



## The Evolution and History of Change Management: A Comprehensive Overview

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### ABSTRACT

Change management has emerged as a critical discipline in organizational studies, reflecting the need for structured approaches to managing transitions in a rapidly evolving business environment. This article traces the evolution of change management from its early mentions or roots in the 20th century to present scenario or position as a multifaceted field of study and practice. By examining key theories, models, and historical milestones, this paper holistically discuss and provides a comprehensive overview of the development of change management. The article further explore and elicit with a discussion of contemporary trends and evolving directions in the field, emphasizing the importance of adaptability and innovation in an era of digital



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## **Introduction**

The formalization of change management as an academic discipline, traces its origins in the mid-20th century, although the concept of managing change can be traced back to earlier periods. The industrial revolution, the rise of scientific management, and the advent of organizational behavior studies all contributed to the development of change management as we know it today. This article explores the historical evolution of change management, highlighting key theories, models, and practices that have shaped the field. The discussion is organized into several sections, each focusing on a certain distinct period or theme in the historical evolution of the concept of discipline of change management.

## **Early Foundations of Change Management**

### **The Industrial Revolution and Scientific Management**

Change management has its roots in the Industrial Revolution, which saw substantial technical improvements and the creation of large-scale industrial businesses. The need to manage the transition from agrarian economies to industrial ones necessitated new approaches to organizing work and managing people. Frederick Winslow Taylor's concepts of scientific management, first established in the period of early 20th century, provided the explicit yet holistic framework for methodical ways to controlling change. Taylor's emphasis on efficiency, standardization, and the scientific study of work processes influenced early thinking on organizational change (Taylor, 1911).

### **The Human Relations Movement**

In the period between 1930-40s, the human relations movement originated as a reaction to the mechanistic perspective of organisations championed by scientific management. Furthermore, experts such as Elton Mayo and Kurt Lewin emphasised the significance of human aspects in organisational success and development. Lewin's work, in emphasis, introduced the concept of "field theory" and Lewin (1947) proposed that change is a process that involves the phases of unfreezing, changing/altering, and refreezing. This perspective marked a shift from a purely technical approach to change management to one that considered the psychological and social dimensions of change.



## **The Disciplinary Evolution of Concept of Change Management.**

### **The Post-War Era and Organizational Development**

In the post-World War II era, organisational development (OD) emerged as a distinct discipline of professional research and practice. OD emerged from the work of researchers such as Richard Beckhard and Warren Bennis, who sought to apply behavioral science principles to improve organizational effectiveness. The OD movement emphasized participative approaches to change, focusing on employee involvement, team building, and leadership development (Beckhard, 1969). This period also saw the development of key OD interventions, such as survey feedback, process consultation, and team development, which became foundational tools in the change management toolkit.

### **The Systems Approach to Change**

The systems approach to change rose to popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, encouraged by Ludwig von Bertalanffy and others. The systems viewpoint regarded organisations as complex, interconnected systems, with changes in one component of the system having domino or ripple effects across the organisation. This approach emphasized the need for holistic and integrated change strategies, taking into account the interdependencies between different organizational elements (Katz & Kahn, 1966). The systems approach also introduced the concept of "open systems," which highlighted the importance of considering external environmental determinants in change management.

### **The evolutionary emergence of Change Management Models**

#### **Lewin's Change Model**

Kurt Lewin's three-step model of change—unfreezing, altering, and refreezing—remains one of the most widely used frameworks in change management. Lewin's method highlights the importance of preparing groups for change, carrying out the change, and establishing the new state in order to ensure long-term impact (1947). Although the paradigm has been critiqued for its simplicity and linearity, it remains an important concept in change management theory and practice.

#### **John Kotter's 8-Step Model**

In the 1990s, John Kotter released his eight-step change model, which built on Lewin's work and provided a more detailed road map for managing organisational transformation. Kotter's approach



highlights the need of creating a sense of urgency, forming a steering coalition, designing a vision and strategy, communicating the goal, empowering people, generating short-term wins, consolidating triumphs, and embedding new methods into culture (Kotter, 1996). Kotter's notion has been widely applied in practice, and it remains a vital resource for change management professionals.

### **The ADKAR Model**

The ADKAR approach, created by Jeff Hiatt in the early 2000s, emphasises individual development as the cornerstone for organisational change. The paradigm highlights five critical components of successful change: awareness, desire, knowledge, ability, and reinforcement (Hiatt 2006). The ADKAR model emphasises the necessity of dealing with the human side of change and offers a practical framework for managing the transition process on an individual level.

### **Contemporary Trends in Change Management**

#### **Agile Change Management**

In recent years, the rise of agile methodologies has influenced change management practices. Agile change management emphasizes flexibility, iterative progress, and continuous improvement. This method is particularly well-suited to fast-paced, dynamic contexts where classic, linear change models may not be as successful. Agile change management involves close collaboration between change agents and stakeholders, frequent feedback loops, and a focus on delivering value incrementally (Denning, 2018).

#### **Digital Transformation and Change Management**

The digital transformation of organizations has brought new challenges and opportunities for change management. As organizations adopt new technologies and digital business models, change management techniques and strategies must develop and innovate themselves to address the particular context specific needs of digital transformation. This includes managing the cultural shift towards digital-first thinking, Addressing opposition to new technology and ensuring that staff have the necessary skills and capacities to prosper in a digital world (Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron, & Buckley, 2015).

#### **Leadership need and role in Change Management**



Leadership has always been pronounced and critical factor in successful change management, but its role has become even more pronounced in the context of contemporary challenges. Transformational leadership, in particular, has been identified as a key driver of successful change. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees, create a futuristic and innovative outlook, and fostering culture of innovation and adaptability (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In an era of rapid change, the ability of leaders to navigate complexity and uncertainty is essential for effective change management.

## **Future Directions in Change Management**

### **The Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Automation**

As AI and automation evolve, they are expected to have a significant influence on change management. AI-powered solutions may offer real-time insights into change projects, forecast possible obstacles, and suggest adaptive tactics. However, the growing use of AI and automation creates ethical and societal concerns, notably around job displacement and the need for reskilling. Change management professionals will need to navigate these challenges while leveraging the potential of AI to enhance change processes (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

### **Sustainability and Change Management**

Sustainability has become a key concern for organizations worldwide, and change management will play a critical role in driving sustainable practices. This includes managing the transition to more environmentally friendly business models, addressing social and governance issues, and ensuring that sustainability is embedded in organizational culture. Change management practices will need to evolve to support the integration of sustainability into all aspects of organizational operations (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010).

### **The upcoming expected evolution of Work and Change Management**

Trends such as remote employment, the gig economy, and the growing emphasis of lifelong learning are shaping the workplace of the future. Change management will need to adapt to these changes, with an emphasis on building organisations that are adaptable, inclusive, and resilient. This involves managing the shift to remote and hybrid work modes, promoting ongoing learning and growth, and developing an adaptable and innovative culture (World Economic Forum, 2020).



## Conclusion

The history of change management reflects the evolving needs and challenges of organizations in a dynamic and complex world. From its early roots in scientific management and the human relations movement to the development of sophisticated models and frameworks, change management has grown into a multifaceted discipline that is essential for organizational success. As we look to the future, change management will continue to evolve, driven by trends such as digital transformation, sustainability, and the neo-nature of work. By embracing innovation and adaptability, change management professionals can help organizations navigate the uncertainties of the future and achieve lasting success.

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