Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to Organizational Change Readiness

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This systematic literature review examines the evolution and current state of research on organizational change readiness through the lens of cross-disciplinary approaches. The combination of insights from various fields has greatly enhanced our understanding of how organizations and individuals prepare for and respond to change. Through a comprehensive analysis, this review identifies key cross-disciplinary intersections that have shaped change readiness research, focusing on integrating organizational psychology and management theory. Organizations that adopt cross-disciplinary approaches to change readiness achieve more successful outcomes in change initiatives. The review highlights significant research gaps, including the need for more sophisticated measurement tools, greater attention to contextual factors, and more diverse methodological approaches. Future research should focus on developing integrated theoretical models, assessing digital transformation readiness from cross-disciplinary perspectives, and examining cultural and global viewpoints on change readiness. **Keywords:** Cross-disciplinary approaches, Change readiness, Organizational psychology, Management theory, Systematic literature review

INTRODUCTION

Organizational change has become inevitable in contemporary business environments, driven by technological advancements, global competition, shifting workforce dynamics, and unexpected disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic (Burnes, 2020; Worley & Jules, 2023). The ability of organizations to implement change effectively has consistently been linked to their level of change readiness—the capacity of an organization and its members to engage with and adapt to change initiatives successfully (Rafferty *et al.*, 2013).

Despite this understanding, organizational change initiatives experience high failure rates, with estimates suggesting that 60-70% of change efforts do not achieve their intended outcomes (Hughes, 2011; Fergnani, 2022). In response to this persistent challenge, researchers have moved beyond siloed disciplinary approaches to understanding change readiness, toward more integrated, cross-disciplinary perspectives that capture the complexity of organizational change phenomena (Stouten *et al.*, 2018).

The purpose of this systematic literature review, therefore, is to analyze how the integration of multiple disciplinary perspectives—particularly organizational psychology and management theory—has enhanced our understanding of change readiness. More specifically, the review addresses three primary research questions:

RQ1: How have cross-disciplinary approaches evolved in the study of organizational change readiness?

RQ2: What unique insights emerge from integrating organizational psychology and management theory in change readiness research?

RQ3: What are the significant research gaps and future directions for cross-disciplinary change readiness research?

By addressing these questions, this review aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of current knowledge, identify theoretical and practical implications of cross-disciplinary approaches, and chart a course for future research that builds on these integrated perspectives.

METHOD

This systematic literature review employed a structured approach to identify, evaluate, and synthesize research on organizational change readiness across multiple disciplines. The methodology was designed to capture the cross-disciplinary nature of change readiness research while maintaining analytical rigor.

Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

A comprehensive search was conducted across major academic databases including Web of Science, Scopus, PsycINFO, and ProQuest. The search used combinations of key terms: "change readiness," "readiness for change," "organizational change," "change preparedness," "change capacity," and "change receptivity." These terms were cross-referenced with terminology specific to management, psychology, sociology, and healthcare administration to ensure comprehensive interdisciplinary coverage.

Studies were included if they: (1) were published between 2000 and 2024, (2) primarily focused on organizational change readiness, (3) provided empirical evidence (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) or offered theoretical contributions, and (4) underwent peer review. To ensure consistent quality assessment, non-English publications, conference proceedings, book chapters, and dissertations were excluded.

Screening Process

The initial search yielded 327 potentially relevant publications. After removing duplicates (n=73), the remaining 254 articles underwent title and abstract screening based on the inclusion criteria, resulting in 112 publications for full-text review. During the full-text assessment, 64 additional articles were excluded as they did not sufficiently focus on change readiness or lacked cross-disciplinary implications. The final sample comprised 48 studies that met all criteria.

