preservation, and recovery. Change-event characteristics, employee–organization relations, change fatigue, and HRM practices were treated as connecting or boundary literatures where they clarified how those mechanisms operate. Evidence was coded at the level actually supported by each source. Employee-level associations were not elevated to team- or organization-level effects, formal policies were not equated with experienced practices, and conceptual mechanisms were not described as empirically validated pathways.

The integrative logic was also deliberately comparative. Sources were assessed not only for whether a protective factor was associated with well-being, but for what process it represented, what alternative explanation remained plausible, when the relationship might fail, and whether the evidence addressed preservation of resources, restoration after depletion, or a different outcome such as change adoption or performance.

Literature identification and eligibility

Literature identification used targeted searches across the article’s substantive and methodological domains, including employee well-being during organizational change, leadership and mental health, work design and job demands/resources, participation and voice, conservation of resources, recovery, change fatigue, and change-management interventions. Integrative reviews require purposeful literature organization while still making the basis for inclusion sufficiently transparent to prevent theoretical convenience from substituting for evidence fit [7].

Eligible material was restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2017 through 2025 with a verifiable DOI and publication in a Q1 journal in a relevant management, organizational-behavior, HRM, leadership, or applied-psychology

category. Sources also had to support a specific manuscript claim, mechanism, methodological decision, contradiction, or boundary condition. Duplicate versions, adjacent articles without a direct analytical role, and candidates whose main contribution could not be transferred without exceeding their population, sector, design, or level of analysis were excluded. Recency informed selection only when evidence fit remained strong.

The evidence-intake logic is made explicit in **Table 1** so that source admission, appraisal, and synthesis roles remain distinguishable without converting the review into a systematic-review flow protocol.

Table 1. Evidence intake and appraisal logic for integrating employee well-being protection during organizational change

Evidence-intake element	Eligibility principle	Evidence admitted	Appraisal and coding focus	Role in synthesis	Principal limitation
Change and well-being evidence	Direct relevance to employee functioning during organizational change	Empirical and conceptual change studies	Exposure, appraisal, uncertainty, well-being outcome	Establish change-specific pathways and boundaries	Constructs vary across studies
Protective-mechanism evidence	Mechanism maps to leadership, work design, participation/control, or resources	Reviews, theory, interventions, observational studies	Mechanism, mediator or moderator, level, timing	Compare distinct protection routes	Direct interaction tests remain limited
Deterioration and boundary evidence	Identifies failure, threat, contradiction, vulnerability, or contextual variation	Qualitative, longitudinal, configurational, and review evidence	Alternative explanation, context, vulnerability, temporal condition	Constrain uniformly positive interpretations	Transferability may be narrow
Methodological evidence	Directly informs integrative-review design or appraisal rigor	Peer-reviewed review-method articles	Transparency, evidence status, claim fit	Separate source findings from article synthesis	Does not make the review systematic
Metadata and journal screen	Date, peer review, DOI, and relevant Q1 status satisfied	Eligible journal articles	Publication identity and duplicate/version integrity	Maintain a bounded evidence base	Journal rank does not establish study quality

Evaluation and coding of the evidence

Evaluation prioritized claim-level fit over citation volume. Management reviews require methodological rigor in how evidence is selected, coded, compared, and synthesized, particularly when heterogeneous study designs are integrated [8]. Each source was therefore coded for article type, setting, unit and level of analysis, focal constructs, operationalization or data source where reported, theoretical lens, analytical design, reported finding or theoretical position, mechanism, boundary condition, alternative explanation, robustness information, limitation, and transferability.

A second coding layer constrained manuscript language. For every source, the review specified the exact claim that the evidence permitted and a corresponding claim that it did not permit. This was especially important for observational mediation models, qualitative cases, configurational analyses, and conceptual integrations, where the explanatory value of a mechanism can exceed the causal certainty of the design. Evidence strength was therefore treated as claim-specific rather than assigned globally to a journal or study.

