

Managing change in multicultural organisations: cultural alignment, structured frameworks and project success in the UN system

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine how cross-cultural dynamics shape the effectiveness of structured change-management frameworks in complex international organisations. Focusing on the United Nations system, it investigates how cultural value alignment and processual frameworks jointly influence the success of change initiatives under conditions of change saturation.

Design/methodology/approach – This study combines gap-spotting and problematisation with an empirical analysis of 52 United Nations change initiatives complemented by 12 peer-reviewed Kotter case studies. It operationalises framework type and cultural alignment through a CVScale index that captures leadership engagement, two-way communication, cultural alignment and feedback practices across culturally diverse entities. Non-parametric techniques (Spearman's rank-order correlation and Kruskal–Wallis tests) are applied to examine relationships between these cross-cultural mechanisms, framework use and project outcomes.

Findings – The results show that using a structured change framework is moderately associated with project success, but higher CVScale scores are more strongly linked to positive outcomes. This research suggests that in cross-cultural, change-intensive settings, processual change models work best when they are enacted through culturally aligned leadership and communication practices.

Research limitations/implications – The findings from this research may have limited generalisability due to the secondary case data. Therefore, this calls for further research with larger data sets and longitudinal designs.

Practical implications – For leaders in global public organisations, the findings suggest that CVScale-style diagnostics should be integrated into change programme design as a primary readiness assessment, given that cultural alignment is a stronger predictor of success than framework selection alone.

Originality/value – This study provides empirical evidence that cultural alignment is a stronger predictor of change success than the use of structured frameworks alone. It also offers a context-sensitive approach to managing change in multicultural organisations.

Keywords Organisational change management, Multicultural organisations, Change saturation, Leadership and communication, Change management frameworks

Paper type Research paper



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1. Introduction

While every success begins with change, not every change leads to success. With the rapid emergence of new technologies and the way people perform their work, change has become not only inevitable but also a defining feature of modern organisations. According to a UNSSC survey conducted in July/August 2023 across 37 UN organisations, 70% of respondents reported having “five to nine simultaneously ongoing change initiatives” ([United Nations System Staff College, 2023](#)). This finding highlights a phenomenon of change saturation, where multiple transformations take place concurrently. Considering the high intensity of simultaneous changes, it is unsurprising that only $\frac{1}{3}$ of change initiatives succeeded with few produced sustainable results ([McKinsey and Company, 2021](#); [Abdelouahab and Lotfi, 2021](#), [Mankins and Litre, 2024](#)). While there has been a significant shift towards embracing diverse change management practices, still these rates of success have remained relatively stable since the early 2000s ([Mankins and Litre, 2024](#); [Stouten et al., 2018](#)).

Some scholars have pointed out that many transformations fail not because organisations lack ambition or inadequate planning, but rather because of an overemphasis on performance targets at the expense of understanding how change is experienced and enacted in practice ([Oreg et al., 2011](#); [Shura et al., 2017](#); [Khaw et al., 2022](#)). In response, the present study turns attention towards the cultural dimensions through which organisational actors make sense of and engage with change. Such perspectives challenge the assumption that change can be effectively implemented through standardised models alone, instead the change process “is continually constructed by people, as they make sense of their experiences” ([Meier and Dopson, 2021](#), p. 94).

This dynamic is particularly evident in complex, multicultural environments such as the United Nations, where change occurs within varied institutional and cultural settings. Therefore, the present study adopts an approach that conceptualises change as an inherently contextual and relational process. Grounded on the framework of studying context in action it views change not as the linear implementation of predefined stages, but rather as the outcome of complex interactions among actors, different processual frameworks and culturally embedded context ([Meier and Dopson, 2021](#)).

Based on this idea, the study argues that change processes cannot be fully understood without examining how actors engage with and reproduce their contextual conditions. Culture, therefore, should not be viewed as an external influence on change, but rather as a central dimension through which expectations and responses to change are shaped. Consequently, this study integrates Kotter’s processual framework with the Cultural Values Scale (CVScale) to examine how leadership practices, communication patterns, cultural alignment and feedback mechanisms influence the enactment of change in practice. By linking these cultural dimensions to observable change outcomes, the study examines why similar change initiatives produce different outcomes across organisational settings. Building on this, the study contributes to change management research by demonstrating that the effectiveness of structured frameworks depends on how they are enacted through culturally aligned practices. Specifically, it shows that leadership engagement, two-way communication, cultural alignment and feedback mechanisms are central drivers of successful change outcomes in multicultural and change-saturated environments.

