

Factors Contributing for Success of Change Management Initiatives: Grounded Theory Analysis

Fikru Hussien Ahmed

UCN European Programmes, Central University of Nicaragua, Innsbruck, Austria

Abstract

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, organizational change is imperative for survival. However, change initiatives are often complex, simultaneous, and demanding, presenting significant challenges for leaders. Despite the development of comprehensive change models, empirical evidence suggests that a substantial portion—30 percent—of change initiatives fail to deliver the intended results. Prior research in change management lacks the comprehensiveness needed to fully understand the factors contributing to these failures, and existing theories often lack empirical support. This study aims to address this gap by identifying the factors contributing to change successes through data collected from change practitioners, leaders, academicians, and others. Grounded theory approach is employed to develop a comprehensive theoretical model capable of capturing the multifaceted nature of change management. Data from nine highly rated change management podcasts, comprising 60 episodes, are analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding techniques to identify 10 main categories of factors contributing to change initiative successes. The identified categories include leadership and management, communication and transparency, employee involvement and participation, training and development, culture and values, adaptability and resilience, strategic planning and decision making, psychological safety and trust, storytelling and vision, and tools and techniques. Deep analysis of each category and subcategory offers nuanced insights into the factors influencing change initiative successes, providing valuable guidance for practitioners seeking to enhance their change initiatives

Keywords: *Change Successes, Grounded Theory Approach, Multifaceted, Organizational Change, Podcast, Qualitative Research*

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, the success of change management initiatives is crucial for organizational survival and growth. Despite the development of various change management models, empirical evidence suggests that a significant portion of change initiatives fail to deliver the intended results. This study aims to address this gap by identifying the factors contributing to successful change management initiatives through a grounded theory approach.

The data for this study was collected from nine highly rated change management podcasts,

comprising 60 episodes, and analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding techniques. The analysis identified ten main categories of factors contributing to the success of change initiatives: leadership and management, communication and transparency, employee involvement and participation, training and development, culture and values, adaptability and resilience, strategic planning and decision-making, psychological safety and trust, storytelling and vision, and tools and techniques.

Each category offers nuanced insights into the factors influencing change initiative

successes. For instance, effective leadership and management are recognized as critical, with authentic and committed leadership playing a pivotal role in navigating change processes [1, 25]. Similarly, communication and transparency are essential for fostering a clear understanding of change objectives and outcomes among employees [19, 3].

By delving into these categories, this study provides valuable guidance for practitioners seeking to enhance their change initiatives. The comprehensive theoretical model developed through this research captures the multifaceted nature of change management, offering a robust framework for understanding and implementing successful change initiatives.

Core Research Question

What are the core factors contributing to successes in change management initiatives, as identified by change management professionals, leaders, and academicians in diverse organizational contexts, as explored through podcast interviews?

Basic Assumptions

Grounded Theory Approach: The study assumes the use of the grounded theory approach as the primary methodology for data analysis. Grounded theory allows for the systematic analysis of qualitative data to develop theories that emerge from the data itself, rather than being based on preconceived hypotheses or assumptions.

Theory Construction: The main objective of employing the grounded theory approach is to construct a theory that explains the core factors contributing to change management failures. This theory will be developed based on insights gleaned from the collected data, without imposing predetermined assumptions or biases on the analysis process.

Data-Driven Analysis: The analysis process will prioritize the data collected from podcast interviews with change management professionals, leaders, and academicians.

Rather than starting with predefined theories or models, the analysis will focus on identifying patterns, themes, and relationships within the data to generate new theoretical insights.

Open-Minded Inquiry: The researcher will maintain an open-minded approach throughout the analysis process, allowing for the emergence of unexpected findings and perspectives. This approach encourages flexibility and adaptability to the evolving nature of the data, ensuring that the resulting theory is comprehensive and reflective of the diverse viewpoints expressed in the interviews.

Limitations of the Study

1. Podcasts are not primarily addressing the challenges of change management initiatives, leading to uncertainties about sample size adequacy.
2. Some podcasts may need to be excluded due to a lack of necessary content for addressing the research question.

Review of Related Literature

Change Management Models

Various frameworks for managing change have been developed, grounded in diverse academic and professional disciplines [14]. These models guide leaders and consultants by outlining critical success factors and step-by-step processes for implementing change [2, 26]. A key classification divides them into processual and descriptive types [26]. Processual models focus on the stages of change execution, while descriptive models highlight the variables that influence outcomes. Expanding on this, a comprehensive review categorized 37 models into these two groups [10]. This study explores notable examples from both categories, including Kotter and Lewin as processual models, and McKinsey's 7-S and Prosci's methodology as descriptive models.

