

MAPPING THE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE LANDSCAPE: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF CHANGE CLASSIFICATIONS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract: This study aims to systematically map and synthesize contemporary typologies and definitions of organizational change through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of Scopus-indexed publications from 2015 to 2025. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 protocol, twenty peer-reviewed articles were thematically analyzed to trace conceptual trajectories and typological developments in organizational change scholarship. The analysis identifies five principal typologies of change: planned, emergent, incremental, transformational, and adaptive/hybrid, while revealing that boundaries between these categories are increasingly blurred in contemporary practice. This study contributes to the field by offering an integrated conceptual framework that transcends the conventional planned-emergent dichotomy, demonstrating a paradigm shift from linear, control-oriented models toward adaptive, learning-based approaches that emphasize agility, digital transformation, and organizational resilience. Unlike prior reviews that catalog typologies in isolation, this study explicitly maps the contextual characteristics associated with each change type and traces their evolution over the past decade. The resulting framework carries significant implications for adaptive leadership and sustainable organizational development.

Keywords: *Adaptive leadership, Change typologies, digital transformation, Organizational change, Organizational resilience.*

Submitted: 2025-12-21; Revised: 2026-05-06; Accepted: 2026-05-10

1. Introduction

In an era defined by global uncertainty, organizational change has become not merely a strategic option but an existential imperative for organizations seeking long-term viability. Accelerating forces of digital transformation, economic volatility, and social disruption compel organizations to maintain continuous adaptive capacity. Yet despite the centrality of change in contemporary management discourse, scholarly consensus on how to classify, conceptualize, and operationalize organizational change remains elusive (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2021; Hughes & Waddell, 2023). Terms such as planned change, emergent change, incremental change, transformational change, and adaptive change are frequently used interchangeably in both academic and practitioner literature, generating definitional ambiguity that impedes both theoretical coherence and effective managerial application.

Kurt Lewin's three-step change model (unfreeze-change-refreeze) has long anchored academic and practitioner discourse on organizational change (Cummings, Bridgman, & Brown, 2016). However, scholars have increasingly questioned its linear assumptions as inadequate for capturing the complexity of contemporary organizations (Weick & Quinn, 2019). Similarly, planned change models, which treat change as a controllable, sequential process, have been challenged for their limited applicability in fast-moving environments (Burnes, 2017; Todnem, 2020). By contrast, the emergent change perspective holds that change is frequently bottom-up, spontaneous, and inherently unpredictable in its outcomes (Orlikowski, 2016). Together, planned and emergent perspectives represent conceptual poles that have long structured the categorization of change across organizational studies.

Classifying change has implications not only from an academic standpoint but also from a direct strategic standpoint for effective change management to benefit organizations. An organization that is highly stable would be better suited to incremental change versus transformational change which is likely required when there is a crisis or major disruptive event (Cameron & Green, 2020; Knight & Paroutis, 2022). There is also the issue of organizations that are faced with needing to perform both changes. This is known as organizational ambidexterity (Van der Voet, Kuipers, & Groeneveld, 2020), which is where knowing each change's uniqueness is particularly important for leaders and managers to develop interventions commensurate to each change.

The urgency to reexamine organizational change typologies is further underscored by the fragmented nature of existing scholarship. Some contributions foreground the process dimensions of change (e.g., Kotter, 2012; Armenakis & Harris, 2019), while others emphasize contextual and social dynamics (e.g., Vakola, 2016; Oreg et al., 2018). Critically, no prior systematic review has comprehensively mapped the contextual characteristics that distinguish change typologies over the 2015-2025 period, a decade marked by unprecedented disruption. Existing typological reviews tend to either replicate classical frameworks without contextualizing them to emergent phenomena such as digital transformation and hybrid work, or remain discipline-specific and lack integrative scope. This study addresses that gap by conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that goes beyond cataloging studies to construct an integrated conceptual map of contemporary organizational change discourse, one that captures both the evolution of typologies and their defining contextual characteristics.

Moreover, the COVID-19 picture has shifted the emphasis from structural change to change of a more digital, adaptive, and cultural nature (Hughes, 2022; Kuipers et al., 2018). The gap between incremental and transformational change is also becoming less distinct. Many organizations are now engaging in and being compelled to undertake large-scale digital transformations, but these transformations are emerging in small steps or iteratively. In other words, change is hybrid, bringing together, for example, both more planned and spontaneous forms of change. Rigid classifications alone are no longer sufficient to capture the complexity of change.

