

The Role of Emotions During Organizational Change: A Review and Research Agenda

David P. Kroon, Janina Klein & Yoeeri Klok

To cite this article: David P. Kroon, Janina Klein & Yoeeri Klok (2026) The Role of Emotions During Organizational Change: A Review and Research Agenda, Journal of Change Management, 26:1, 26-39, DOI: [10.1080/14697017.2026.2617665](https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2026.2617665)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2026.2617665>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 18 Jan 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2912



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

The Role of Emotions During Organizational Change: A Review and Research Agenda

David P. Kroon, Janina Klein and Yoeri Klok

School of Business and Economics (SBE), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

ABSTRACT



This article reviews twenty-five years of research on the role of emotions during organizational change and proposes avenues for future research. Building on an analysis of articles published in the *Journal of Change Management: Reframing Leadership and Organizational Practice* (JCM) from 2000 to 2024, we trace the development of scholarship in the field and synthesize contributions. We also uncover how the research published in JCM has substantially influenced the wider field by integrating perspectives from psychology, sociology, and institutional theory, thereby advancing an interdisciplinary understanding of the role of emotions in change processes. Persistent gaps remain, however, which also provide opportunities for future research. We identify collective emotions, emotional contagion, and affective climates; the politics of affect; and the non-linear and temporal nature of emotional experiences and responses as particularly promising areas for future research. Finally, advancing our understanding of the role of emotions during organizational change requires methodological pluralism and engagement with emerging organizational contexts such as digital transformation, sustainability transitions, and global crises.

MAD statement

Emotions make a difference in every stage of organizational change, shaping how individuals interpret, respond to, and engage with new initiatives. Over the past 25 years, research published in the *Journal of Change Management* has established emotions as a central force in change processes, showing how feelings such as fear, hope, and anger influence commitment, resistance, and withdrawal. This body of work has advanced an interdisciplinary understanding of emotions by integrating insights from psychology, sociology, and institutional theory. At the same time, it reveals important gaps, highlighting the need to explore collective emotions, emotional contagion, and affective climates, as well as the politics and evolving nature of emotional experiences. Addressing these gaps—especially in emerging contexts such as digital transformation, sustainability transitions, and global crises—will make a difference in how organizations lead change more effectively.

KEYWORDS

Organizational change; emotions; change management; temporal dynamics; collective emotions; politics of affect; interdisciplinary perspective; methodological pluralism

CONTACT David P. Kroon  d.p.kroon@vu.nl  School of Business and Economics (SBE), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, VU Main Building | De Boelelaan 1105 | 4th Floor A-Wing, Amsterdam, 1081 HV, Netherlands

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

Introduction

Emotions are a central feature of social life that influence individual action and experiences both inside and outside organizations (Voronov & Vince, 2012). Commonly defined as ‘transient feeling state with an identified cause or target that can be expressed verbally or nonverbally’ (Maitlis et al., 2013, p. 223), emotions have been conceptualized as the ‘glue binding people together’, that generate ‘commitments to large scale social and cultural structures’ (Turner & Stets, 2005, p. 1), such as organizations and organizational processes. Prior research has shown that emotions play a key role during organizational change, most notably by influencing whether individuals engage with or resist organizational change (Klok et al., 2023; Vince, 2006).

Different emotions, e.g. fear, anxiety, hope, or anger, can significantly influence key outcomes of organizational change, such as change commitment, resistance, or withdrawal (Biggane et al., 2017; Kark Smollan, 2006). Such affective responses are influenced by individual traits (e.g. resilience or openness), leadership and communication strategies, and broader organizational factors such as trust in leaders and the organization’s culture (Kark Smollan, 2006; Santos De Souza & Chimenti, 2024). Understanding the role of emotions and how they influence individuals and their behavior during organizational change is, therefore, essential for effective change leadership.