Conceptual Evolution and Cross-Disciplinary Integration in Change Readiness Research
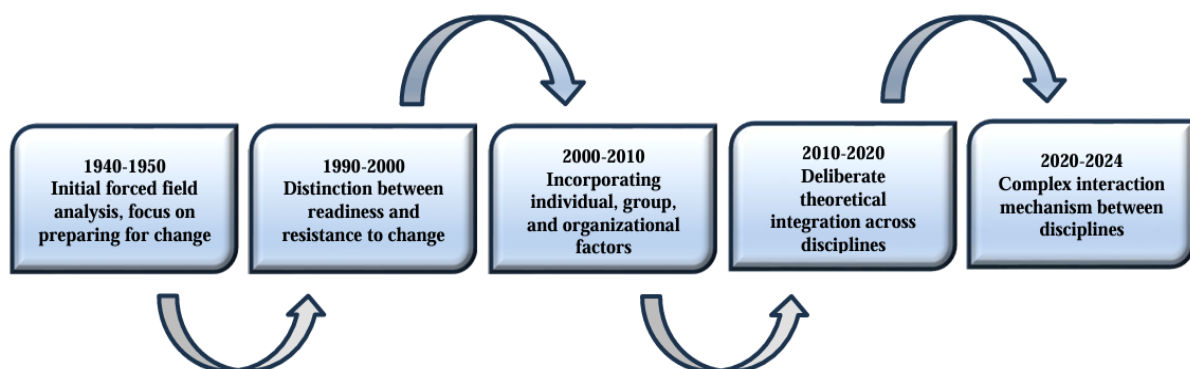

Figure 1. Conceptual evolution in change readiness research

Historical Evolution and Conceptual Foundations

The concept of change readiness has evolved significantly over the past several decades (Figure 1). In the early stages of development, conceptualizations in the 1940s and 1950s, influenced by Lewin's (1947) force field analysis and three-step change model, focused primarily on "unfreezing" as a prerequisite for change. By the 1990s, scholars distinguished between readiness for change and resistance to change. Armenakis *et al.* (1993) defined readiness as a cognitive precursor to behaviors that either support or resist a change effort.

Building on these foundations, the 2000s witnessed a shift toward multi-level conceptualizations of change readiness encompassing individual, group, and organizational factors (Weiner, 2009). Most recently, researchers have begun to view change readiness as a dynamic capability that organizations can develop over time rather than a static state that must be achieved before initiating change (Heckmann *et al.*, 2016; Jones & Van de Ven, 2016).
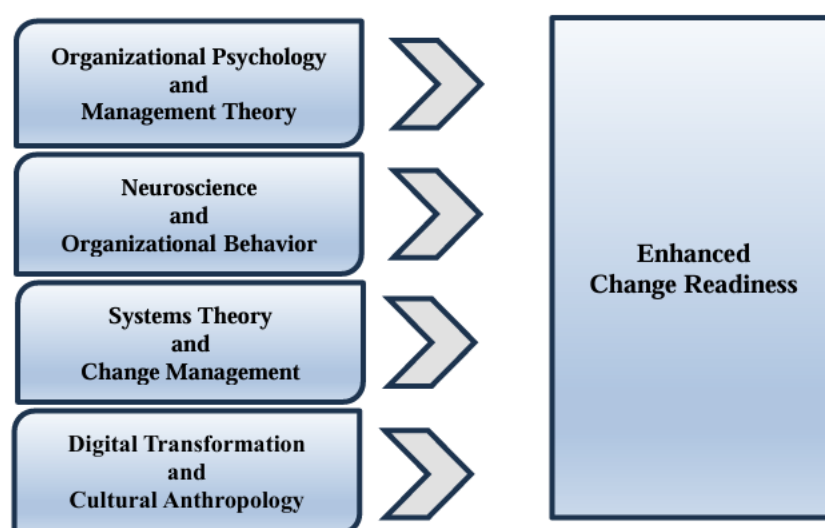
Cross-Disciplinary Approaches to Change Readiness

Figure 2. Cross-disciplinary approaches to enhanced change readiness

Organizational Psychology and Management Theory

At the core of cross-disciplinary research, integrating organizational psychology and management theory has produced fruitful insights into change readiness. Organizational psychology contributes to understanding the individual and group psychological processes, while management theory provides perspectives on structural, strategic, and process-oriented aspects of organizational functioning.