Lewin's change management model, influential in the field, outlines three main stages: unfreezing, moving, and refreezing [10].

Unfreezing involves identifying and destabilizing the existing status quo, emphasizing the need to discard old behaviors before adopting new ones [21]. This stage is associated with readiness and motivation for change, often involving dissatisfaction with the current state, survival anxiety, and learning anxiety [32]. The moving stage, catalyzed by unfreezing, focuses on identifying and assessing all forces at play and exploring alternative solutions [30]. Lewin's action research aims to transition to more acceptable behaviors, with the understanding that change requires reinforcement to be sustained [22]. The final stage, refreezing, aims to stabilize the new equilibrium, ensuring that the newly adopted behaviors are secure from regression [5]. This stage emphasizes the compatibility of new behaviors with existing ones and the overall environment, highlighting the necessity of changing organizational culture, norms, policies, and practices to support the new behaviors [8]. Lewin's work extends beyond organizational contexts, addressing social conflicts within organizations and society, and includes Field Theory, Group Dynamics, and action research methods to facilitate behavior change within social groups [5].

Kotter's 8-step Change Model provides a structured approach to organizational change, aligning with Lewin's 3-stage model. It begins with establishing a sense of urgency to motivate individuals and forming a powerful guiding coalition to lead the change, emphasizing leadership, trust, and shared objectives [19]. Next, creating and communicating a clear vision is crucial for guiding the organization and fostering a shared understanding of the change [19]. Empowering individuals to act on the vision involves removing barriers and enhancing skills, autonomy, and accountability [20]. Achieving short-term wins helps maintain momentum and reduce resistance [20]. Consolidating gains and expanding the change effort to other parts of the organization ensures sustained progress [19]. Finally, anchoring new

approaches in the organizational culture integrates the changes into everyday practices, demonstrating their value and establishing systems to support the new methods [19].

McKinsey's 7-S model, developed by Robert H. Waterman and Tom Peters in the 1980s, identifies seven key elements essential for organizational effectiveness: structure, strategy, systems, skills, style, staff, and shared values. These elements are categorized into hard elements (structure, strategy, systems) and soft elements (skills, style, staff, shared values). The model emphasizes the importance of aligning and interconnecting these elements, suggesting that changes in one area necessitate adjustments in others to maintain overall effectiveness [18]. Strategy involves a plan to achieve competitive advantage, focusing on long-term objectives supported by vision, mission, and values [17, 18]. Structure refers to the organizational arrangement and distribution of responsibilities, akin to an organizational chart [17, 18]. Systems encompass the procedures, workflows, and processes that guide decision-making [17, 18]. Skills pertain to employee capabilities and competencies necessary to support strategy and adapt to structural changes [18]. Style refers to the leadership approach and management style [17, 18]. Staff includes composition, recruitment, training, and reward systems for employees [18]. Shared values are the core norms and standards influencing organizational behavior [17, 18]. The model underscores that effective organizational change requires a holistic approach, ensuring all elements are aligned and mutually reinforcing.

The ADKAR model, developed by Prosci founder Jeff Hiatt, emerged from a comprehensive study of change patterns across over 700 organizations nearly two decades ago [29]. The acronym "ADKAR" stands for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement [29]. This model outlines a series of steps to effectively manage organizational change. The first step,

Awareness, involves creating an understanding of the need for change, with early communication playing a crucial role in establishing awareness of the objectives and anticipated outcomes. The second step, Desire, focuses on fostering active participation and engagement in the change process. The third step, Knowledge, entails equipping individuals with the necessary information and understanding of how to enact the desired change. The fourth step, Ability, centers on empowering individuals to effectively implement the change at the required performance level. Finally, Reinforcement ensures that the change is sustained over time by reinforcing new behaviors and practices.

A Brief History of Change Management

The field of change management has evolved through various perspectives, shaped by scholars such as Warner Burke, Mark Guidi, László dr. Eszes, and Prosci. Each provides a unique framework for understanding the development of change management over time.

The history of organizational change spans from ancient times to modern practices [4, 17, 18]. Early developments emphasized efficiency through scientific management. Later, attention shifted to human relations, followed by psychological and training-based approaches. The emergence of sociotechnical systems highlighted the link between social and technical elements. In the 1960s and 1970s, participatory methods gained prominence, leading to models focused on collaboration and structured change. Eventually, consulting practices integrated both qualitative and quantitative techniques to guide organizational transformation [4].