Coding also distinguished evidence-supported relationships from synthesis introduced by this review. When multiple literatures pointed toward a common resource-preservation interpretation but had not directly tested the proposed cross-domain relationship, that relationship was reserved for explicit treatment as proposed. Missing methodological, measurement, or contextual information was not inferred.

Integrative synthesis strategy

The synthesis proceeded by comparing what each domain changes in the employee's resource environment. Leadership evidence was examined for relational safety, support, communication, and resource transmission; work-design evidence for changes in demands, autonomy, learning, tolerability, and social connection; participation evidence for voice opportunity, efficacy, influence, and perceived control; and resource theories for loss, gain, recovery, and contextual passageways. Review-method guidance supports using an integrative design to reorganize heterogeneous evidence around a theoretically meaningful problem rather than treating literature accumulation as synthesis [6]. Integrative reviews can accordingly generate conceptual contribution through connections among previously separated bodies of work, provided selection and inferential boundaries remain visible [7].

The procedure used three comparisons. First, mechanisms were kept analytically distinct before relationships among them were considered. Second, protective evidence was read against failure and deterioration evidence to identify when formally positive practices could become weak, symbolic, or demand-intensifying. Third, temporal distinctions were preserved: resources may be protected before depletion, buffered during exposure, restored through recovery, or lost cumulatively as change continues.

Methodological rigor requires that such integration not erase design differences or convert convergent interpretation into causal proof [8]. Accordingly, the resource-preservation framework developed later is an original synthesis proposed from the evidence base. It is not presented as a validated mediation model, universal sequence, or implementation-ready prescription.

Leadership as a well-being protection mechanism

Leadership is relevant to employee well-being primarily through the conditions leaders create or transmit, not because a leadership label is intrinsically protective. An integrated review of leadership and well-being identifies work, social-cognitive, and relational processes as plausible pathways and also highlights the limited causal certainty of much leadership research [9]. This supports treating leadership during change as a mechanism-bearing context rather than a stand-alone intervention. Workplace mental-health research further indicates that organizational and managerial prevention and support matter, while cautioning against shifting responsibility for structural working conditions onto individual coping or line-manager goodwill [10]. One relational pathway is psychological safety: evidence linking leadership, psychological safety, and employee well-being suggests that employees' sense of interpersonal safety can influence whether they speak about problems and experience supportive working relations [11]. During change, this matters because voice that is formally invited but interpersonally risky may not function as a usable resource.

Resources may also cross interpersonal boundaries. Evidence that supervisor resilience can relate to employee well-being through resource crossover indicates a possible cross-person route by which leaders influence employee resource states [12]. However, this evidence is not change-specific and does not establish that resilient supervisors can compensate for excessive demands, insecurity, or poorly designed change.

Work design during organizational change

Work design provides the most direct link between organizational change and employees' day-to-day exposure because change often alters tasks, discretion, workload, relationships, skill requirements, and monitoring. A century of work-design research shows that jobs are multidimensional configurations rather than bundles reducible to autonomy alone [13]. Job Demands–Resources theory adds an important process distinction: demands are associated with health-impairment processes, whereas resources support motivation and may buffer particular demands under specified conditions [14]. A change can therefore add resources and demands simultaneously.

Recent work-design synthesis organizes job qualities into higher-order dimensions involving stimulation, mastery, agency, relational features, and tolerability [15]. Intervention evidence likewise indicates that redesign outcomes depend on both what job characteristics change and how redesign is implemented [16]. This matters for change management because consultation or supportive leadership cannot substitute for a job that becomes persistently unmanageable.

Digital change illustrates the boundary particularly clearly. Automation and algorithms affect employees partly through how they redesign tasks, autonomy, skill use, and monitoring rather than through technology adoption itself [17]. Pandemic remote work similarly produced heterogeneous work-design challenges and resources, although that exceptional context limits generalization to routine change [18]. Even after-hours connectivity is not uniformly depleting; autonomy can alter its relationship with exhaustion [19]. The implication is conditional: well-being protection requires attention to the experienced configuration of changed work, not categorical assumptions about whether a practice is modern, flexible, participatory, or resourceful.