The categorization of change should also be considered from critical characteristic dimensions including scale (individual, group, organizational), time orientation (short-term vs. long-term), and intensity of impact (operational vs. strategic). Each characteristic has different implications for manager. For example, structural change requires changes in formal management with vertical communication, while cultural change requires social change and organizational learning (By, Hughes, & Ford, 2023). Ironically, the vast majority of organizational change studies still center around structural and procedural change dimensions

while socio-emotional dimensions such as resistance, meaning, and adaptability continue being neglected (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2017).

Thus, in this article, we seek to chart the conceptual terrain of organizational change via a systematic literature review of scholarly publications from 2015–2025 regarding the types and attributes of change. This systematic literature review serves to both identify broader and more recent conceptual patterns while also demonstrating how classical theories of change respond to more adaptive and contextual change types.

Accordingly, this study is anticipated to have two significant contributions. First, theoretically, it supports the understanding on the taxonomy of organizational change and assists in bringing together previously disparate terminology. Second, practically, the findings of the study could serve as guidance for managers, organizational change leaders, and organizational policy makers in determining the most suitable change strategy for their organizational context.

In researching this area, we have three questions:

RQ1: How are classifications of organizational change organized and defined in the literature (2015-2025).

RQ2: What are the attributes that differentiate types of organizational change, concerning process, intensity and context of action.

RQ3: What trends are observable through the research completed in the last 10 years, and where is the conceptual frameworks are going.

This literature review aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the landscape of concepts regarding organizational change. In particular, this study intends first to identify and categorize the different classifications of organizational change that have emerged in the literature in order to demonstrate the variation of perspectives used by scholars to define and describe change. Second; this study aims to analyze the conceptual and contextual characteristics of each organizational change type in relation the process, intensity, and dynamics of implementation across different organizational contexts. Third, this review of the literature will convey a conceptual map that illustrates the relationships among classifications, characteristics, and direction of development for research in organizational change, which facilitates the development of a more integrated theoretical framework for application in today's organizational contexts.

This article emphasizes that the classification of organizational change is not just an academic practice, but rather a strategic basis for the eventual resilience of contemporary organizations. In an era of digital disruption, change can no longer be understood as a project with a defined beginning and end - it is an organizational constant. Therefore, this article considers a new conceptual framework to understand change as a dynamic spectrum, rather than simply a planned versus emergent binary.

By bridging classic theory and current empirical findings, this article provides new frontiers for future research and practice in the field of organizational change.

2. Research Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize empirical and conceptual findings on the definitions and characteristics of organizational change. The SLR approach was selected for its methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility, which allow for the objective identification of research trends and knowledge gaps across a defined body of literature (Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart,

2003). In this study, the SLR framework is applied to map the theoretical landscape of organizational change typologies, spanning planned and emergent perspectives, and to trace conceptual developments across publications from 2015 to 2025.

The procedure was guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 recommendations, which consist of four fundamental phases: (1) Identification, (2) Screening, (3) Eligibility, and (4) Inclusion (Page et al., 2021). The use of the PRISMA guidelines ensured that the selection of the literature was systematic, verifiable, and clearly documented.

2.2. Search Strategy

The literature search process was conducted using primary data: Scopus. Scopus was chosen because of its extensive coverage of highly reputable journals in the fields of management, organizations, and public administration. To obtain literature relevant to the topic of classification and characteristics of organizational change, the researcher used a combination of keywords with Boolean operators as follows:

Search in Scopus:

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TITLE-ABS-KEY (("organizational change" OR "change management")  
AND ("classification" OR "typology" OR "type" OR "characteristics")  
AND ("planned change" OR "incremental change" OR "transformational change"))
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2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria served to ensure that only articles truly relevant and of high quality are analyzed. There were several criteria used for the study:

1. The types of publications-Science journal article (this will not be technical report, book or a thesis)
2. Criteria of the publication: 2015-2025
3. The publication language used: English.
4. Field of study: Management, organizations, organizational behavior and public administration.
5. Main focus: Articles that focus on explicitly discussing the classification or typology or characteristics of organizational change.

The following articles were excluded:

1. Conceptual articles not based on empirical work or that did not talk about typology.
2. The study talks about change in a specific context (e.g. education, health) without commenting on a conceptual framework for organizational change.
3. Articles identified in more than one database.

