Indian Journal of
Modern Research and Reviews

This Journal is a member of the *'Committee on Publication Ethics'*

Online ISSN:2584-184X

*Research Article*

# Influence of Organizational Culture on Change Management Success: A Mixed-Methods Approach

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**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22057060

**Abstract**

Organizational change initiatives fail at a persistently high rate, and a growing body of scholarship attributes much of this failure not to poor planning or inadequate resourcing, but to a mismatch between the proposed change and the underlying culture of the organisation attempting it. This study examines the relationship between organisational culture and change management success using a mixed-methods design that combines a quantitative survey of employees across multiple industries with qualitative interviews of change leaders and staff who have recently experienced a major organizational change. The quantitative phase, grounded in the Competing Values Framework and Kotter's eight-step model of change, tests the association between four cultural archetypes—clan, adhocracy, market, and hierarchy—and perceived change success. The qualitative phase explores, through semi-structured interviews, the mechanisms by which culture enables or obstructs change, including communication norms, trust, leadership style, and employee readiness. Findings indicate that adhocracy and clan cultures are associated with significantly higher perceived change success than hierarchy or market cultures, and that psychological safety, transparent communication, and visible leadership commitment mediate this relationship. The paper concludes with a set of practical recommendations for aligning change strategy with cultural context and proposes an integrated framework for diagnosing cultural readiness prior to launching change initiatives.

**Manuscript Information**

- **ISSN No:** 2584-184X
- **Received:** 07-07-2026
- **Accepted:** 17-08-2026
- **Published:** 22-08-2026
- **MRR:**4(8); 2026: 215-220

- **Plagiarism Checked:** Yes
- **Peer Review Process:** Yes

**How to Cite this Article**

Yadav S. Influence of Organizational Culture on Change Management Success: A Mixed-Methods Approach. Indian J Mod Res Rev. 2026;4(8):215-220.

**Access this Article Online**

www.mrrjournal.in

**KEYWORDS:** organizational culture, change management, mixed-methods research, Competing Values Framework, change readiness, leadership.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Organizational change has become a near-constant feature of modern business life. Digital transformation, mergers and acquisitions, restructuring, and shifts in strategic direction all require organizations to alter established patterns of behavior, structure, and process. Despite decades of research and the proliferation of structured change methodologies, a substantial proportion of organizational change efforts fail to achieve their intended outcomes. Estimates of failure rates vary across studies, but the consistent theme in the literature is that technical and procedural explanations alone cannot account for why some organizations navigate change successfully while others do not[1].

Organizational culture—the shared assumptions, values, beliefs, and norms that shape how members of an organization perceive and respond to their environment—has emerged as a central explanatory variable in this discussion. Culture influences how employees interpret the rationale for change, how much trust they place in leadership, how willing they are to take the risks associated with new ways of working, and how resilient they are when change efforts encounter setbacks. Where culture and change strategy are aligned, organizations tend to experience smoother implementation and more durable adoption of new practices. Where they are misaligned, even well-resourced and carefully planned initiatives can stall or reverse.

This study addresses three questions. First, is there a measurable association between organizational culture type and perceived success of change initiatives? Second, which cultural dimensions or archetypes are most strongly associated with successful change outcomes? Third, through what mechanisms does culture exert its influence on the change process, from the perspective of those who lead and experience change directly?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data. The rationale for this design is that organizational culture is simultaneously a measurable construct—amenable to standardized instruments such as the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument—and a lived experience that is best understood through the narratives of the people who navigate it daily. Combining both approaches allows the study to establish statistical patterns while also explaining the human and interpersonal dynamics that produce those patterns.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on organizational culture, change management theory, and the documented links between the two. Section 3 describes the mixed-methods research design, sampling strategy, instruments, and analytical procedures. Section 4 presents the quantitative and qualitative findings. Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings for theory and practice. Section 6 concludes with limitations and recommendations for future research.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture has been conceptualized in numerous ways since the construct gained prominence in management scholarship in the early 1980s. One influential perspective frames culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group develops as it learns to cope with problems of external adaptation and internal integration—assumptions that, having proven successful, are taught to new members as the correct way to perceive and respond to organizational challenges. This view emphasizes that culture operates at multiple levels, from visible artifacts and espoused values down to deeply held, often unconscious assumptions that are the most difficult to change[2].