A generational view of change management identifies six distinct phases [15]. The earliest phase was directive and hierarchical. The second introduced structured models. The third was shaped by digital transformation, requiring tailored technological solutions. The fourth embraced agile methods, focusing on gradual

progress. The fifth combined various approaches for a more comprehensive strategy. The sixth anticipates the impact of technologies like AI, IoT, and big data, enabling predictive and adaptive change processes.

Change management can be divided into four key phases [11]. The first reflects emotional reactions to change, inspired by psychological models. The second emphasizes structured, step-by-step frameworks. The third incorporates agile and Lean practices, promoting flexibility and engagement. The fourth, current phase, is shaped by digital innovation, data-driven strategies, and the need to manage complexity.

The evolution of change management can be categorized into three distinct phases [29]. Before the 1990s, the focus was on foundational theories developed by early scholars. In the 1990s, change management gained traction in the business world, with the introduction of structured models. From the 2000s onward, it became a formal discipline, marked by defined roles and systematic approaches. Emerging trends point toward increased interdisciplinary collaboration, enhanced organizational capabilities, and expanded professional development.

Recent studies emphasize the shortcomings of conventional models in managing change within today's unpredictable environments [24, 27]. More adaptive and iterative strategies are suggested to better respond to evolving conditions. Additionally, the unpredictable and fast-paced nature of contemporary change, influenced by various internal and external dynamics, is highlighted [6].

In summary, the history of change management demonstrates a transition from rigid, top-down approaches to more dynamic, integrated, and technology-driven methodologies. Future developments will likely emphasize AI-driven adaptability and interdisciplinary collaboration to navigate complex change environments effectively.

Data Collection and Research Methodology

Table 1. Overview of Collected Data

Name of podcasts	Total episodes*	Sample Size	Sample/population
Conversations of agile change	60	6	Around 10%
The change management review podcast	95	11	Around 10%
Leading Transformational Change with Tobias Sturesson	72	6	Around 10%
Chatting About Change with Dr. Jim Maddox	62	6	Around 10%
Change on the run	61	6	Around 10%
Change @ work	27	3	Around 10%
The change exchange	26	3	Around 10%
Engaging people podcast	164	16	Around 10%
The change by attraction	31	3	Around 10%
Total	598	60	Around 10%

* During the time of data collection

Source: Author's compilation

Secondary data is employed to analyze the research problem and provide relevant answers to the research question. The data is collected from the top nine change management podcasts rated by Feedspot in 2023, as listed in their curated list of the best Change Management podcasts [12]. These podcasts were selected based on criteria such as traffic, social media followers, domain authority, and freshness. The podcasts feature interviews with various change professionals, academicians, and leaders, providing a rich source of qualitative data for analysis.

While traditional sampling methods prioritize representativeness and hypothesis testing, this study adopts a theoretical sampling approach rooted in analytic induction. Theoretical sampling focuses on generating and refining theoretical insights rather than seeking to achieve representativeness. Approximately 10 percent of the total population of change management podcasts identified by Feedspot will be sampled for data collection, allowing for in-depth exploration and analysis of the insights provided by change professionals, academicians, and leaders in the selected podcasts (see Table 1).

The researcher initially employed a random sampling technique, selecting episodes at random. The researcher was forced to proceed to the next episode if the selected one did not provide relevant data and lacking pertinent content. The researcher acknowledged these limitations and consider the data collection techniques as a non-random sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling. The purpose of this approach was to ensure the inclusion of episodes featuring experts in the field of change management. It is assumed that the podcasts selected in the top ten rankings by Feedspot likely include high-profile experts, given that their selection criteria are based on factors such as traffic, followers, domain authority, and freshness.

Grounded theory, a qualitative research approach, serves as the methodological cornerstone in this study. Grounded theory is characterized by its inductive nature, aiming to construct theory directly from empirical data rather than imposing preconceived notions or theoretical frameworks onto the analysis.

In employing grounded theory, the research process unfolds iteratively, allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically from the

data. This iterative process involves successive cycles of data collection, coding, and analysis, wherein the researcher engages in constant comparison and theoretical sampling to refine and elaborate emerging concepts.

Central to grounded theory is the notion of theoretical saturation, whereby data collection continues until no new insights or themes emerge, indicating that theoretical understanding has reached a point of saturation. This iterative approach enables researchers to delve deeply into the intricacies of the phenomena under study, uncovering rich and nuanced insights that may not be readily apparent through other research approaches.