A seminal contribution to this integration can be found in Holt *et al.'s (2007)* influential work, which developed an integrated model of change readiness, combining psychological factors (beliefs, attitudes, intentions) with contextual factors (leadership support, organizational culture, structural flexibility). Their model demonstrated how individual psychological readiness interacts with organizational structural elements to create overall change readiness.

Extending this integrative approach, Vakola (2013) examined how organizational structures and processes shape employee attitudes toward change. Her research revealed that structural elements such as decision-making processes and communication channels significantly influence psychological

readiness for change, demonstrating the bidirectional relationship between psychological and management factors.

Further advancing this synthesis, Rafferty *et al.* (2013) developed a multilevel model of change readiness that explicitly integrates psychological and management perspectives. Their model distinguishes between cognitive, emotional, and intentional dimensions of change readiness at the individual level while incorporating structural enablers and constraints at the organizational level. This integration allows a more nuanced understanding of how individual readiness aggregates to group and organizational levels within specific structural contexts.

More recent work by Katsaros *et al.* (2020) introduced the concept of "readiness climate"—a collective perception of change readiness that emerges from the interaction between psychological perceptions and management practices. Their research demonstrates how leadership behaviors and organizational structures create psychological conditions that facilitate or inhibit readiness for change.

Complementing these perspectives, Hughes (2018) identified that successful change management requires the integration of hard elements (strategy, structure, systems) from management theory and soft elements (shared values, skills, staff, style) from organizational psychology. Organizations that attend to these dimensions demonstrate significantly higher rates of change success than those focusing predominantly on structural or psychological elements alone.

Neuroscience and Organizational Behavior

Moving beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, recent advances in neuroscience have begun to inform change readiness research. Randel et al. (2018) demonstrated how threat and reward responses in the brain influence receptivity to organizational change. Their research shows that changes perceived as threats activate neural networks associated with defense mechanisms, while changes perceived as opportunities activate reward centers that facilitate engagement and creativity.

Similarly, Waldman *et al.* (2019) integrated neuroscience with leadership theory to explain how different leadership approaches affect neurological responses to change. Their work reveals that transformational leadership practices activate neural networks associated with trust and openness to new experiences, creating psychological conditions conducive to change readiness.

Systems Theory and Change Management

Another productive cross-disciplinary intersection involving integrating systems theory with change management has expanded the understanding of change readiness as an emergent property of complex organizational systems. Wee and Taylor (2018) demonstrated how feedback loops and interconnections between different organizational subsystems influence overall change readiness, highlighting the limitations of linear change models.

Burnes and Cooke (2013) re-examined Lewin's work through a complexity lens, arguing that readiness for change emerges from interactions between various system components rather than being engineered through sequential stages. Their perspective suggests that readiness is continually constructed and reconstructed through ongoing social and organizational processes.

Digital Transformation and Cultural Anthropology

As organizations face technological disruption, the challenges of digital transformation have prompted the integration of technological perspectives with cultural anthropological approaches. Gregory *et al.* (2019) examined how organizational cultures influence readiness for digital transformation, identifying specific cultural elements that enable or constrain technological adaptation. Their ethnographic approach revealed how cultural artifacts, rituals, and shared values shape collective interpretations of technological change.

Building on this cultural perspective, Morgan and Nica (2020) explored how cultural meaning-making processes influence the adoption of digital technologies. Their research demonstrates that successful digital transformations require attention to not only technological capabilities but also cultural narratives and symbolic interpretations of technology.

Measurement and Assessment Approaches

Paralleling theoretical developments, the measurement of change readiness has evolved considerably through cross-disciplinary integration. In earlier approaches, measurement tools focused predominantly on individual psychological aspects of readiness (Holt *et al.*, 2007), while in more recent developments, approaches incorporate psychological and structural elements.

A notable advancement in this area came from Shea *et al.* (2014), who developed the Organizational Readiness for Implementing Change (ORIC) instrument that measures the psychological (change commitment) and capability (change efficacy) dimensions of readiness. Their approach explicitly acknowledges that readiness emerges from the interaction between psychological states and structural enablers.