To address this idea, the present paper considers the following research hypotheses and corresponding questions that support these hypotheses:

- H1.* Projects with a structured framework (Kotter/mixed) have higher success than those without a framework (none).
- RQ1.* How does the presence of a structured change-management framework influence the success of organisational change initiatives, analysis of case studies from the UN and some selected?

- H2.* Cases with higher CVScale index scores correlate positively with project success.
- RQ2a.* To what extent do leadership engagement, communication, cultural alignment and feedback mechanisms (CVScale dimensions) contribute to project outcomes?
- RQ2b.* Does integrating CVScale indicators enhance the explanatory power of Kotter's 8-Step Change Model in predicting successful outcomes?

This study adopts a combined gap-spotting and problematisation approach ([Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011](#)) to identify key limitations in change management research. Specifically, it highlights the limited empirical testing of structured frameworks in change-saturated environments and the under-theorisation of cultural value orientations in shaping change outcomes. It further re-examines assumptions that treat frameworks as context-neutral and culture as a background condition.

2. Theoretical framework

This study treats context as an analytical lens through which change processes can be examined. From this perspective, context is not simply a container within which action unfolds, but as a dynamic interplay of actors, institutional arrangements and cultural meanings. In line with recent work by Meier and Dopson on “context in action”, this study understands context not as a static backdrop or empirical setting, but as an enacted, relational configuration of actors, institutional arrangements and cultural meanings that both enables and constrains change (2021). Drawing on Weick's sensemaking and sensegiving, context is treated as something continuously constituted through actors' interpretive practices, while Helms-Mills and Hofstede provide the basis for identifying how culturally embedded norms and value orientations shape what is perceived as meaningful, legitimate and actionable. Thus, culture is not an external variable but a constitutive dimension of context through which the context-action-change relationship unfolds (2021, p. 95). This approach allows the analysis to move beyond asking whether context matters to examining how it matters - specifically, how cultural context becomes embedded in actors' everyday practices that shape organisational change.

To examine the view of cultural context, the study draws on Weick's theory of sensemaking and sensegiving. This perspective provides a foundation for understanding how context operates through actors' interpretive practices ([Weick et al., 2005](#); [Weick, 1995](#), pp. 13-15). His work emphasises that organisational change does not occur through the blind implementation of frameworks, rather, it unfolds through processes in which actors interpret and give meaning to change initiatives. Though grounded on interpretation, this perspective overlooks the extent to which culturally embedded norms shape actors' initial understandings of meaning and appropriate action. In response, [Helms-Mills' \(2003\)](#) work offers an extension of the role of culture and identity in shaping how sensemaking unfolds in organisational settings. While sensemaking theory emphasises how actors interpret and respond to unfolding events, Helms-Mills demonstrates that such interpretive processes are deeply embedded within culturally constituted norms and power relations. From this viewpoint, sensemaking is not simply a cognitive activity but a socially situated practice through which actors draw on culturally available narratives, norms and symbols to render events intelligible and legitimate.

While Helms-Mills shows how meaning is produced through interaction, [Hofstede's \(2001\)](#) work provides an analytical vocabulary for identifying the underlying value orientations – such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, or collectivism – that inform how actors interpret

change, respond to authority and assess risk. Taken together, these perspectives allow culture to be understood not merely as a background variable, but as a constitutive dimension of context that influences how organisational actors make sense of and act upon change.

In line with Meier and Dopson's work, this study therefore approaches organisational change as a process in which context is both constituted and transformed through human action (2021). This perspective shifts the analysis from merely describing contextual conditions to examining how culture, leadership and communication collectively shape change processes. Integrating these elements, the study offers a framework for tracing how culturally rooted sensemaking drives outcomes across diverse organisations.

From this perspective, integrating Kotter's processual framework with the CVScale index is not simply an exercise in adding cultural variables. It is a way of analytically specifying context as a dynamic pattern of leadership engagement, two-way communication, cultural alignment and feedback that conditions how actors interpret and enact change initiatives.

3. Literature review

Organisational change is an unavoidable part of modern institutions, but as was noted by some scholars it is also "one of the most difficult issues for any organisation" to undergo (Wentworth *et al.*, 2018). This has created a need for structured frameworks that will guide and support the change process within organisations (Errida and Lotfi, 2021; Stouten *et al.*, 2018; Fernandes *et al.*, 2021). Insights from different theories have gradually shaped the foundation of modern models (Galli, 2018). However, scholars soon realised that no single solution exists and that the change-management process is far more complex. As a result, this led to the creation of two primary schools of thought (Burnes, 2009; Parker *et al.*, 2001; Pettigrew, 2000). The distinction between these perspectives can be summarised in two categories. The first, the processual model, focuses on a rigid structure with defined steps and frameworks (Parry *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, the descriptive model prioritises the contextual variables that determine change-management outcomes.