Moreover, grounded theory is characterized by its emphasis on theoretical sensitivity, wherein researchers maintain openness to unexpected findings and alternative interpretations. This openness allows for the exploration of diverse perspectives and the construction of theory that is grounded in the complexities of the empirical reality.

By employing grounded theory in this research, the aim is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to success in change management initiatives. Through rigorous data analysis and theoretical development, this approach facilitates the generation of nuanced insights and theoretical frameworks that are firmly grounded in the empirical data, thereby enhancing the credibility and applicability of the study's findings.

Discussion and Analysis

The findings of this study reveal a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to successful change management initiatives. Through the analysis of data from nine highly rated change management podcasts, ten critical categories were identified: leadership and management, communication and transparency, employee involvement and participation, training and development, culture and values, adaptability and resilience, strategic

planning and decision-making, psychological safety and trust, storytelling and vision, and tools and techniques. Each of these categories plays a significant role in the success of change initiatives, highlighting the importance of a multifaceted approach to change management. For instance, effective leadership and management, characterized by authentic and committed leaders, are essential for guiding organizations through change processes. Similarly, clear and transparent communication fosters a shared understanding of change objectives and outcomes among employees.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of employee involvement and participation, which ensures that employees are actively engaged in the change process. Adequate training and development programs equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to change, while a supportive culture and values promote resilience and continuous improvement. Strategic planning and decision-making align change initiatives with organizational goals, and psychological safety and trust create an environment where employees feel safe to express their concerns and ideas. Additionally, the use of effective tools and techniques facilitates the implementation and monitoring of change initiatives. These findings provide valuable insights for practitioners seeking to enhance their change management practices, offering a robust framework for understanding and implementing successful change initiatives. These are the categories.

Leadership and Management

Leadership and management are recognized as one of the ten critical factors contributing to successful change management. This conclusion emerged from data collected from practitioners, consultants, and leaders in the field of change management, employing a grounded theory approach. A key subcategory within this domain is the significance of genuine, authentic, and committed leadership in

navigating change management processes. Authentic leadership positively influences change initiatives by involving followers in decision-making processes and shaping their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors [1]. The importance of leadership commitment in achieving successful change outcomes is also emphasized [25].

Subcategories such as leadership influence, leadership engagement, leadership support, and managerial support underscore the necessity of robust support from leaders. Without adequate support, assistance, and understanding from leadership, achieving the desired outcomes

from change initiatives is improbable. This distinction highlights the importance of differentiating between leadership and management, even regarding support.

The significance of visionary and passionate leadership, leadership by example, and transformative leadership is also identified as essential subcategories through grounded theory analysis. These contemporary philosophies and leadership principles are aligned with 21st-century leadership theories, demonstrating that progress in change management parallels advancements in leadership theories (see Table 2).

Table 2. Subcategories Under Leadership and Management

Leadership and Management	Genuine Leadership Engagement
	Leadership Commitment
	Leadership Support
	Managerial Support
	Leadership Transformation
	Clear Communication of Vision
	Leadership Engagement
	Adaptive Leadership Styles
	Visionary and Passionate Leadership
	Leadership Influence
	Leadership by Example
	Authentic Leadership

Source: Author's compilation

Communication and Transparency

Communication and transparency are the second critical factors contributing to successful change management initiatives. Scholars such as Kotter have emphasized the crucial role of communication during change processes. Furthermore, experts recommend developing specific communication strategies to navigate change effectively. Grounded theory analysis has identified subcategories such as open communication, effective communication, clear communication, communication and connection.

The concept of transparency is inherently tied to openness in communication. It is essential to convey transparent messages to employees, enabling them to process

information, form realistic expectations, and gain a clear understanding of the anticipated outcomes. However, it is crucial to note that openness does not imply disclosing all details about the change and its outcomes. Unfiltered information can lead to chaos. Therefore, having a well-defined plan and strategy for information dissemination during change management is imperative. The timing, channels used, and type of information shared determine the effectiveness of communication efforts. Clear communication helps avoid dilemmas and misinterpretations that could negatively impact the change process.

Communication is often misunderstood as merely transmitting information to the receiver. Recent research highlights that communication

encompasses more than just information transmission; it also involves creating connections with the receiver. Clarity and consistency in messaging, timely and relevant information, and two-way communication channels (open dialogues) are essential

elements of effective communication during change management [3]. Developing a communication plan and utilizing appropriate communication tools are strategic approaches to enhancing communication effectiveness (see Table 3).