Further refining measurement approaches, Jones *et al.* (2019) created a multilevel assessment framework that measures change readiness at individual, group, and organizational levels while accounting for psychological and structural factors. Their approach enables the identification of readiness gaps across different organizational levels and dimensions.

Despite these advances, measurement remains a significant challenge in change readiness research. Indeed, Miake-Lye *et al.* (2020) conducted a systematic review of readiness assessment tools and found considerable variation in conceptual foundations, psychometric properties, and practical utility. They concluded that most existing tools fail to adequately capture the complex, multi-dimensional nature of change readiness that emerges from cross-disciplinary perspectives.

Contextual Factors and Contingencies

An important theme emerging from cross-disciplinary research is the importance of contextual factors in change readiness. Combe (2022) integrated insights from contingency theory with change management principles to demonstrate how contextual factors moderate the relationship between change approaches and outcomes. The research suggests that organizations must adapt their readiness strategies to fit their specific context rather than applying universal best practices.

Expanding on this contextual understanding, Al-Haddad and Kotnour (2015) developed a contingency framework for organizational change readiness that identifies how different types of change (incremental vs. radical, technical vs. cultural) require different approaches to developing readiness. Their integrated perspective helps explain why approaches that work effectively in one context may fail in another.

From a global perspective, recent research by Chen *et al.* (2021) examined how national culture influences organizational change readiness. By integrating cultural psychology with organizational theory, they demonstrated significant variations in change readiness across different cultural contexts, challenging the notion that change readiness constructs and measures can be universally applied.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cross-disciplinary approaches evolved in the study of organizational change readiness

When we examine the historical trajectory of cross-disciplinary approaches to change readiness, we can observe an evolution from simplistic borrowing across disciplines to more sophisticated integration. In the initial phase during the 1990s and early 2000s, cross-disciplinary work primarily involved importing concepts from organizational psychology into management frameworks without

substantial theoretical integration (Armenakis *et al.*, 1993). These efforts recognized the importance of psychological factors but treated them as additions to primarily structural models rather than as equal theoretical components.

Moving to a more mature stage, the mid-2000s witnessed more deliberate attempts at integration, exemplified by Holt *et al.*'s (2007) work developing multidimensional models that explicitly incorporated psychological and management perspectives. This period saw the emergence of frameworks that positioned psychological and structural dimensions as complementary rather than competing explanations for change readiness phenomena.

In the most recent phase (2015-2024), the field has moved toward a genuine theoretical synthesis that attempts to explain the mechanisms through which psychological and structural elements interact. Rafferty *et al.*'s (2013) multilevel framework and Wee and Taylor's (2018) systems approach represent this more sophisticated integration that conceptualizes readiness as emerging from complex interactions between psychological and structural domains. However, as this critical analysis demonstrates, significant theoretical and methodological challenges remain in achieving coherent integration.

The unique insights emerge from the integration of organizational psychology and management theory in change readiness research

When we specifically consider the integration of organizational psychology and management theory has generated several distinctive insights that transcend single-discipline perspectives. First and foremost, this integration reveals change readiness as simultaneously an individual psychological state and an organizational capability—acknowledging that change readiness cannot be reduced to either dimension alone (Holt *et al.*, 2007; Vakola, 2013). This insight helps explain why interventions targeting only psychological factors or only structural factors often fail to produce sustainable readiness.

A second key insight is the reciprocal relationship between psychological and structural elements, demonstrating how organizational structures shape psychological responses while psychological interpretations influence how structural elements function in practice (Hughes, 2018). This bidirectional relationship challenges simplistic causal models and emphasizes the dynamic, co-constructed nature of change readiness.

Third, and equally important, the integration illuminates the multilevel complexity of change readiness, showing how readiness at the individual, group, and organizational levels interacts through processes of composition and compilation (Rafferty *et al.*, 2013; Shea *et al.*, 2014). This insight helps explain why readiness sometimes fails to translate across organizational levels and why interventions effective at one level may not produce readiness at other levels.