The Kotter 8-Steps Model falls into the processual model category. While widely adopted in practice, the model has been questioned for its reliance on linear sequencing and its limited sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which change actually takes place (Hughes, 2015; Appelbaum *et al.*, 2012; McLaren *et al.*, 2023). Similar limitations were identified across 12 case studies that applied the model in various organisational contexts, which are summarised in Table 1.

Such critiques remain largely theoretical, despite identifying important limitations and have not been tested in multicultural contexts. Therefore, it requires systematic analysis to identify empirical gaps and underlying assumptions.

4. Methodological approach: gap-spotting and problematisation

4.1 Gap-spotting in change management literature

The presented study adopts a gap-spotting approach to examine how established change-management frameworks can be extended and embedded within the cultural context of complex, multicultural organisations. Within this framework, gap-spotting is understood as a methodology for developing research trajectory through "identifying gaps in existing literature that needs to be filled" (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). In practice, this means to extend theory in new areas accumulate knowledge and advance theoretical development (Lakatos, 1970). Therefore, this section identifies how studies focused on linear episodic dynamics neglect continuous change processes (confusion spotting) and how dominant frameworks under-theorise culture as a constitutive element of context in change processes (neglect spotting):

Table 1. Common limitations and criticisms of Kotter's 8-step change model: summary of 12 articles

Limitations	Summary	Articles (by primary author)
Rigid, linear structure (lack of flexibility)	The studies showed that the rigid structure may not be suitable for complex organisational environments and may challenge an organisation's ability to adapt quickly	Chappell et al. (2016) ; Fernandes et al. (2021) ; Kang et al. (2020) ; Sittrop and Crosthwaite (2021) ; Sibanda et al. (2024) ; Haas et al. (2019) ; Miles et al. (2023)
Top-down approach perspective and conflict with organisation culture	The model overlooks aspects of organisational culture, which limits its applicability across diverse environments. It is also found to be less effective for bottom-up approaches	Lambert (2019) ; Sibanda et al. (2024) ; Chappell et al. (2016) ; Carman et al. (2019) ; Davis (2022) ; Kang et al. (2020)
Sustainability and measurement challenges	The model lacks measurement mechanisms and struggles to support long-term changes	Carman et al. (2019) ; Mørk et al. (2018) ; Hu et al. (2025) ; Sittrop and Crosthwaite (2021)

Source(s): Author's own work

(1) Effect of structured frameworks on success in saturated change contexts is under-researched

Initial research on structured change frameworks was largely developed in single-project settings and predominantly Western managerial contexts ([Kotter, 2007](#); [Burnes, 2004](#)). Even though these organisations faced significant failure risks, faithful execution of linear steps was promised to deliver success. However, there is no reason to believe structured frameworks are relevant only to bounded change initiatives ([Burnes, 2009](#)). Instead, they should be applicable wherever organisations need clear roadmaps for transformation.

International organisations with persistent change saturation provide ideal contexts for testing structured change frameworks. Relatively little empirical research has tested the effectiveness of change frameworks in highly saturated environments ([Sullivan et al., 2011](#); [Phillips and Klein, 2023](#)).

Reviews of the change management literature suggest that most existing frameworks were developed for relatively stable conditions, which makes them less suited to today's more complex and fast-moving organisational demands ([Todnem By, 2005](#); [Burnes, 2004](#)). Although practitioners often describe these frameworks as helpful in complex settings, academic research has not yet systematically compared the outcomes of projects using structured approaches (Kotter/mixed) with those that use no formal framework (none).

At the same time, dominant change frameworks within the literature are rooted in an episodic view of change and offer limited guidance for contexts where change unfolds continuously rather than episodically ([Weick and Quinn, 1999](#)). Consequently, a central question in change practice remains empirically untested: Do structured frameworks systematically predict higher project success under conditions of change saturation? *H1* and *RQ1* address this gap by testing whether projects using structured frameworks (Kotter/mixed) outperform those without frameworks (none) in UN case studies.

(2) Contribution of cultural and value-based variables to change outcomes is under-theorised

Most change management studies primarily explore change frameworks and its execution processes ([Kotter, 2007](#); [Stouten et al., 2018](#)) while cultural values' influence on change

outcomes remains largely neglected (Yoo *et al.*, 2011). As a result, it is assumed that change success depends primarily on completing prescribed steps rather than on achieving alignment between change initiatives and cultural traits.