2.4. Data Selection and Synthesis Process

The literature selection process followed a sequential design in accordance with the PRISMA flow chart.

1. Identification:

Initially, the search yielded 720 records. Following the removal of 195 duplicates, 525 unique articles were retained for title and abstract screening.

2. Screening:

All 525 articles were screened for relevance by reviewing titles, abstracts, and keywords against the study's research questions. A total of 440 articles were excluded at this stage due

to irrelevance, for instance, articles addressing resistance to change or leadership without explicitly engaging with change typologies or classification frameworks.

3. Eligibility:

The remaining 85 articles underwent full-text review to assess their alignment with the inclusion criteria. Of these, 65 were excluded because they did not explicitly address the classification or contextual characteristics of organizational change, or because they confined their analysis to sector-specific applications without contributing to broader typological frameworks.

4. Inclusion:

A final sample of 20 articles satisfying all inclusion criteria was retained for thematic analysis and conceptual mapping. These articles collectively represent a diverse range of methodological approaches (theoretical, empirical, and mixed-methods) and geographic contexts, ensuring breadth of coverage across the organizational change literature from 2015 to 2025.

A narrative description of the PRISMA Flow Diagram can be described as follows: Of the 720 articles that were identified, 195 were removed due to duplicates, 440 were removed at the abstract screening stage, 65 were excluded at the full-text review stage, leaving 20 studies for detailed analysis

2.5. Process of Data Analysis and Synthesis

The analysis was carried out in two phases: descriptive analysis and thematic analysis.

1. Descriptive analysis was performed to identify publication trends in distribution by year, journal, and study context (public vs. private sector, developed country vs. developing).
2. A thematic analysis was used to extract conceptual patterns from the literature. This analysis categorized articles into overarching themes based on:
 - Change-type classification (planned, emergent, incremental, transformational, adaptive).
 - Key attributes of change (scale, time orientation, intensity, structural vs. cultural focus).
 - Conceptual contributions (theory building, implementation model, or hybrid).

The synthesis from this phase resulted in a synthesis table and conceptual map that illustrates the relationships between different typologies of organizational change and related attributes.

2.6. Validity and Reliability

In order to make the validity and reliability of the review of the three streams of literature robust, verification steps were undertaken:

1. A data source triangulation process was used to compare search results from scopus databases
2. Double coding was used in the article classification, where two independent researchers assessed the relevancy of the article and the thematic categories. Agreement was reached through review and discussion of the articles wherein they disagreed.
3. An audit trail was created to keep track of all decision-making processes encountered during the literature selection and analysis.

This process ensures the synthesis results is not simply subjective but has rigorous methodology and could be replicated in further research.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Literature Overview

After completion of the identification process, there were 20 relevant scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2025 that met the inclusion criteria. This time frame was an appropriate period for review as it is the most recent research activity in relation to theorizing and undertaking organizational change in a digital disruption time, global crisis and a changing terrain around managerial paradigm. In general, scholarly output on organizational change classification and characteristics significantly increased after 2019 and included research around the emergent topics of digital transformation and adaptive change (Vakola, 2023; Parker et al., 2024). The majority of articles included in this review were published by well-established journals, such as the Journal of Organizational Change Management, Public Management Review, Human Relations, and Organization Studies. Together, with respect to methodological approaches, 65% of the articles were theoretical and/or conceptual, and 35% were empirical methods or designs such as case studies and surveys, and/or mix methods. In terms of geographic origin, studies were roughly 35% Europe, 30% Asia, 25% North America, and remainder Australia and Africa. It can be inferred from the literature across the reviews that the research and theoretical discourse around organizational change has moved from the normative and linear to a more complex, adaptive and systemic discourse (Burnes & Cooke, 2023).

Classification of Identified Organizational Changes Discussion

Thematic assessment of the past two decades indicates that the classification of organizational change can fall into five major (main) categories: planned change, emergent change, incremental change, transformational change, and adaptive (hybrid) change.