Fourth, from a practical standpoint, integrated approaches reveal the importance of alignment between psychological and structural elements. Organizations achieve optimal readiness when psychological states (motivation, commitment) align with structural capabilities (resources, processes) (Katsaros *et al.*, 2020). This insight explains why structural readiness without psychological buy-in, or psychological readiness without structural support, rarely produces successful change outcomes.

Finally, from a strategic perspective, cross-disciplinary integration highlights the context-dependent nature of change readiness, demonstrating how effective strategies vary depending on organizational characteristics, change type, and environmental conditions (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2021). This contingent perspective challenges universal prescriptions for developing change readiness and emphasizes the need for tailored approaches.

Research gaps and future directions for cross-disciplinary change readiness research

Despite the substantial progress made, significant gaps remain in cross-disciplinary change readiness research. First and most fundamentally, theoretical integration remains incomplete, with

most frameworks juxtaposing rather than genuinely synthesizing psychological and management perspectives. Future research should develop more sophisticated theoretical models that explicitly address the mechanisms through which psychological and structural elements interact, particularly focusing on feedback loops and emergent properties that cannot be reduced to either domain alone.

A second major limitation involves methodological constrain that restrict the current understanding of cross-disciplinary change readiness. Most research relies on cross-sectional designs and self-report measures that cannot capture dynamic processes or distinguish subjective perceptions from objective conditions. Future research should employ more diverse methodological approaches, including longitudinal designs, experimental methods, physiological measures, and qualitative approaches that capture lived experiences of change.

From a critical perspective, power dynamics receive insufficient attention in current integrated frameworks. Most approaches implicitly adopt managerial perspectives without critically examining how power shapes the relationship between psychological and structural elements of readiness. Future research should incorporate critical perspectives to examine how power dynamics influence which voices are heard in change processes and how resistance might represent legitimate responses to problematic change initiatives.

In terms of global relevance, cultural contextual factors remain underexplored in cross-disciplinary research. Most integrated frameworks emerge from Western contexts and incorporate Western assumptions about organizations, individuals, and change. Future research should examine how cultural factors influence the relationship between psychological and structural elements and develop culturally sensitive integrated frameworks.

Looking toward emerging challenges, digital transformation presents unique challenges that current integrated frameworks inadequately address. The pace, scope, and technological specificity of digital change may require new theoretical approaches that go beyond simple combinations of psychological and management perspectives. Future research should develop frameworks specifically tailored to digital transformation contexts.

Finally, from a methodological standpoint, measurement approaches require significant refinement. Current instruments struggle to capture psychological and structural dimensions of readiness in ways that acknowledge their different ontological status and complex interactions. Future research should develop more sophisticated measurement approaches that can simultaneously assess both domains while maintaining theoretical coherence.

Theoretical Implications

The integration of organizational psychology and management theory has significantly advanced the theoretical understanding of change readiness. This cross-disciplinary approach reveals change readiness as simultaneously a psychological state and a structural capability—neither perspective alone provides a complete understanding of the phenomenon.

Several key theoretical insights emerge from this integration:

At the most fundamental level, change readiness is inherently multilevel, existing simultaneously at individual, group, and organizational levels (Rafferty *et al.*, 2013; Weiner, 2009). Cross-disciplinary approaches clarify how readiness at different levels influences and is influenced by readiness at other levels, creating complex patterns of mutual causation that cannot be captured by single-discipline perspectives.

From a temporal perspective, the integration reveals change readiness as dynamic rather than static. Management perspectives emphasize how structural elements evolve, while psychological perspectives explain how individual and collective attitudes and capabilities develop through

experience. These perspectives suggest that readiness should be understood as an ongoing capability rather than a prerequisite state (Heckmann *et al.*, 2016).

In terms of practical application, cross-disciplinary integration highlights the context-dependent nature of change readiness. What constitutes effective readiness varies significantly depending on the type of change, organizational characteristics, and external environment (Al-Haddad & Kotnour, 2015; Combe, 2022). This contingent perspective challenges universal prescriptions for developing change readiness.