Participation, voice, and perceived control

Participation is protective only when employees can use it as a meaningful resource. Voice research distinguishes the opportunity to speak from the perceived efficacy and interpersonal risk of doing so; silence can therefore reflect strategic self-protection rather than lack of commitment [20]. Psychological safety adds a relational condition: employees are more able to raise concerns when doing so does not expose them to unacceptable interpersonal risk, although safety does not guarantee that their input will influence decisions [21]. During change, participation should consequently be evaluated by whether employees can express relevant information and whether that information can affect matters that remain genuinely open to influence.

Change-specific qualitative evidence demonstrates why this distinction matters. Participation can become paradoxical when implementers invite input while retaining tight control over what may change, producing tensions between involvement, vulnerability, and resistance [22]. Voice is also temporally dynamic: responses to earlier speaking-up episodes can alter later

expectations of efficacy and risk [23]. Participation is therefore not a one-time procedural resource. Its protective value can strengthen or erode across the change process.

Finally, participation raises a distributional question. Evidence on inclusive organizational behavior shows that whose interests enter participatory processes matters, making representation, participation, and inclusion analytically distinct [24]. Perceived control is thus better treated as an experienced consequence of consequential participation than as an automatic property of consultation.

Resource loss, preservation, and recovery

Conservation of Resources theory provides the central resource logic for this review. Resource loss can be especially consequential, resources may cluster into caravans, and organizational environments can function as passageways that enable or obstruct preservation and gain [25]. Applied to change, leadership, workable job design, credible information, voice, and social support can therefore be interpreted as different resource conditions rather than interchangeable benefits. Their value depends on what employees are at risk of losing and whether the surrounding context permits those resources to be used.

Recovery occupies a different temporal position. Recovery processes can restore depleted psychological and physiological capacity after demanding work, but they cannot replace prevention of avoidable resource loss [26]. This distinction is important during prolonged change because repeated demands can make restoration increasingly difficult. Economic insecurity can simultaneously enlarge the threat environment: financial strain, job insecurity, and related occupational-health pressures may intensify the consequences of restructuring or uncertain employment prospects [27].

JD–R and COR theories are complementary but not equivalent. JD–R specifies demand and resource processes close to the design of work, whereas COR emphasizes resource threat, investment, accumulation, and loss over time [28]. The synthesis developed here therefore uses both lenses while avoiding an undifferentiated “resources explain everything” account.

Interactions among protective mechanisms

Protective mechanisms are unlikely to operate as independent additive inputs. Organizational-change research increasingly distinguishes adoption from maintenance, implying that psychological mechanisms can change as employees move from initial interpretation to sustained enactment [29]. Leadership may be especially important when uncertainty is high, work design when new routines stabilize, and participation when local knowledge can still shape implementation; these temporal emphases are proposed rather than established universal sequences.

Personal resources can modify these processes without replacing organizational responsibility. Evidence on change fatigue suggests that self-leadership may buffer some adverse pathways through psychological need satisfaction [30]. Yet a personal resource cannot make chronically excessive demands, unsafe voice, or insecure employment structurally benign. The more defensible synthesis is one of complementarity and interference: supportive leadership can increase the usability of participation, participation can improve information for redesign, and workable design can reduce the depletion that recovery must later repair. Conversely, one mechanism can be weakened by failure elsewhere.

Table 2 therefore represents protective mechanisms as configurations rather than as four isolated domains.