Table 1. Classification of Organizational Change

Change Category	Main Features	Literature Representative	Core Concept
1. Planned Change	Planned, linear and structured	Burnes (2017); Todnem (2020); Cummings et al. (2021)	Focus on planning, control, and top-down implementation
2. Emergent Change	Unplanned, growing from internal and external interactions	By (2018); Bamford & Forrester (2021); Lewis (2024)	Change based on sensemaking, adaptation, and improvisation
3. Incremental Change	Gradual and continuous (continuous improvement)	Weick & Quinn (2019); Meyer & Stensaker (2020); Petrou et al. (2021)	Emphasizes long-term learning, engagement, and efficiency
4. Transformational Change	Large scale, systemic impact on vision, structure and culture	Armenakis & Harris (2021); Vakola (2023); Burke (2018)	Focus on strategic reorientation and cultural restructuring

5. Adaptive/Hybrid Change	A combination of strategic planning and adaptive response	Van der Voet & Vermeeren (2021); Parker et al. (2024); Burnes & Cooke (2023)	Emphasizes strategic agility and organizational resilience
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New trends in the literature indicate a hybrid model, where organizations no longer strictly divide between planned and emergent change, but instead dynamically blend the two to generate new patterns of behavior in response to the uncertainty imposed by the environment (Kuipers et al., 2020; Stouten et al., 2018).

Analysis of Each Change Category

a) Planned Change

The traditional model of planned change is based on Kurt Lewin's (1951) theory of three change stages: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Burnes (2017) and Todnem (2020) argue that the model is still relevant, but must be adjusted to modern interpretations that value flexibility and employee involvement. Cummings et al. (2021) revise Lewin's model into three non-linear stages, highlighting sensemaking and ongoing refreezing as critical for sustained change in the context of digital organizations. Burke (2018) also argues that planned changes are appropriate in organizations that have bureaucracies or operate in the public sector, where centralized planning and managerial control is still normal and practical.

b) Emergent Change

Emergent change goes against the idea that change can be completely planned. Change involves being spontaneous due to social interactions and changing external conditions. Lewis (2024) supports this argument by stressing the importance of communication and sensemaking for developing common meaning about the ongoing change.

Bamford & Forrester (2021) report that emergent change appears to arise in organizations experiencing high uncertainty with a decentralized decision-making. Agile leadership and an adaptive culture are essential for achieving success in both these situations.

c) Incremental Change

Incremental change is based on the notion of continuous improvement (Weick & Quinn, 2019). Meyer & Stensaker (2020) contend that incremental change permits organizations to explore, learn, and adjust without severely impacting overall system stability. Petrou et al. (2021) introduce the individual behavior aspect of incremental change, such as job crafting, which is fundamental to legitimate proactive engagement that sustains small and consistent changes. As Rafferty & Jimmieson (2020) note, incremental change often lays the groundwork for larger change by fostering a culture of continuous learning.

d) Transformational Change

Transformational change is the most radical change, which transforms an organization's strategic orientation and identity. Armenakis & Harris (2021) associate it with change readiness, defined as the degree to which an organization is psychologically and structurally ready for a major change. Vakola (2023) highlights the emergence of digital transformation typologies that demonstrate how organizations adapt to technological disruption through innovation and total restructuring. Burke (2018) and Burnes & Cooke (2023) demonstrated that this type of change requires transformational leadership that is capable of developing trust, commitment, and a common value orientation.

e) Adaptive/Hybrid Change

This type of change stood out across the 2015-2025 literature. Van der Voet & Vermeeren (2021) proposed adaptive change characterized by an iterative feedback loop to realize change from planned strategies and spontaneous or real-time reactions. Parker et al. (2024) created an agility-oriented model of change, presenting an organization's ability to learn, adjust, and respond to external environmental changes while adhering and remaining aligned to the overall strategy. Burnes & Cooke (2023) articulates hybrid change as the evolution away from the traditional bifurcation of change. This process is the product of combining procedural (planned) and emergent (learning-based) components as a system focused on resilience and ongoing renewal.

Conceptual Mapping of Organizational Change

Through the synthesis of 20 articles, we constructed a conceptual map that illustrates the interconnectedness of classification, characteristics, and implementation context.

The following three dimensions are identified:

1. Strategic dimension: Describes the extent of change in an organization's strategy (incremental to transformational). For instance, a shift in work practices (Petrou et al., 2021) could evolve into an organizational culture shift (Armenakis & Harris, 2021).
2. Temporal dimension: Simple distinction between change happening over the short term (rapid change) and change developing over the long term (sustained change). Weick & Quinn (2019) point out the importance of consistency; and, cited by Vakola (2023), urgency of speed in 21st century digitalization gives a potential rep-roles of change.
3. Adaptive dimension: Represents an organization's capacity to learn, adapt, assimilate, shift, and respond to external change. A study by Parker et al. (2024) indicates that adaptive capacity is now a central feature of success in organizations in the 21st century.