Table 3. Subcategories under Communication and Transparency

Communication and Transparency	Open communication
	Effective communication
	Clear communication
	Communication and connection

Source: Author's compilation

Employee Involvement and Participation

Employee involvement and participation constitute the third critical factor contributing to successful change management initiatives. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that engaging employees positively impacts change processes by fostering a sense of ownership and making employees feel recognized and valued. Grounded theory analysis has identified several key subcategories within this classification: listening to employees, encouraging employee input, empowering individuals, personalized change, and feedback loop closure.

Listening to employees involves actively seeking and considering their perspectives and concerns, which enhances their engagement and commitment to the change process. Encouraging employees to contribute ideas and

suggestions ensures that they feel their input is valued, leading to innovative solutions and a more inclusive approach to change. Empowering individuals by granting them autonomy and decision-making authority can increase their investment in the change process.

Personalized change refers to tailoring change initiatives to address the specific needs and circumstances of individual employees or groups, thereby increasing the relevance and effectiveness of the changes. Finally, closing the feedback loop by responding to employee feedback and demonstrating that their input has been considered and acted upon is crucial for maintaining trust and ongoing engagement.

By prioritizing these subcategories, organizations can enhance employee involvement and participation, leading to more successful and sustainable change management outcomes (see Table 4).

Table 4. Subcategories under Employee Involvement and Participation

Employee Involvement and Participation	Engagement and participation
	Listening to employees
	Encouraging employees input
	Empowering individuals
	Personalizing change
	Feedback loop closure

Source: Author's compilation

Training and Development

The organization should prioritize training and development to enhance employees' competencies, ensuring they meet the demands of their assignments. Effective training and development programs boost employee confidence, reduce uncertainties, and decrease turnover rates, which in turn increases organizational productivity and competitiveness. Grounded theory analysis identifies six key elements as subcategories within this domain: the availability of workplace coaching, development and growth opportunities, reflective approach, continuous learning, effective training and training and development skills.

Workplace coaching is crucial for providing personalized guidance and support, helping employees develop specific skills and

competencies. Development and growth opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and continuous learning programs, enable employees to advance their careers and stay updated with industry trends and demands.

A reflective approach is recommended for educators and coaches in the workplace. This method involves regularly evaluating and adjusting training delivery methods to ensure they are effective and relevant to real-world situations. By adopting a reflective approach, trainers can tailor their techniques to better meet the evolving needs of employees and the organization.

Focusing on these subcategories can lead to more effective training and development programs, ultimately contributing to a more skilled, confident, and productive workforce (see Table 5).

Table 5. Subcategories under Training and Development

Training and Development	Effective training
	Development and Growth Opportunities
	Training and Development Skills
	Coaching Availability
	Continuous Learning
	Reflective Approach

Source: Author's compilation

Culture and Values

Values and cultures are critical elements for successful change management. Emphasizing the values of diversity and inclusion positively impacts change initiative outcomes. Research indicates that diverse workplaces exhibit higher productivity compared to organizations with homogeneous workforces. Grounded theory analysis identifies several subcategories within this domain, including cultural neuroscience, handling cultural shifts, humanizing work, and maintaining consistency in values.

Cultural neuroscience is a notable subcategory for future research. It is defined as “a field of study that examines the bidirectional

influences of cultural and biological factors on the brain and behavior, including mental processes” [7]. This emerging field explores how cultural contexts shape neural mechanisms and behaviors, offering valuable insights into how cultural diversity can be leveraged in change management.

Handling cultural shifts involves navigating and managing changes in organizational culture to align with new goals and values. Humanizing work focuses on creating a work environment that respects and values each employee's individuality, fostering a sense of belonging and engagement. Consistency in values ensures that the organization's core values remain stable and

guide behavior and decision-making processes throughout the change initiative.

By focusing on these subcategories, organizations can effectively incorporate values

and cultures into their change management strategies, leading to more inclusive, adaptable, and resilient workplaces (see Table 6).

Table 6. Subcategories Under Culture and Values

Culture and Values	Cultural neuroscience
	Diversity and Inclusion
	Ethical culture and values
	Cultural shift
	Community impact
	Humanizing work
	Consistency in values

Source: Author's compilation

Adaptability and Resilience

Adaptability and resilience are crucial factors in successful change management. Organizations with strong adaptation capabilities are better equipped to handle unexpected events, demonstrating strategic fitness and responsiveness to market changes [16]. Flexibility also positively impacts firms' innovation performance, enhancing their ability to adapt effectively to market dynamics [9].