Table 2. Conditional configurations through which protective mechanisms can reinforce or undermine one another during change

Initiating change condition	Leadership mechanism	Work-design mechanism	Participation/control mechanism	Preservation or recovery mechanism	Interaction pattern	Plausible well-being implication	Evidence caveat
High uncertainty	Credible support and interpersonal safety	Clear, manageable role redesign	Safe questions and consequential input	Preserve predictability, support, and control	Complementarity	Lower depletion risk	Sequence and relative contribution remain uncertain
Intensive redesign	Leader responsiveness	Autonomy and tolerable demands	Local knowledge shapes implementation	Prevent avoidable loss before recovery is needed	Complementarity	Better functioning is plausible	Performance benefits cannot stand in for well-being evidence
Repeated change demands	Support remains available	Demands continue to accumulate	Influence narrows over time	Recovery and personal resources carry more load	Interference	Fatigue may persist despite isolated supports	Personal coping cannot substitute for structural protection

Symbolic participation	Supportive intent without influence	Core demands remain unchanged	Voice is invited but consequential control is low	Few threatened resources are restored	Misalignment	Frustration or vulnerability may intensify	Context and employee appraisal can alter the pattern
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Conditions producing well-being deterioration

Well-being deterioration is not simply the inverse of protection. Configurational evidence from planned culture change indicates that positive and negative reactions can arise from different combinations of organizational support, empowerment, participation, supervisory support, and employee conditions [31]. Although those findings come from one distinctive organizational context and do not establish universal causal recipes, they support a more general caution: the absence of one resource need not produce deterioration, and the presence of several apparently favorable conditions need not guarantee protection.

HRM itself can contain competing pathways. Evidence differentiating job-resource HR practices from challenge-demand HR practices shows that employee well-being can depend on whether HR arrangements are experienced as supplying useful resources or intensifying demands [32]. This makes formal practice labels insufficient. During change, a participation initiative, development program, performance system, or flexibility policy may simultaneously create opportunity and additional cognitive, temporal, or emotional load.

Deterioration is therefore proposed as a sequence in which an initial threat can generate secondary losses when protective interruption is weak, mistimed, inaccessible, or contradicted by another mechanism. **Table 3** traces these sequences without assigning fixed probabilities or universal thresholds.

Table 3. Resource-loss sequences and interruption points that bound well-being protection during organizational change

Change condition	Initial resource threat	Secondary loss process	Vulnerability or context	Deterioration signal	Protective interruption point	Boundary condition	Unresolved evidence need
Restructuring or role uncertainty	Predictability and security	Sustained vigilance and insecurity	Economic dependence or weak alternatives	Strain, sleep or functioning problems	Timely information, credible support, workable role design	Objective and perceived insecurity may diverge	Repeated multi-source tests
Work intensification	Time, energy, autonomy	Recovery deficit and accumulating fatigue	High concurrent demands	Exhaustion or impaired functioning	Demand reduction, autonomy, recovery opportunity	Added challenge may not be uniformly harmful	Threshold and timing evidence
Constrained participation	Control and interpersonal safety	Silence, vulnerability, reduced efficacy	Power asymmetry or low managerial receptivity	Withdrawal or persistent concern	Safe, consequential influence	Formal participation may coexist with little control	Longitudinal voice–well-being tests
Repeated change events	Attention, confidence, adaptive capacity	Resource depletion across episodes	Prior change history and limited recovery	Change fatigue	Coordinated protection across mechanisms	Positive events can coexist with negative accumulation	Event-level and configurational replication

An integrative resource-preservation framework

The synthesis suggests that employee well-being during change is best understood neither as a direct consequence of change exposure nor as the product of one protective practice. HRM–well-being research already warns against assuming automatic mutual gains between organizational practices, employee welfare, and performance [33]. The proposed framework extends that caution to change: leadership, work design, participation, and recovery are treated as distinct resource passageways whose effects may complement, substitute for, or interfere with one another.

Relational expectations also matter. Employee–organization relationship research emphasizes perceived organizational support and psychological-contract conditions as relevant to health and well-being, while formal organizational intent cannot be assumed to equal employees' experienced support [34]. The framework therefore separates organizational provision, enacted managerial behavior, employee experience, and well-being outcome. It also separates prevention from restoration: protecting autonomy, security, manageable demands, information, and voice before loss is analytically different from helping employees recover after depletion.