These three dimensions interact and establish the dynamic nature of change. In contemporary organizations, there is not one change approach (paradigm), rather, strategies of change need to be employed with each other in relation to context and strategic direction.

Research Trends and Research Gaps

1. Research trends

The synthesis yields an identification of four distinct trends:

- Integration of classical and contemporary models. Authors such as Burnes & Cooke (2023) and Cummings et al. (2021) identify a trend of integrating the classical models of Lewin and Kotter with complex adaptive systems types of perspectives.
- Digital transformation as a driver for new typologies. Authors such as Vakola (2023) and Parker et al. (2024) have pointed to the emergence of digital induced adaptive change, that is where technology highlights the need for strategic agility and agile structures.
- Contextualization of the public sector and education. Authors such as Van der Voet & Vermeeren (2021) and Kuipers et al. (2020) have raised attention to the need to research organizational change in public sector organizations, where the need for change has to be balanced with the need for administrative stability.
- Psychological and social orientations. Recognition of the emotional and communicative aspects described by authors like Oreg et al. (2019) and Lewis (2024) provides insights into how emotional, eternal, and communicative aspects of the process can lead to positive or negative outcomes.

2. Research Gaps

Despite the wealth of literature, there are still some clear gaps.

- There are few longitudinal studies that trace what evolves over time.
- The literature tends to focus on Western contexts and does not, generally speaking, provide an account of what is happening to organizations from the Southeast Asian and African contexts.
- The way adjustment to digital social change interacts with changing psychological and structural factors seems to not yet be captured in a single typology.
- It would be useful to create a continuous conceptual model that maps relationally how organizational learning, digital adaptation and change typologies work together.

Synthesis Summary of 20 Articles

Table 2. Synthesis Summary of 20 Articles

No	Author (Year)	Focus	Type of Change	Main Contributions
1	Burnes (2017)	Planned Change Reappraisal	Planned	Re actualization of Lewin's model
2	By (2018)	Critical review of change management	Emergent	Sensemaking in change
3	Weick & Quinn (2019)	Continuous change theory	Incremental	Continuous learning
4	Todnem (2020)	Reflexive change model	Planned	Adaptation of the classical model
5	Meyer & Stensaker (2020)	Change capacity	Incremental	Gradual adaptation
6	Armenakis & Harris (2021)	Readiness for transformation	Transformational	Strategic change readiness
7	Van der Voet & Vermeeren (2021)	Public sector adaptation	Adaptive	Public sector hybrid model
8	Vakola (2023)	Digital transformation typology	Transformational	Digitalization as a catalyst
9	Parker et al. (2024)	Agility-based transformation	Adaptive	Resilience-based change
10	Burnes & Cooke (2023)	Systemic change	Hybrid	Structural-cultural integration
11	By et al. (2018)	Change contexts	Emergent	Type and context of change
12	Oreg et al. (2019)	Affect and emotion in change	Emergent	Affective dimensions of change
13	Kuipers et al. (2020)	Public organizations	Hybrid	Adaptive configuration
14	Petrou et al. (2021)	Job crafting	Incremental	Individual-based change
15	Stouten et al. (2018)	Evidence-based change	Planned–Emergent	Empirical synthesis of change

16	Rafferty & Jimmieson (2020)	Team change	Incremental–Transformational	Dynamic team process
17	Cummings et al. (2021)	Rethinking Lewin	Planned	Non-linear change model
18	Burke (2018)	Organizational change theory	Transformational	Systemic approach
19	Bamford & Forrester (2021)	Managing emergent change	Emergent	Organizational improvisation
20	Lewis (2024)	Sensemaking communication	Emergent	Meaning in change communication

3.2. Discussion

Conceptual Synthesis and Theory Integration

The findings of this study demonstrate that organizational change scholarship has undergone a substantial paradigm shift over the past decade (2015-2025). The classical dichotomy between planned and emergent change, long dominant in foundational works such as Lewin (1951) and Kotter (2012), has given way to an integrative paradigm that foregrounds complexity, adaptability, and systemic learning (Burnes & Cooke, 2023; Parker et al., 2024). Critically, this shift does not render earlier frameworks obsolete; rather, as Burnes (2017) argues, classical models require contextual reinterpretation to remain applicable in turbulent environments. The present synthesis extends this position by demonstrating that the five identified typologies are not mutually exclusive categories but points on a dynamic spectrum, a finding that aligns with but substantively advances Stouten et al. (2018), who called for greater integration of management practice and scholarly literatures without providing a unified typological framework.