A second widely used approach treats culture as a set of competing value orientations that can be mapped along two axes: flexibility versus stability, and internal focus versus external focus. This produces four cultural archetypes. Clan culture emphasizes collaboration, mentorship, and a family-like internal environment. Adhocracy culture emphasizes innovation, risk-taking, and adaptability in a dynamic external environment. Market culture emphasizes competitiveness, results, and external positioning. Hierarchy culture emphasizes control, stability, efficiency, and adherence to formal procedures. Most organizations exhibit a blend of these archetypes, with one or two typically dominant. This framework has been used extensively in empirical research because it lends itself to structured measurement while retaining conceptual richness[3].

### 2.2 Change Management

Change management as a discipline is concerned with the structured processes, tools, and leadership behaviors used to move individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired future state. Classic models describe change as unfolding in stages: unfreezing existing patterns, introducing and reinforcing new behaviors, and refreezing the organization around the new equilibrium[4]. Later models expanded this into more granular sequences, such as establishing urgency, building a coalition, forming a vision, communicating that vision, empowering broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring new approaches in the culture itself[5]. Notably, the final stage of this widely used model explicitly recognizes that sustainable change requires the new behaviors to become embedded in culture, implicitly acknowledging that culture is both an input to and an output of successful change.

A recurring theme across the change management literature is that resistance to change is rarely purely rational or purely irrational; it is shaped by employees' sense of psychological safety, perceived fairness, trust in leadership, and prior experience with organizational change[6]. Organizations with a history of poorly managed change tend to accumulate “change fatigue” and skepticism, which subsequent change efforts must overcome. This suggests that the cultural residue of past change experiences is itself a component of present-day organizational culture.

### 2.3 The Culture–Change Link

A growing body of empirical and conceptual work has examined how culture and change interact. Some scholars argue that culture functions as a lens through which employees interpret the meaning and legitimacy of a proposed change; the same change initiative may be read as an exciting opportunity in one cultural context and as a threat to established norms in another. Others emphasize those structural features of culture—centralization, formalization, and communication patterns—that either facilitate or constrain the diffusion of new practices through an organization[7]. Cultures characterized by openness, psychological safety, and distributed decision-making are generally reported to be more receptive to change, while cultures characterized by rigid hierarchy and risk aversion are reported to be more resistant, even when the substantive case for change is strong.

At the same time, some literature cautions against treating any single cultural archetype as uniformly "good" or "bad" for change. Hierarchy and market cultures, for instance, can be advantageous for executing well-defined, incremental changes that benefit from discipline and clear accountability, whereas adhocracy cultures may struggle to sustain change once the initial burst of enthusiasm fades, absent structures that lock in new behaviors. This suggests that culture–change fit, rather than a single "best" culture type, may be the more important predictor of success—an idea that remains underexplored empirically and that this study seeks to test.

### 2.4 Conceptual Framework

Drawing on the reviewed literature, this study proposes that organizational culture influences change success both directly, by shaping employees' baseline openness to new ways of working, and indirectly, through mediating mechanisms such as trust in leadership, quality of change communication, and perceived psychological safety. The four Competing Values Framework archetypes[3] serve as the primary independent variable, perceived change success (encompassing adoption, sustainability, and achievement of stated objectives) serves as the primary dependent variable, and the mediating mechanisms are explored qualitatively to explain the pathways through which the relationship operates.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected during overlapping timeframes, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. This design was chosen because it allows the statistical generalizability of survey data to be combined with the contextual depth of interview data without requiring one method to be strictly sequential to, or subordinate to, the other. The quantitative strand addresses the "what" and "how strong" questions regarding the culture–change relationship, while the qualitative strand addresses the "why" and "how" questions regarding the mechanisms underlying that relationship.

### 3.2 Quantitative Phase

The quantitative phase used a cross-sectional online survey distributed to employees who had participated in a significant organizational change initiative—defined as a restructuring, system implementation, merger, leadership transition, or strategic pivot—within the preceding eighteen months. The survey instrument comprised three sections. The first section captured organizational culture using a shortened, validated adaptation of the Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument, which asks respondents to distribute points across descriptive statements corresponding to the four Competing Values Framework archetypes[3], yielding a culture profile for each respondent's organization. The second section measured perceived change management success using a multi-item scale addressing implementation effectiveness, employee adoption, achievement of intended objectives, and sustainability of the change six months or more after initial rollout. The third section captured demographic and organizational control variables, including organization size, industry sector, tenure, and hierarchical level.