The central proposed mechanism is conditional preservation. Change conditions create threats and opportunities; organizational mechanisms alter whether resources remain usable; employee resource states then shape multidimensional

well-being over time. Failure can occur when a nominal resource is inaccessible, when one protective mechanism contradicts another, or when cumulative demands overwhelm available preservation and recovery capacity.

Figure 1 consolidates this argument while distinguishing evidence-supported mechanisms from the article's proposed cross-domain integration.

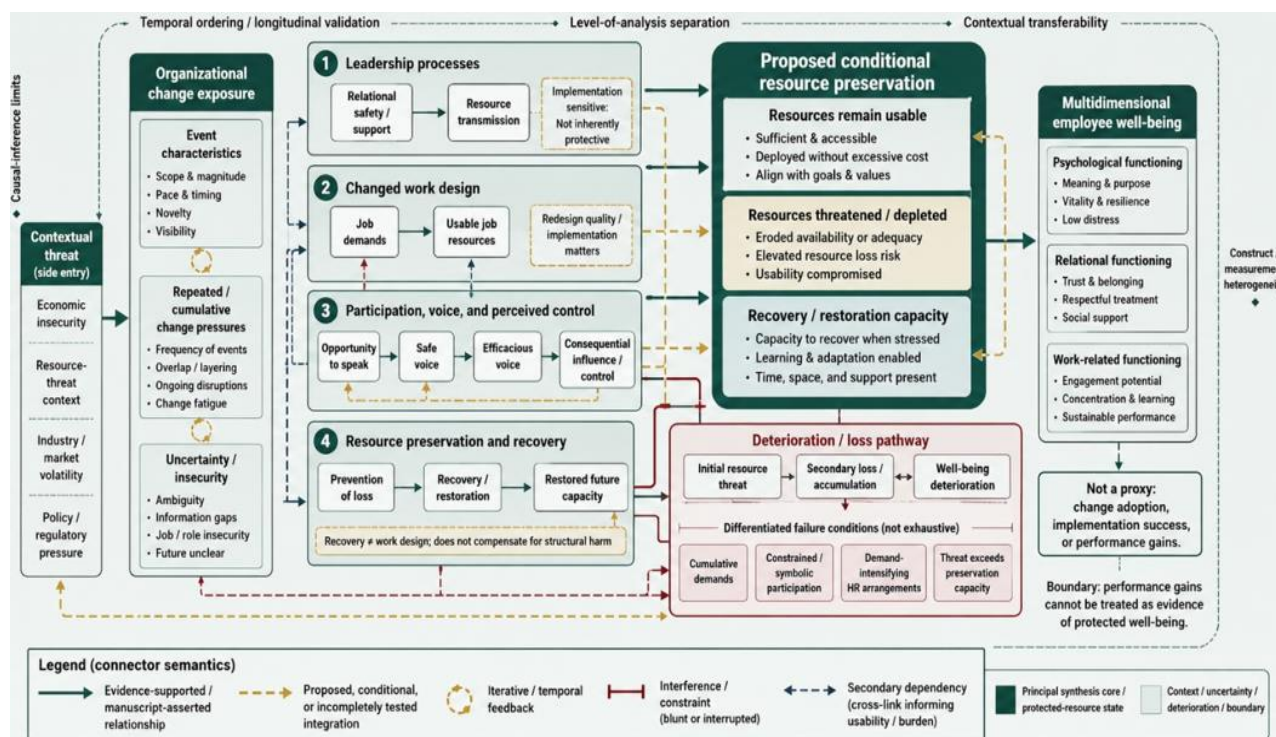


Figure 1. Leadership, work design, participation, and recovery preserve employee resources through complementary but conditional change mechanisms

Propositions for future research

The proposed framework is most useful if its relationships can be challenged rather than merely illustrated. First, research should test whether protective mechanisms change in importance across change phases. Longitudinal voice scholarship demonstrates the need to model employee speaking and responses over time [23], while organizational-change theory distinguishes adoption from maintenance mechanisms [29]. Repeated-measures designs should therefore test within-person changes in perceived control, resource threat, recovery, and well-being rather than relying only on between-person snapshots. Second, resource dynamics require temporal tests. COR theory predicts loss and gain processes that unfold over time [25], but the proposed complementarity among leadership, work design, participation, and recovery has not been jointly established. Studies should compare additive, interactive, substitution, and interference models and specify plausible lags. Measurement invariance across change stages and workforce groups should be tested before apparent temporal differences are interpreted as substantive shifts in well-being.