Adaptive leadership, which emphasizes the ability to navigate uncertainty, plays a significant role in successful change management initiatives. This leadership style involves adjusting strategies and approaches based on evolving circumstances and challenges, thereby ensuring that the organization remains agile and responsive.

Strengths-based leadership is another important approach within this context. This leadership style focuses on identifying and leveraging the strengths of individuals and groups to boost productivity, efficiency, and engagement. It is described as a shift from concentrating on deficiencies to capitalizing on existing capabilities and talents [31]. By emphasizing what people and teams do well, strengths-based leadership fosters a positive and productive environment that supports adaptability and resilience.

Incorporating these leadership styles and focusing on adaptability and resilience enable organizations to thrive amidst change and uncertainty, ensuring sustained success in dynamic market conditions (see Table 7).

Table 7. Subcategories Under Adaptability and Resilience

Adaptability and Resilience	Flexibility and adaptability
	Agile adaptation
	Navigating uncertainty
	Adaptive leadership
	Strengths-Based leadership

Source: Author's compilation

Strategic Planning and Decision Making

In recent years, leaders have increasingly favored data-driven decision-making over relying solely on common sense and intuition. Researchers have also championed the idea of making better, high-quality decisions based on data. The advantages of data-driven decision-making are well documented, including its role in fostering innovation, adaptability, effective communication, and organizational growth [28].

Within the broader category of strategic planning and decision-making, data-driven decision-making represents a crucial subcategory. By assessing threats and opportunities, leaders gain insights into anticipating the outcomes of change initiatives and can make necessary preparations. This subcategory can seamlessly integrate with

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

Another significant subcategory within strategic planning and decision-making is strategic foresight. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines strategic foresight as a structured and systematic approach to using future-oriented ideas [23]. It involves exploring various plausible futures, understanding the associated opportunities and challenges, and then applying those insights to make informed decisions in the present.

Literature consistently emphasizes that organizational culture significantly influences the success of change management. Furthermore, effective planning and control within an organization are pivotal if achieving success remains the ultimate goal of any change initiative (see Table 8).

Table 8. Subcategories Under Strategic Planning and Decision Making

Strategic Planning and Decision Making	Data-Driven Decision Making
	Accurately Assessing Threats and Opportunities
	Strategic Foresight
	Precise Cultural Changes
	Planning and Control

Source: Author's compilation

Psychological Safety and Trust

Psychological safety has emerged as a critical concept in contemporary organizational research and practice. It refers to the extent to which individuals feel safe expressing their thoughts, taking risks, and engaging in open dialogue without fear of negative consequences. Harvard professor Amy Edmondson, a prominent researcher in this field, has underscored the significance of psychological safety in fostering positive and productive work environments.

The researcher has identified five subcategories using a grounded theory analysis. These factors are trusting building, safe forums for honest conversation and empathy and trust.

Understanding Resistance are also one of the subcategories. Trust building serves as the bedrock of psychological safety. When team members trust one another and their leaders, they are more likely to share ideas, admit mistakes, and collaborate effectively. Safe forums for honest conversation are also important since individuals can express themselves openly and without judgment. These forums allow for candid discussions, constructive feedback, and the exploration of diverse viewpoints. Empathy, both from leaders and peers, plays a pivotal role in fostering psychological safety. Leaders who demonstrate empathy and understanding create an environment where employees feel valued and

supported. Recognizing and addressing resistance is crucial. Change initiatives often encounter resistance, whether due to fear of the unknown, perceived threats, or personal biases.

Leaders who acknowledge and engage with resistance openly contribute to psychological safety by validating employees' concerns and facilitating smoother transitions (see Table 9).

Table 9. Subcategories Under Psychological Safety and Trust

Psychological Safety and Trust	Psychological Safety
	Trust Building
	Safe Forums for Honest Conversations
	Empathy and trust
	Understanding Resistance

Source: Author's compilation

Storytelling and Vision

The pivotal role of storytelling in facilitating successful change initiatives is well recognized [13]. Leaders must not only diagnose root causes and trial solutions but also construct a compelling narrative that galvanizes organizational momentum toward change. The

importance of formulating a compelling vision in the context of change management is also emphasized [20]. Key factors underpinning successful change initiatives within this framework include effective storytelling, the creation of a compelling vision, vision and clarity, shared meaning, and emotional intelligence (see Table 10).

Table 10. Subcategories Under Storytelling and Vision

Storytelling and Vision	Creative storytelling and Vision
	Creating a Compelling Vision
	Vision and Clarity
	Shared Meaning and Emotional Engagement

Source: Author's compilation

Tools and Techniques

Managers and change leaders employ various tools and techniques to facilitate successful change initiatives. In this context, several subcategories emerge:

Templates: Templates provide essential information for stakeholders, particularly employees. They outline the change objectives and potential outcomes, ensuring clarity and alignment.