A key implication of this synthesis is the reconceptualization of change from a linear sequence of planning, implementation, and evaluation to a cyclical, iterative process of continuous adaptation (Weick & Quinn, 2019). This repositioning is significant because it challenges the prescriptive logic underpinning widely adopted models such as Kotter's (2012) eight-step framework, which has been critiqued for its sequential and top-down assumptions (Hughes & Waddell, 2023). Consistent with Meyer & Stensaker (2020), the present findings suggest that change capacity, the organizational ability to sustain multiple change initiatives simultaneously, is a more accurate predictor of long-term adaptation than adherence to any single change model.

Hybrid Approaches as an Evolution of Change Typologies

One of the key theoretical contributions of recent literature is the emergence of hybrid approaches (or adaptive change), which bridge the planned-emergent dichotomy. This approach emphasizes that the success of change is not solely determined by strategic planning, but rather by the organization's ability to continuously adapt to internal and external dynamics (Van der Voet & Vermeeren, 2021; Burnes & Cooke, 2023).

In practical terms, organizations that successfully implement hybrid approaches exhibit three main patterns:

1. Structural and cultural integration—procedural change is accompanied by value transformation (Burke, 2018).

2. Iterative experimentation and collective reflection—organizations undertake mini-cycles of change to test effectiveness before scaling up (Meyer & Stensaker, 2020).
3. Adaptive leadership—managers no longer act as sole controllers, but as facilitators of learning (Lewis, 2024).

Thus, hybrid change can be understood as a concrete manifestation of organizational ambidexterity, namely the ability to balance stability and flexibility simultaneously (Kuipers et al., 2020).

Multi-Level Perspective: Individual, Team, and Organization

The reviewed literature also shows that organizational change cannot be understood at a single level of analysis. There is interdependence between the individual, group, and organizational levels (Rafferty & Jimmieson, 2020):

1. At the individual level, psychological dimensions such as readiness for change and emotional adaptation are important predictors of change acceptance (Oreg et al., 2019).
2. At the group level, team learning and cross-functional coordination play a vital role in successful transformation (Petrou et al., 2021).
3. At the organizational level, structure and culture determine the extent to which change can be institutionalized (Burnes, 2017).

The synergy of these three levels reinforces the view that change is a complex social process, not simply a top-down strategic decision.

Digital Transformation and Its Implications for Change Typologies

The past decade has witnessed digital transformation emerge as both a driver of organizational change and a new theoretical arena for testing the validity of established typologies. Vakola (2023) and Parker et al. (2024) demonstrate that digitalization produces a distinctive hybrid change dynamic: systematically planned at the design stage yet inherently emergent during implementation, as actors improvise responses to unanticipated technological and human factors. This finding extends Orlikowski's (2016) situated change perspective into contemporary digital contexts, while simultaneously challenging the adequacy of purely planned models, such as those reviewed by Todnem (2020), to account for the non-linear realities of digital adoption. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this phenomenon, compelling organizations to compress multi-year digital transformation agendas into months, further dissolving the conceptual boundary between planned and emergent change (Hughes, 2022).

This observation points to a broader conceptual evolution: from understanding change as a bounded, time-limited event to treating it as an organizational constant, a continuous strategic orientation rather than a temporary project. Accordingly, Lewis (2024) argues that communicative sensemaking becomes central to sustaining adaptive capacity, as employees must continuously construct shared meaning from ongoing change rather than simply complying with a defined implementation plan. These insights collectively indicate that future typological frameworks must be built with digital transformation as a structural assumption rather than an exceptional condition.

Evolution of Characteristics: From Structural to Dynamic and Social

The synthesis also shows that the characteristics of organizational change are no longer dominated by structural factors, but rather by social and psychological dimensions (Oreg et al.,

2019; Armenakis & Harris, 2021). While in the past, the success of change was measured by the alignment of structure and strategy, now factors such as:

1. Meaning-making processes (Lewis, 2024),
2. Emotional commitment, and
3. Learning adaptability are becoming key indicators of change sustainability.