While there are some studies that recognise cultural influences on change, they provide limited insight into how value orientations shape change implementation (Kirkman *et al.*, 2006; Abawari *et al.*, 2024). As a result, the prior research fails to capture how cultural alignment affects (or is affected by) framework execution and influence change enactment.

However, the analysis below demonstrates that value alignment supports smoother framework implementation, whereas cultural mismatches create hidden barriers to success. Therefore, progressing research on CVScale-index integration is necessary to understand and apply change frameworks to their fuller extent for improving outcomes in multicultural organisations. In the current study, *H2*, *RQ2a* and *RQ2b* address this gap by testing whether higher CVScale index scores correlate with project success and enhance change-framework explanatory power.

These identified gaps – while valuable for directing empirical inquiry – represent surface-level symptoms of deeper paradigmatic assumptions that organise change management knowledge. In other words, gap-spotting maps “what’s missing” to extend existing theory, but a deeper understanding requires questioning the underlying assumptions “why it’s missing” that shape how change is conceptualised and studied (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011).

4.2 Problematising in change management literature

Problematisation shifts attention to the paradigmatic assumptions and ways of constructing reality that underpin existing change-management and cross-cultural research. As a result of this, this approach opens up newer conversations by challenging and re-entering counterintuitive conversations (Patriotta, 2017). Consequently, the focus of problematisation is shifting towards thoughtful and critical examination of gaps in the selected literature (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). Based on conducted analysis the unaddressed assumptions that deserve re-examination in change management research are:

Assumption 1. Change success depends primarily on framework execution rather than contextual saturation.

Existing change management research often assumes that successful outcomes depend primarily on the correct execution of structured steps (Kotter, 2007), overlooking the constraints imposed by complex and saturated organisational environments. This decontextualised view renders saturation invisible: when —five to nine reforms compete simultaneously, the “rational” sequence becomes impossible, yet theory treats context as background noise rather than constitutive constraint.

Moreover, traditional change frameworks in the literature are rooted in an episodic view of change – emphasising planned, sequential stages – and may offer limited guidance where change unfolds continuously rather than as discrete episodes (Weick and Quinn, 1999). Reviews show change management studies reveal two gaps:

- (1) rational-linear models do not match real-world change agent practices; and
- (2) no single framework reliably predicts success across contexts (Phillips and Klein, 2023).

H1 directly examines whether structure retains predictive power when sequential execution confronts continuous reform.

Assumption 2. Cultural value orientations constitute background context rather than constitutive mechanisms of change success.

Change management research frequently treats culture as a background condition rather than as an active factor shaping how change processes are interpreted and implemented (Hofstede, 1980; Kotter, 2007). Dominant models treat value orientations as “add-on moderators” at best, measured through generic indices rather than as active ingredients that alter how change processes actually unfold. This decontextualised view treats culture as secondary rather than central to change processes. As a result, key influential factors, such as leadership legitimacy, feedback cycles or alignment mechanisms become invisible determinants of project outcomes.

Moreover, technical-rational frameworks privilege universal process steps (Burnes, 2004) over cultural co-construction, assuming step completion trumps contextual enactment. Cross-cultural research perpetuates this view by emphasising national differences over project-level value alignments (Kirkman *et al.*, 2006), sustaining the belief that “frameworks work everywhere” while reducing culture to noise rather than contextual signal. Studies measure success through step fidelity rather than cultural-process interaction, leaving unanswered whether CVScale indexed alignment systematically predicts outcomes beyond structure alone.

In contrast, some scholars conceptualise context as an “enacted relational configuration” in which meanings are continuously produced through interaction (Meier and Dopson, 2021). From this perspective, cultural value orientations can be understood as constitutive elements of this enacted context, shaping how change frameworks are interpreted and enacted in practice. Accordingly, Assumption 2 obscures how cultural value orientation operates not as moderators but as sensemaking filters (Weick, 1995; Helms-Mills, 2003) that shape actors’ interpretations of framework steps. *H2* directly tests this proposition in the empirical analysis.

As summarised in Table 2, the analysis identifies two central gaps in existing change management research: first, that framework effectiveness under conditions of change saturation remains underexplored and second, that cultural mechanisms within change frameworks remain under-theorised. Section 5 presents the methodology used to test these propositions empirically, including the study design, data sources, coding procedure and analytical approach.