Facilitation Expertise: Effective facilitation plays a crucial role in accelerating the change

process. Skilled facilitators guide teams through transitions, minimizing resistance and maximizing adoption.

Structured Feedback Process: Implementing a structured feedback mechanism allows organizations to gather insights during the change journey. Feedback informs adjustments and helps manage expectations.

Simulation: When feasible, simulating the change provides employees with a realistic preview of the outcome and nature of the transformation. This insight fosters better understanding and acceptance (see Table 11).

Table 11. Subcategories Under Tools and Techniques

Tools and Techniques	Facilitation Expertise
	Templates
	Structured Feedback Process
	Simulation and Practice

Source: Author's compilation

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of successful change management initiatives. By analyzing data from nine highly rated change management podcasts, ten critical factors were identified: leadership and management, communication and transparency, employee involvement and participation, training and development, culture and values, adaptability and resilience, strategic planning and decision-making, psychological safety and trust, storytelling and vision, and tools and techniques. These factors collectively contribute to the success of change initiatives, highlighting the importance of a holistic approach to change management.

Effective leadership and management emerged as pivotal, with authentic and committed leadership being essential for navigating change processes. Communication and transparency were also crucial, fostering a clear understanding of change objectives and outcomes among employees. The involvement and participation of employees, along with adequate training and development, were found to be significant in ensuring the smooth implementation of change initiatives. Additionally, a supportive culture and values, adaptability, strategic planning, psychological safety, and the use of appropriate tools and techniques were all identified as key contributors to successful change management.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for practitioners seeking to enhance their change management initiatives:

1. **Strengthen Leadership and Management:** Invest in leadership development programs to cultivate authentic and committed leaders who can effectively guide change processes.
2. **Enhance Communication and Transparency:** Develop comprehensive communication strategies that ensure clear and consistent messaging about change objectives and outcomes.
3. **Foster Employee Involvement and Participation:** Encourage active employee participation in change initiatives by creating opportunities for input and feedback.
4. **Invest in Training and Development:** Provide ongoing training and development programs to equip employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to change.
5. **Cultivate a Supportive Culture and Values:** Promote a culture that values adaptability, resilience, and continuous improvement to support change initiatives.
6. **Ensure Strategic Planning and Decision-Making:** Implement robust strategic planning processes that align change initiatives with organizational goals and objectives.
7. **Promote Psychological Safety and Trust:** Create an environment where employees feel safe to express their concerns and ideas, fostering trust and collaboration.
8. **Utilize Effective Tools and Techniques:** Leverage appropriate tools and techniques to facilitate the implementation and monitoring of change initiatives.

By addressing these recommendations, organizations can enhance their ability to successfully implement change initiatives, ultimately leading to improved performance and sustainability.

Ethical Considerations and Conflict of Interest

This study is based on publicly available podcast data and does not involve human subjects directly. Therefore, ethical approval was not required. The author declares no conflict of interest related to this research.

Acknowledgments

The author wishes to acknowledge Prof. Dr. Gerhard Berchtold for his invaluable academic

guidance and mentorship throughout the development of this research. Appreciation is extended to the Universidad Central de Nicaragua (UCN), particularly the UCN European Program, for providing the institutional support necessary for the completion of this study. The financial contribution from the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) is also gratefully acknowledged.

The author is deeply thankful to his family—Tigist Temesgen, Naomi Fikru, Rediet Fikru, Amha Fikru, and Yitbarek Fikru—for their unwavering support and encouragement. Their patience and belief were essential to the successful completion of this work.