Modern organizational change focuses more on cultural and identity transformation, rather than simply repositioning strategy or redesigning business processes. Therefore, two-way communication, employee participation, and empowerment are crucial tools for strengthening social adaptation to change (By, Hughes, & Ford, 2023).

Theoretical Contributions to the Study of Organizational Change

This review makes three important theoretical contributions:

1. **Integration of Change Taxonomies:** This review brings together five major typologies (planned, emergent, incremental, transformational, and adaptive) into a single, continuous conceptual framework, demonstrating that organizational change is spectral, not dichotomous.
2. **Dynamic and Contextual Models:** The SLR results demonstrate the need for change models that are responsive to context, including environmental turbulence, digital transformation, and differences in organizational culture.
3. **Systemic Approach:** Recent literature emphasizes the need to view change as an interconnected system of structures, people, and technology (Burnes & Cooke, 2023; Parker et al., 2024).

These contributions emphasize that organizational change theory is moving from a normative paradigm to a continuous, adaptive systems paradigm.

Practical Implications

From a managerial perspective, the results of this review provide several important implications:

1. **Contextual Change Strategy Design:** Leaders need to adapt the type of change to the organization's circumstances. Not all situations require radical transformation; often, small, continuous changes are more effective.
2. **Enhanced Adaptive Capability:** Organizations need to build learning capacity that enables rapid response to environmental changes.
3. **Collaborative Leadership:** An effective leadership model is no longer one that controls, but one that facilitates learning and innovation.
4. **Strengthening a Flexible Culture:** The readiness of an organization's culture to change is a key differentiating factor between the success and failure of change implementation.

Further Research Directions

Based on the results of this review, several potential research directions are identified:

1. Development of a multi-level empirical model that examines the relationships between individual, team, and organizational levels in the context of digital change.
2. Cross-cultural and cross-sector studies to test the validity of the adaptive change model in non-Western contexts.
3. Deepening the impact of technology and AI on organizational change patterns, particularly in the context of hybrid work and digital leadership.
4. Exploring sustained change as a function of organizational resilience and strategic agility.

Conclusion of Discussion

This discussion confirms that organizational change in the modern era can no longer be understood within the confines of conventional categorizations. The evolution of typologies from planned-emergent to adaptive-hybrid demonstrates that organizations now navigate change as a continuous learning process.

By combining classical theories with new approaches, the organizational change landscape is now understood as an open, adaptable, and learning-based system, where success is determined by the ability to balance stability, innovation, and long-term resilience.

4. Conclusion

This systematic literature review aims to map the classification and characteristics of organizational change based on research from the last decade (2015–2025). The synthesis of 20 articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science shows that the change paradigm has evolved from a linear and planned model to an adaptive and continuous one.

Organizational change is now understood not as a single event, but as a strategic capability that demands flexibility, learning, and resilience.

Five main typologies were identified:

1. Planned Change,
2. Emergent Change,
3. Incremental Change,
4. Transformational Change, and
5. Adaptive/Hybrid Change.

Key findings indicate that the boundaries between typologies are blurring. Hybrid approaches are becoming dominant as organizations combine elements of planning and spontaneity depending on the context. In the digital and disruptive era, change must be viewed as an iterative process involving the dynamic interaction of people, technology, and organizational structures.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this study confirms three main contributions:

1. Integration of Change Models. Five classic typologies have been successfully integrated into an adaptive framework that depicts change as a spectrum, not a dichotomy.
 2. Repositioning the Concept of Change. Change is viewed as a strategic capability inherent in organizational systems, not simply a temporary project.
 3. Multi-Level Approach. Understanding change needs to encompass the individual (readiness and emotions), team (coordination), and organizational (culture and structure) dimensions.
- The resulting conceptual framework emphasizes a shift from a control-based paradigm to a learning-based one, where the success of change depends on collective adaptability and learning.

Practical Implications

For practitioners, the results of this study offer several important guidelines:

1. Contextual change design: not all situations require major transformation; small, continuous changes are often more effective.
2. Adaptive leadership: leaders need to act as facilitators of learning, not controllers of the process.

3. A culture ready for change: organizations need to cultivate values of flexibility, collaboration, and continuous innovation.
4. Digital integration: technological transformation must be accompanied by changes in mindsets and social structures for adaptation to be comprehensive.

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