### 3.3 Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase consisted of semi-structured interviews with a subset of survey respondents who volunteered for follow-up participation, purposively sampled to include both change leaders (managers, project sponsors, and change management professionals) and change recipients (frontline and mid-level employees) across organizations representing each of the four dominant culture types identified in the quantitative phase. Interviews explored participants' lived experience of the change process, including how communication was handled, how leadership behaved during the initiative, how colleagues reacted to the change, and what participants believed helped or hindered successful adoption. Interviews lasted between thirty and fifty minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### 3.4 Sample

The final quantitative sample consisted of 342 valid responses drawn from employees across a range of industries, including financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, technology, and public sector organizations, following exclusion of incomplete responses and responses failing attention-check items. The qualitative sample consisted of 28 interview participants drawn from 12 organizations, selected to ensure representation across culture types and organizational roles.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to test the association between dominant culture type and perceived change success while controlling for organization size, sector, and change type. Culture type was operationalized both as a continuous score for each of the four archetypes and as a categorical variable representing each organization's dominant archetype, allowing both approaches to be checked for consistency. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving iterative coding of interview transcripts to identify recurring themes related to the mechanisms connecting culture and change outcomes. Two researchers coded a subset of transcripts independently to assess inter-coder reliability before proceeding to code the remaining transcripts, and themes were refined through discussion and comparison against the quantitative findings, consistent with the convergent parallel design's integration stage.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

All participants provided informed consent prior to participating in either the survey or interviews. Organizational and individual identities were anonymized in all reporting. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without consequence. The study followed standard ethical research protocols regarding data storage, confidentiality, and the secure handling of recorded interview material.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Quantitative Results

Descriptive analysis of the culture profiles indicated that clan and hierarchy were the two most commonly dominant archetypes across the sampled organizations, followed by market and then adhocracy, broadly consistent with prior applications of the Competing Values Framework[3] in large, established organizations. Mean perceived change success scores varied meaningfully across dominant culture types. Organizations with a dominant adhocracy culture reported the highest mean perceived change success, followed closely by clan-dominant organizations. Market-dominant organizations reported moderate perceived change success, while hierarchy-dominant organizations reported the lowest mean scores, though not dramatically lower than market-dominant organizations.

Correlation analysis showed that adhocracy and clan culture scores were positively and significantly associated with perceived change success, while hierarchy culture scores were negatively and significantly associated with perceived change success. Market culture scores showed a weak and statistically non-significant association with perceived change success once other variables were accounted for. Multiple regression analysis, controlling for organization size, industry sector, and type of change initiative, confirmed that adhocracy and clan culture scores remained significant positive predictors of perceived change success, and hierarchy culture score remained a significant negative predictor. The overall regression model explained a substantial proportion of variance in perceived change success, indicating that culture type is a meaningful, though not exclusive, predictor of change outcomes; organization size and change type also contributed modest but significant explanatory power, with larger organizations and more disruptive change types associated with somewhat lower perceived success regardless of culture.

Subgroup analysis by hierarchical level revealed that change leaders rated perceived change success somewhat higher, on average, than frontline employees within the same organizations, suggesting a perception gap between those who design and lead change and those who experience its downstream effects. This gap was narrower in adhocracy- and clan-dominant organizations than in hierarchy-dominant organizations, suggesting that these cultures may also narrow the distance between leadership intent and employee experience during change.

### 4.2 Qualitative Results

Thematic analysis of the interview data identified four principal themes explaining how culture shapes change outcomes.

**Communication transparency and frequency.** Participants in clan- and adhocracy-dominant organizations consistently described change communication as frequent, two-way, and responsive to employee questions and concerns. Several described leaders actively soliciting feedback and visibly adjusting plans in response. By contrast, participants in hierarchy-dominant organizations more often described communication as top-down, infrequent, and focused on announcing decisions rather than explaining rationale, which several participants linked directly to skepticism about whether their input mattered.

**Psychological safety and permission to fail.** Interviewees in adhocracy-dominant organizations frequently described an organizational tolerance for experimentation and early mistakes during the transition period, which they credited with encouraging faster adoption of new tools and processes[8]. In hierarchy- and market-dominant organizations, participants more often described fear of visible failure or performance penalties as a reason employees reverted to old practices when new processes proved difficult, even when they privately believed the new approach was better.

**Leadership visibility and modeling.** Across culture types, participants emphasized the importance of leaders visibly modeling the behaviors associated with the change, rather than delegating change entirely to project teams or communications alone. This theme was strongest among change leaders themselves, who described visible commitment—attending training sessions, using new systems personally, and acknowledging their own adjustment difficulties—as a key credibility signal to employees.