5. Methodology

5.1 Operationalising context

Consistent with this theoretical framing, context is operationalised as a set of enacted conditions rather than as a nominal label for “the UN” as a site. The presence and type of

Table 2. Gap-spotting and problematisation of change management frameworks in saturated and multicultural contexts

Gap type	Unaddressed issue	Underlying assumption	Empirical test
Confusion spotting	Framework effectiveness under conditions of change saturation is under-researched	Success depends on execution, not saturation	<i>H1</i> : Projects using structured frameworks have higher success than those without formal frameworks.
Neglect spotting	Cultural mechanisms within change frameworks are under-theorised	Culture as backdrop, not constitutive context	<i>H2</i> : Higher CVScale index scores are positively associated with project success.

Source(s): Author’s own work

change framework (none/other/Kotter or mixed) capture the formal structuring of change, while the CVScale index (leadership, communication, cultural alignment, feedback) captures culturally embedded practices through which actors make sense of and realise change. Together, these measures approximate the context–action configuration within each case, allowing empirical examination of how different contextual patterns are associated with divergent change outcomes.

5.2 Cross-cultural methodological considerations

In this study, culture is understood as an enacted configuration of national, organisational and professional value orientations within the United Nations system rather than as a single national profile. Each case reflects interactions among staff and leaders from multiple cultural backgrounds who co-construct meanings around change initiatives in specific organisational entities. Consequently, the cultural mechanisms examined here operate at the project and organisational levels, even as they draw on broader societal value patterns identified in cross-cultural research.

The CVScale index was designed as a proxy for these enacted value orientations by coding four dimensions – leadership commitment, two-way communication, cultural alignment and feedback/measurement – from secondary case descriptions. To enhance conceptual equivalence across entities, the coding scheme focused on behaviours and practices (e.g. visible leader sponsorship, dialogic communication channels, explicit linking of reforms to local norms and systematic monitoring) that can be observed in diverse cultural contexts. While this approach supports cross-case comparison, it also comes with important limitations. Firstly, relying on documentary sources means the analysis tends to reflect official narratives, and perspectives that dissented from or were marginalised within formal accounts may not be fully captured. Secondly, using Hofstede-inspired dimensions as an interpretive lens carries a risk of reinforcing established categories – even when the goal is to question universalist assumptions in cross-cultural management. These limitations are recognised in how the findings are interpreted, and the results are offered as one step towards building a more multi-vocal and longitudinal body of evidence in cross-cultural change research.

5.3 Research design

This research adopted a mixed-methods design that combined coding of qualitative data with quantitative correlational analysis to examine the relationships among the presence of a change management framework, cultural alignment and project outcomes. The primary goal was to validate emerging patterns identified in UN reports and reinforce these findings with evidence from academic literature. This approach helps to analyse how structured change management frameworks (Kotter’s 8-Step Model) along with support mechanisms (leadership, communication, feedback and cultural alignment – CVScale index), influence the success of organisational change initiatives within the United Nations system.

5.4 Data collection

The analysis used secondary data from two sources. The primary data set was derived from the Joint Inspection Unit report [[Joint Inspection Unit \(2019\)](#)], which included change management practices across UN entities ($n = 52$). The validation data set consisted of academic case studies that applied Kotter’s 8-Step Change Model ($n = 12$). Academic articles were selected via Google Scholar using search terms “Leading Change”, “Kotter” and “Kotter’s 8-Step Change Model”, limited to peer-reviewed publications from 2015 to 2025

for analysis. In addition, the study selection was made as diverse as possible to demonstrate the broader implications of the model.

5.5 Data preparation

The case study analysis is widely recognised as an excellent source of “structural observation” to explore the complex phenomena of organisational transformation within a specific context (Creswell, 2003; Crowe *et al.*, 2011; Buchanan, 2012). However, the social and contextual meaning is often difficult to analyse, especially without coding that assigns units of meaning to descriptive data (Basit, 2003). Therefore, for the purpose of this analysis, a structured coding system was developed to assess project outcomes, the presence of a change management framework and cultural alignment (CVScale). The variables and coding procedures are presented in Table 3.

The CVScale index was calculated based on the presence of key human and cultural variables identified by Hofstede (2001). The proposed dimensions help to identify the underlying value orientations that influence an organisation’s readiness for change. Each variable does not represent a risk on its own. Instead they provide an understanding of how these dimensions can shape the organisation’s capacity to navigate new and uncertain environments. The proposed CVScale index variables (leadership, communication, cultural alignment and feedback) were scored on a scale from 0 to 4, with one point assigned for the presence of each dimension identified in the case text. Then the combined value formed the CVScale index. This structure helps to explain why similar reform frameworks produce different outcomes across UN entities with diverse missions and operational contexts. Table 4 summarises the CVScale index and its alignment with Hofstede’s cultural dimensions.