References

- [1]. Alavi, S. B., & Gill, C., 2017, Leading change authentically: How authentic leaders influence follower responses to complex change. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 24(2), 157–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051816664681>
- [2]. Bezboruah, K. C., 2008, Applying the congruence model of organizational change in explaining the change in the Indian economic policies. *Journal of Organizational Transformation & Social Change*, 5(2), 129–140. <https://doi.org/10.1386/jots.5.2.1291>
- [3]. Brouge, N., 2023, September 1, Effective communication strategies for change management. Officely Blog. <https://getofficely.com/blog/effective-communication-strategies-for-change-management>
- [4]. Burke, W. W., 2017, Organization Change: Theory and Practice (5th ed.). *SAGE Publications*, Inc.
- [5]. Burnes, B., 2004, Managing Change: A Strategic Approach to Organizational Dynamics (4th ed.). *Prentice Hall*.
- [6]. By, R. T., 2005, Organizational change management: A critical review. *Journal of Change Management*, 5(4), 369–380.
- [7]. Chiao, J. Y., et al., 2021, Cultural neuroscience. In J. Y. Chiao et al. (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Cultural Neuroscience and Global Mental Health* (online ed.). *Oxford Academic*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190057695.013.9>
- [8]. Cummings, T. G., & Huse, E. F., 1989, Organization Development and Change (4th ed.). *West Publishing*.
- [9]. De la Gala-Velásquez, B., Hurtado-Palomino, A., & Arredondo-Salas, A. Y., 2023, Organizational flexibility and innovation performance: The moderating role of management support. *Global Journal of Flexible Systems Management*, 24, 219–234. <https://doi.org/10.18800/360gestion.202106.005>
- [10]. Errida, A., & Lotfi, B., 2021, The determinants of organizational change management success: Literature review and case study. *International Journal of Engineering Business Management*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18479790211016273>
- [11]. Eszes, L., 2019, Change management 4.0. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/change-management-4-0-%C3%A1szl%C3%B3-dr-eszes/>
- [12]. Feedspot., 2023, 20 Best Change Management Podcasts. Retrieved from https://podcasts.feedspot.com/changemanagement_podcasts/

- [13]. Frei, F. X., & Morriss, A., 2023, November, Storytelling that drives bold change. *Harvard Business Review*.
- [14]. Galli, B. J., 2018, Change management models: A comparative analysis and concerns. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, 46(3), 124–132.
- [15]. Guidi, M., 2020, The evolution of organizational change. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/evolution-organizational-change-mark-guidi/>
- [16]. Hansson, C., & Abrantes, B. F., 2023, Strategic adaptation (capabilities) and the responsiveness to COVID-19's business environmental threats. In B. F. Abrantes & J. L. Madsen (Eds.), *Essentials on Dynamic Capabilities for a Contemporary World*.
- [17]. Jharotia, A. K., 2019, McKinsey's 7S model for academic libraries. Conference paper, Delhi.
- [18]. Jurevicius, O., 2023, McKinsey 7S Model. Retrieved from *Strategic Management Insight*.
- [19]. Kotter, J., 1995, Leading change: Why transformational efforts fail. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(2), 59–67.
- [20]. Kotter, J. P., 1996, *Leading Change*. Harvard Business School Press.
- [21]. Lewin, K., 1946, Behavior and development as a function of the total situation. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers by Kurt Lewin* (pp. 238–305). *Social Science Paperbacks*.
- [22]. Lewin, K., 1947, Frontiers in group dynamics. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Field Theory in Social Science*. *Social Science Paperbacks*.
- [23]. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), n.d., Strategic foresight. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/strategic-foresight/>
- [24]. Orlikowski, W. J., & Hofman, J. D., 1997, An improvisational model for change management: The case of groupware technologies. *Sloan Management Review*, 38(2), 11–21.
- <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/an-improvisational-model-for-change-management-the-case-of-groupware-technologies/>
- [25]. Ouedraogo, N., Zaitouni, M., & Ouakouak, M. L., 2023, Leadership credibility and change success: Mediating role of commitment to change. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 72(1), 47–65. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPPM-01-2021-0017>
- [26]. Parry, W., Kirsch, C., Carey, P., et al., 2013, Empirical development of a model of performance drivers in organizational change projects. *Journal of Change Management*, 14(1), 99–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2012.745894>
- [27]. Pettigrew, A., 1985, *The Awakening Giant: Continuity and Change in Imperial Chemical Industries*. London. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203816264>
- [28]. Prachi., 2023, The challenges and opportunities of data-driven decision-making in a rapidly changing business environment. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 4(8). <https://ijrpr.com/uploads/V4ISSUE6/IJRPR14602.pdf>
- [29]. Prosci., 2023, The Prosci ADKAR Model: A powerful yet simple model of facilitating individual change. Retrieved from <https://www.prosci.com/methodology/adkar>
- [30]. Schein, E. H., 1996, Kurt Lewin's change theory in the field and in the classroom: Notes towards a model of management learning. *Systems Practice*, 9(1), 27–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02173417>
- [31]. Williams, E., 2023, December 7, Strengths-based leadership. Retrieved from UpJourney.
- [32]. Wirth, J., 2004, Selbstregulation von Lernprozessen [Self-regulation of learning processes]. Waxmann.