**Trust accumulated from prior change experience.** Several participants, particularly in hierarchy-dominant organizations with a history of poorly managed prior initiatives, described a form of institutional skepticism that colored their reception of the current change regardless of its individual merits. Participants used phrases suggesting they had learned to wait out change announcements rather than engage with them, a pattern several change leaders also recognized and described as a significant obstacle they had to actively work to overcome through early, credible wins.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings support the central premise that organizational culture meaningfully shapes change management success, while also adding nuance regarding the specific mechanisms involved. The quantitative results align with the broader literature suggesting that flexibility-oriented cultures—adhocracy and clan—are more conducive to organizational change than stability- and control-oriented cultures such as hierarchy. This is consistent with theoretical expectations, since change by definition requires a departure from established routines, and cultures that valorize stability and formal procedure may generate structural and psychological friction against exactly the behaviors change requires.

However, the qualitative findings suggest that culture type alone does not fully explain the relationship; rather, culture appears to operate through specific, actionable mechanisms—communication practices, tolerance for experimentation, visible leadership behavior, and accumulated organizational trust[8]—that can, in principle, be cultivated even within organizations whose dominant culture is not naturally change-friendly. This has an important practical implication: rather than treating culture type as a fixed constraint that change leaders must simply accept, organizations may be able to intentionally strengthen these specific mechanisms as a form of "culture engineering" targeted at the change process itself, without requiring a wholesale transformation of organizational culture, which is typically slow and difficult to achieve deliberately.

The finding that market culture showed only a weak, non-significant relationship with change success once other variables were controlled is notable, since market culture is often associated with results-orientation and could plausibly be expected to support change efforts framed around competitive necessity. One interpretation, supported by several qualitative accounts, is that market-dominant organizations tend to communicate change primarily in terms of external competitive pressure without necessarily investing in the internal communication transparency, psychological safety, or leadership visibility identified as key mediating mechanisms; the motivational case for change may be clear, but the internal conditions for executing it well may be underdeveloped.

The perception gap identified between change leaders and frontline employees, and its narrowing in clan- and adhocracy-dominant organizations, reinforces a recurring caution in the change management literature[6]: organizations should be wary of relying primarily on leadership perceptions when evaluating change success, since these perceptions may systematically overstate actual employee adoption and sentiment, particularly in more hierarchical cultures where upward communication may be muted.

These findings also extend the theoretical literature on culture–change fit. Rather than supporting a simple "flexible culture is always better" narrative, the combination of quantitative and qualitative results suggests a more conditional picture: flexibility-oriented cultures appear to provide a more favorable default environment for change, but the specific mechanisms of communication, psychological safety, leadership modeling, and accumulated trust are the more proximate and more directly manageable drivers of success, and these can plausibly be strengthened within any culture type through deliberate practice, even if doing so may require more sustained effort within hierarchy- or market-dominant contexts.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to examine the relationship between organizational culture and change management success using a mixed-methods design that combined survey data from 342 employees with interview data from 28 change leaders and recipients across twelve organizations. The findings demonstrate that adhocracy and clan cultures are associated with significantly higher perceived change success than hierarchy and market cultures, and that this relationship operates substantially through communication transparency, psychological safety, visible leadership modeling, and organizational trust accumulated from prior change experience.

For practitioners, several recommendations follow. First, organizations preparing to launch a significant change initiative should conduct a cultural diagnostic beforehand, using a validated instrument such as the Competing Values Framework[3], to anticipate likely sources of resistance and tailor change strategy accordingly rather than applying a one-size-fits-all change methodology. Second, regardless of dominant culture type, change leaders should prioritize frequent, two-way communication and be prepared to demonstrably act on employee feedback, since this practice was consistently identified as a differentiator between more and less successful change experiences. Third, organizations should deliberately create structured tolerance for early mistakes during transition periods, since fear of visible failure was repeatedly identified as a driver of reversion to old practices. Fourth, leaders should visibly and personally model new behaviors rather than delegating change entirely to project or communications teams. Fifth, organizations with a history of poorly managed change should recognize that they carry a credibility deficit into new initiatives and should invest disproportionately in early, credible wins to rebuild trust before expecting broad employee engagement.

This study has several limitations that should inform future research. The cross-sectional survey design limits causal inference, and perceived change success, while a widely used measure, is inherently subjective and may not fully correspond to objective performance or financial outcomes. The sample, while diverse across sectors, was concentrated in medium to large organizations, and findings may not generalize fully to small organizations or to national and cultural contexts outside those represented in the sample. Future research employing longitudinal designs that track culture and change outcomes over time, and that incorporate objective performance metrics alongside perceptual measures, would help clarify the causal pathways proposed here. Future work might also examine whether the culture-engineering mechanisms identified in this study—communication practices, psychological safety, leadership modeling—can be deliberately strengthened within hierarchy- or market-dominant organizations, and whether doing so produces change outcomes comparable to those observed in naturally flexibility-oriented cultures.

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