Lastly, from a systems perspective, integration reveals the importance of alignment between psychological and structural elements of readiness. Organizations achieve optimal change readiness when psychological states (motivation, commitment) align with structural capabilities (resources, processes) (Holt *et al.*, 2007; Shea *et al.*, 2014).

Practical Implications

Turning our attention to practice, cross-disciplinary approaches to change readiness offer several practical implications for organizations:

First, the assessment of change readiness must address psychological and structural dimensions. Organizations should employ multidimensional assessment tools that capture subjective perceptions and objective capabilities (Jones *et al.*, 2019; Shea *et al.*, 2014).

Second, intervention strategies should target psychological and structural elements simultaneously. Effective change readiness initiatives combine traditional change management techniques with psychological interventions to address cognitive and emotional responses to change (Hughes, 2018; Vakola, 2013).

From a leadership development perspective, capabilities that span psychological and management domains should be emphasized. Leaders need emotional intelligence to address the psychological aspects of change and the strategic capabilities to manage structural aspects (Waldman et al., 2019).

In terms of communication strategy, communication strategies should address rational and emotional dimensions of change. Effective communication frameworks integrate logical arguments for change with narratives that address emotional and identity-related concerns (Morgan & Nica, 2020).

Finally, organizational learning systems should capture insights from successful and unsuccessful change initiatives, incorporating lessons about both psychological and structural aspects of readiness (Wee & Taylor, 2018).

Considerations and Research's Future Line

Despite significant advances, several important gaps remain in cross-disciplinary change readiness research. Theoretical integration remains incomplete. While various cross-disciplinary connections have been established, few comprehensive theoretical frameworks fully integrate insights from multiple disciplines. Future research should develop more sophisticated theoretical models that explicitly connect psychological, management, and other disciplinary perspectives.

Moreover, methodological limitations persist. Much change readiness research relies on cross-sectional designs and self-report measures, limiting understanding of causal relationships and dynamic processes. Future research should employ more diverse methodological approaches, including longitudinal designs, experimental methods, and physiological measures derived from neuroscience.

Digital transformation presents unique challenges that require further cross-disciplinary investigation. As organizations increasingly engage in digital transformations, research must examine how the traditional understanding of change readiness applies in digital contexts and how technology-specific factors influence readiness dynamics.

As global and cultural perspectives remain underdeveloped, most change readiness research has been conducted in Western contexts, limiting understanding of how cultural factors influence readiness processes. Future research should examine change readiness across diverse cultural contexts to develop more culturally sensitive theories and practices.

Existing measures often fail to capture the complex, multi-dimensional nature of change readiness. Future research should develop and validate more sophisticated assessment instruments that integrate psychological and structural elements while accounting for contextual factors.

Finally, the role of individual differences deserves greater attention. While research has examined organizational factors extensively, less attention has been paid to how personality traits, cognitive styles, and other individual differences influence change readiness. Future research should examine how individual factors interact with organizational contexts to shape readiness outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this systematic literature review has examined how cross-disciplinary approaches, particularly the integration of organizational psychology and management theory have advanced the understanding of organizational change readiness. The review demonstrates that change readiness emerges from complex interactions between psychological states and structural capabilities across multiple organizational levels.

The integration of organizational psychology and management theory has provided particularly valuable insights into the multilevel, dynamic, and context-dependent nature of change readiness. This integration reveals that effective change readiness requires alignment between psychological states (beliefs, attitudes, intentions) and structural elements (resources, processes, systems).

Despite significant advances, important gaps remain in cross-disciplinary change readiness research. Future research should develop more comprehensive theoretical frameworks, employ more diverse methodological approaches, examine digital transformation contexts, incorporate global and cultural perspectives, refine measurement tools, and investigate the role of individual differences.

By addressing these gaps through continued cross-disciplinary integration, researchers can develop a more nuanced understanding of change readiness and provide more effective guidance for organizations navigating increasingly complex change environments. In conclusion, as organizations face unprecedented rates of change, this integrated understanding will be essential for developing the dynamic capabilities needed to thrive amid ongoing disruption.

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