5.6 Data analysis

To answer the research questions, quantitative analysis was used. Because the variables were measured on ordinal scales and the data did not meet parametric assumptions such as normality, non-parametric statistical methods were applied (McKillup, 2012; Mircioiu and Atkinson, 2017). Specifically, Spearman’s rank-order correlation was chosen to explore the monotonic relationships between the variables – framework and outcome (*H1*) and CVScale index and outcome (*H2*). This method was selected because it does not require the

Table 3. Variables coding

Variable	Description	Coding scale
Framework	Type of change management framework applied	0 = “None” 1 = “Other models” 2 = “Kotter or Mixed Kotter”
Outcome	Indicates whether the project goals were achieved	0 = “Inconclusive” 1 = “Partial Success” 2 = “Success”
CVScale index	Combination of variables (strong leadership, two-way communication, cultural alignment and feedback/ measurement). Together they scored on a scale of 0–4	0 = “Not present” 1 = “Present”

Source(s): Author’s own work

Table 4. CVScale Index and Hofstede model alignment

Variable	Hofstede cultural dimensions	Connection
Leadership commitment	Power distance	In high power-distance societies, there is a need for visible and direct leadership, whereas in low-power-distance societies, subordinates expect to be consulted (Hofstede, 2001). In diverse environments like the one in the UN, leadership must balance authority with inclusiveness to promote cooperation
Two-way communication	Individualism vs collectivism	Collectivism cultures favour consensus, while individualist cultures – personal opinion (Hofstede, 2001). The change managers should acknowledge that and promote effective communication across different contexts
Cultural alignment	Uncertainty avoidance	Uncertainty avoidance (UA) is different in unfamiliar situations. Low-UA cultures are open to new ideas and less restricted by rules, while high-UA cultures prefer structure and link reforms to existing norms. Projects should balance flexibility with structure and aligning reform timelines with cultural orientations
Feedback and measurement	Long-term orientation	Long-term-oriented cultures emphasise continuous learning and development, whereas short-term-oriented cultures value steadiness and stability (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, the UN framework should balance measurable outcomes with the cultivation of a learning-oriented culture

Source(s): Author’s own work

data to be normally distributed and is appropriate for ordinal or ranked data, where intervals between values may not be equal (Schober *et al.*, 2018; Warner, 2010). With 52 cases, the sample size was sufficient to identify meaningful correlations and strength of associations between variables.

The next step was to apply Kruskal–Wallis test to assess whether the distribution of CVScale index scores differs significantly across multiple framework types (*H2 – RQ2b*). This method complements Spearman’s rank-order correlation as it tests whether the framework groups have significantly different median CVScale scores. This provides additional insight into how cultural alignment varies depending on the applied change management framework.

5.7 Limitations

The selected statistical methods allow for in-depth analysis and provide meaningful insights, still, several limitations must be acknowledged. In particular, non-parametric tests generally have lower statistical power compared to parametric tests. In other words, this limits the ability of the research to measure the precise magnitude of the CVScale effect on project outcomes or to establish reliable confidence intervals (Politi *et al.*, 2021). Another limitation

relates to the coding process itself. Assigning ranks and success rates may involve a degree of subjectivity, which could introduce inconsistency in the results depending on how variables are categorised (Basit, 2003; Campbell *et al.*, 2013).

5.8 Summary

The combination of qualitative analysis and quantitative correlation methods provides a balanced approach to examining the relationships between variables that contribute to a project's outcome.

Moreover, the integration of culturally grounded measures, like CVScale index, into change-management toolkit added an important intercultural dimension into analysis. This reinforces the argument that the dynamics of change can only be fully explained by examining the cultural context through which actors make sense of and realise transformation.

6. Results

After analysing change management practices across UN entities ($n = 52$), it is clear that structured frameworks and presence of stronger CVScale metrics drive more consistent and successful outcomes. Moreover, the data suggest that Kotter's model was not only the most favourable among practitioners but also had the highest rate of successful outcomes. These findings are presented in Figure 1.

The Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to test the two stated hypotheses. The analysis determined the strength and direction of the associations between framework type, CVScale metrics and project outcomes. The findings of this analysis are presented in Table 5 below:

- (1) *H1*. Projects with a structured framework (Kotter/mixed) have higher success than those without a framework (None).