Third, configurational evidence suggests that equivalent outcomes may emerge through different condition sets [31]. Comparative cases and replicated configurational studies could test whether resource-preservation configurations travel across sectors, occupations, national institutions, and change types. Multi-source measurement should also separate objective change characteristics from employee-experienced demands, support, influence, and well-being. Failure to replicate the proposed interactions would refine, rather than invalidate, the value of keeping the mechanisms analytically distinct.

Implications for HRM and change management

The review does not support a universal package of well-being practices. Change-management interventions are heterogeneous activities whose mechanisms, recipients, timing, and implementation conditions differ substantially [35]. HRM should therefore begin with diagnosis of the resources threatened by a particular change rather than selecting interventions by label.

Three implications follow. First, prevention deserves priority: redesign demands, autonomy, information, and role expectations before relying on downstream recovery. Second, participation should be evaluated for actual influence and interpersonal safety, not the existence of consultation events. Third, leadership support should reinforce rather than substitute

for workable structures. Recovery opportunities and personal resources remain valuable, but they should not carry responsibility for resolving avoidable organizational depletion.

These priorities are evidence-informed design principles, not validated prescriptions. Their relevance will vary with change type, workforce vulnerability, institutional context, employment security, and the stage of implementation. HRM evaluation should therefore examine employee-experienced resource conditions and multidimensional well-being separately from implementation success or organizational performance.

Limitations of the review

This review is integrative rather than exhaustive. Its targeted evidence base prioritizes direct claim fit, recent peer-reviewed scholarship, and journals meeting the specified quality boundary; other relevant literatures may therefore fall outside its scope. Integrative review methodology permits theoretical connection across heterogeneous evidence [6], but methodological rigor requires that differences among conceptual reviews, observational studies, longitudinal surveys, qualitative cases, intervention evidence, and configurational analyses remain visible [8].

The underlying literature also contains construct and measurement heterogeneity. Some evidence concerns general workplace well-being rather than organizational change specifically; several empirical mechanisms rely on employee perceptions; and sector- or organization-specific studies constrain transfer. The participation case, for example, provides rich evidence about paradoxical involvement but not population-level prevalence [22], while configurational change evidence identifies context-sensitive combinations rather than universal recipes [31].

Finally, few selected studies directly test the full interaction among leadership, work design, participation, resource preservation, and recovery. The central architecture is consequently proposed synthesis. Longitudinal, multilevel, comparative, intervention, and replication studies are required before stronger causal, predictive, or implementation claims are warranted.

Conclusion

Protecting employee well-being during organizational change requires more than supportive communication or individual resilience. This integrative review shows why leadership, work design, participation, resource preservation, and recovery should remain analytically distinct while being considered together. Their protective value depends on what resources a change threatens, whether organizational practices make resources genuinely usable, how mechanisms reinforce or undermine one another, and when preservation gives way to depletion or recovery.

The proposed resource-preservation framework therefore treats well-being protection as conditional, multilevel, and temporal. It does not assume that change is inherently harmful, that one mechanism is universally protective, or that successful implementation demonstrates employee welfare. Its principal contribution is to organize fragmented evidence around preservation, loss, interference, and restoration while keeping competing explanations and validation boundaries explicit. Future research can strengthen or reject this integration by testing mechanism timing, cross-level relationships, configurational alternatives, and multidimensional well-being with designs capable of establishing temporal and contextual specificity.

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