The Spearman's ρ of 0.43838 suggests a statistically significant positive relationship between the framework applied and the change management project outcome (Rovetta, 2020;

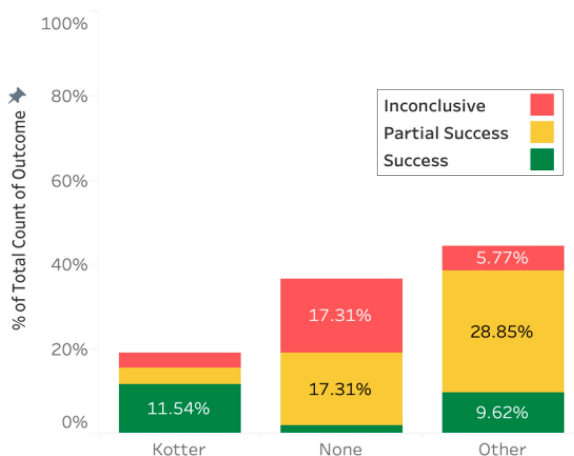


Figure 1. Framework vs outcome

Source: Author's own work

Table 5. Results of Spearman’s rank-order correlation analysis

Hypothesis	Spearman’s ρ	p -value
H1: Correlation between framework and outcome	0.43838	0.001
H2: Correlation between CVScale index and outcome	0.58299	0.0000057
Source(s): Author’s own work		

[Yu and Hutson, 2024](#)). In other words, the results show that the use of a structured framework is linked to an increased likelihood of success (partial or full) compared to projects in which no formal framework was mentioned. Also, the p -value of 0.001 tells that the results are statistically significant and this pattern is very unlikely to occur by random chance ([Akoglu, 2018](#)).

- (2) H2. Cases with higher CVScale index scores correlate positively with project success.

RQ2a. To what extent do leadership engagement, communication, cultural alignment and feedback mechanisms (CVScale dimensions) contribute to project outcomes?

The results show that CVScale index scores (leadership, communication, cultural alignment and feedback) are strongly and positively correlated with the change-management project success, as shown by a Spearman’s ρ of 0.583 ($p < 0.00001$). This means that when organisations have higher scores on the CVScale index, their change-management projects are much more likely to achieve positive outcomes. [Figure 2](#) illustrates the relationship between CVScale index score and the outcome. This graph confirms that the mean project outcome increases steadily with higher CVScale index values. Projects that demonstrated stronger leadership commitment, two-way communication, cultural alignment and feedback mechanisms achieved higher success rates in change-management projects.

- (3) H2. Cases with higher CVScale index scores correlate positively with project success.

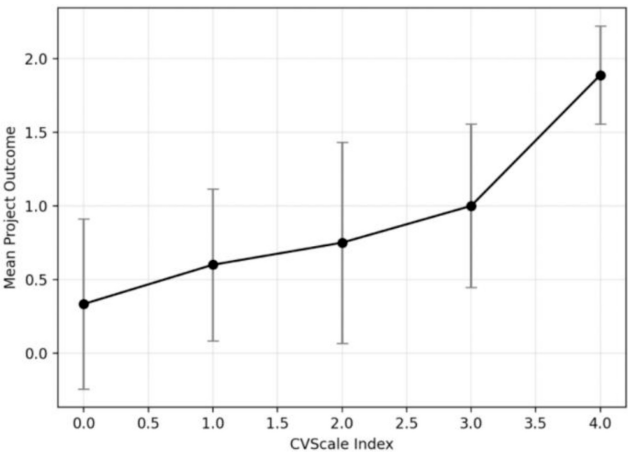


Figure 2. Average project outcome by CVScale index

Source: Author’s own work

RQ2b. Does integrating CVScale indicators enhance the explanatory power of Kotter's 8-Step Change Model in predicting successful outcomes?

The Kruskal–Wallis test was applied to assess whether CVScale scores differed significantly across framework types. The test ranks all values and then calculates differences in ranks between groups (Nahm, 2016; Ostertagova *et al.*, 2014). The output yielded $H = 9.86$ and $p = 0.0072$, indicating a statistically significant difference (H value) among the three groups. This finding is presented on Figure 3. Density plots indicate a clear shift in location for the CVScale Index, with organisations using the Kotter's framework showing the highest scores, followed by “Other” frameworks and then those with no formal framework. This suggests that the strength of cultural and behavioural change variables (as measured by the CVScale Index) varies depending on the framework applied.

Taken together, the results support both hypotheses: structured frameworks are positively associated with change outcome ($H1$), while cultural alignment as measured by the CVScale index is a stronger predictor of success ($H2$). These findings suggest that practitioners should treat cultural readiness not as background noise but as a constitutive constraint and core driver of change outcomes, particularly in multicultural and change-saturated environments. This implies that CVScale dimensions – leadership commitment, two-way communication, cultural alignment and feedback mechanisms – should be evaluated as part of change readiness rather than sidelined by framework selection.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into how structured change frameworks operate in complex, multicultural environments. While the use of frameworks such as Kotter's model is associated with improved outcomes, the results show that culturally aligned practices have a stronger influence on change success.

For practitioners, the results show the need to tailor leadership practices and feedback loops to the organisation's cultural context. In other words, managers should prioritise the practical implementation of structured frameworks over their purely theoretical design.

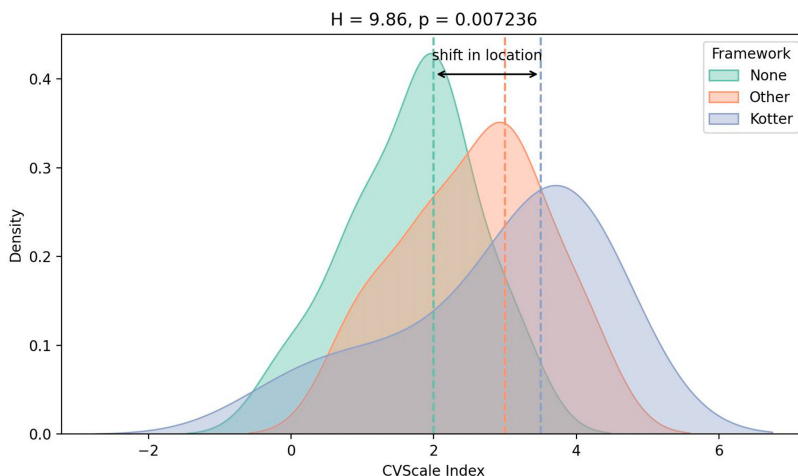


Figure 3. CVScale index distributions by framework (Kruskal–Wallis)

Source: Author's own work

These findings also open additional avenues for future research and offer a set of implications for practice. In particular, to explore the idea that relying on standardised frameworks may be insufficient in complex organisational settings. Instead, greater attention should be given to how change frameworks are enacted in culturally diverse environments. In this regard, the study shows the need to move beyond viewing culture as a background condition and instead to view its role as an active factor shaping change outcomes.

Initial change management research has largely drawn on technical-rational foundations (Kotter, 1996); however, incorporating the CVScale index demonstrates potential to advance socio-cognitive perspectives on organisational change. Beyond its practical relevance, this finding enriches sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) by showing that cultural values do more than provide context – they shape how people read and respond to change, influencing whether leaders can build momentum or encounter resistance.

The results also align with dynamic capabilities perspectives, suggesting that cultural alignment enables organisations to better adapt and respond under conditions of change saturation. In addition, these results extend Meier and Dopson's (2021) "context in action" perspective by empirically illustrating how culture operates as an enacted mechanism that shapes change processes.

Empirical research in change management continues to expand, yet key tensions remain unresolved. This study advances the field by empirically validating structured frameworks (*H1*) while simultaneously demonstrating cultural alignment's stronger impact (*H2*) on the change management process. This offers an integrated approach for multicultural, high-velocity settings.

Conclusion

This study examined how structured change-management frameworks and cultural alignment jointly shape the success of change initiatives in multicultural and change-saturated environments. The findings show that while the use of structured frameworks such as Kotter's model is associated with improved outcomes, culturally aligned practices – captured through leadership engagement, communication and feedback – have a stronger influence on change success.

Through the integration of processual frameworks and culturally informed analysis, this study advances change management research. In particular, the results show the importance of shifting from universal models to a context-sensitive understanding of change processes.

This study opens several avenues for future inquiry. For practitioners, the CVScale index can serve as a pre-launch diagnostic tool. This gives managers and project leads a clearer picture of organisational readiness before an initiative is designed and launched. Beyond individual practice, the finding that cultural alignment matters more than framework structure has significant implications for how reform programmes are governed and evaluated. In other words, when reform efforts in the international organisations fail, the impact goes beyond inefficiency and can weaken coordination and implementation capacity across the organisation. Cultural readiness assessments integrated into reform processes would not only improve organisations' preparedness for change but also strengthen the accountability of multilateral institutions to the communities they serve.

However, dimensions of the CVScale may require further exploration in future research. Subsequent studies should test whether the scale operates differently across organisational types, sectors and levels of change intensity. In particular, to test whether leadership commitment, communication, cultural alignment and feedback predict success equally strongly in private-sector multinationals and public administrations. It would also be worth examining whether these effects hold across different institutional contexts – and longitudinal and comparative designs, alongside ethnographic fieldwork, would be well suited to explore this.

They can provide a deeper understanding of how cultural alignment shapes framework implementation over time, rather than only at the point of project completion.

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