The 25th Anniversary Special Issue focusing on topics that have been central to JCM offers an opportunity for a timely reflection on the state of research and for developing a future research agenda. Over the past two and a half decades, JCM has played a foundational role in establishing emotions as a legitimate and vital area of inquiry within the field of organizational change. Research published in JCM has advanced our theoretical understanding of how emotions influence the key stages of change processes from change initiation to implementation and stabilization. By reflecting on the body of knowledge accumulated in JCM to date and situating this research in the wider field, our first objective is to provide scholars and practitioners with a timely synthesis of work exploring the role of emotions during organizational change. Building on these insights, our second aim is to identify persistent gaps and explore how these open pathways for future research. To accomplish these two objectives, we will first provide a review of articles published in JCM from 2000 to 2024 that have explored the role of emotions during organizational change. We will then discuss how this research relates to and has influenced the wider field and highlight how work published in JCM has contributed to this generated knowledge. Based on these insights, we will identify remaining knowledge gaps and propose avenues for future research.

Past Research on the Role of Emotions During Organizational Change in JCM

In this section, we review JCM articles that have explored the role of emotions during organizational change published between 2000 and 2024. To identify relevant articles, we conducted a keyword search in all articles published in JCM between 2000 and 2024 on the journal website using the search term ‘emotion*’. This process yielded a total of 246 articles. We subsequently screened the titles of all articles and included those that were clearly relevant for our review. Next we screened the abstracts of the

remaining articles and decided based on this whether or not they were relevant for our review (e.g. only articles that explicitly examined emotions as a central theme were included). This process led us to include a total of 26 JCM articles. In reviewing these articles, we have focused on several key aspects that we will present as follows. First, we discuss the types of articles published and methodological trends over time. Second, we synthesize key findings, recurring themes, and theoretical developments.

Types of Articles Published and Methodological Trends Over Time

In the early 2000s, conceptual and theoretical articles dominated in JCM. Jarrett (2004) and Smollan and Sayers (2009) laid foundational arguments for integrating emotions into the organizational change literature. From 2010 onwards, the field shifted toward empirical research, using both quantitative and qualitative designs. Studies frequently employed surveys, case studies, and interviews to examine emotional responses over time (e.g. Giæver, 2009). Scholars also began applying a broader range of theories to frame these emotional dynamics, including affective events theory, psychological contract theory, and social identity theory (Slater et al., 2016; Smollan & Sayers, 2009). At the same time, longitudinal designs gained traction, emphasizing the evolving and non-linear nature of emotions during organizational change. Qualitative approaches became increasingly prominent as well, particularly interviews and ethnographic methods that captured emotional responses in situ (e.g. Harikkala-Laihinen, 2022). More recently, research has expanded toward mixed methods, reflecting the need to capture both subjective experiences and broader organizational trends (Santos De Souza & Chimenti, 2024). In parallel, the past decade has seen the influence of positive psychology, with studies examining post-change outcomes such as job satisfaction, psychological well-being, and emotional recovery. This work often draws on frameworks like cognitive reappraisal, strengths-based leadership, and emotional transcendence to explain how employees consolidate and sustain positive emotional states after change (Allen et al., 2007).

Key Findings, Recurring Themes, and Theoretical Developments

Studies in JCM have highlighted how individuals' emotional responses can change over the different phases of organizational change processes, and how this shapes change outcomes. This perspective acknowledges that emotions are not static, but rather fluctuate across different phases of the change process. Understanding and considering the emotional dynamics prevalent across various phases of the change process is key to minimizing change resistance and withdrawal. It thus facilitates smoother and more successful change processes by bringing individuals and their emotions to the forefront of scholars' and practitioners' attention.

We structure our review around three key phases: the change initiation phase during which old patterns are disrupted; the change implementation phase during which new ways of thinking, working, and valuing are embedded; and the change settlement phase during which new routines, norms, and values are stabilized (By, 2005). This enables us to focus on the temporal and transitional nature of emotional responses during change processes. It also offers a coherent lens for analyzing how emotions emerge, evolve, and are managed across these change phases.

Change Initiation

The initial phase of change marks the point at which established routines and identities are disrupted to create readiness for change. Employees often feel shocked about the upcoming change, resulting in resistance to change, a key theme which is frequently rooted in affective rather than cognitive or rational responses to change (Klonek et al., 2014).

Work published in JCM emphasizes the dual valence of emotional reactions and how this impacts change outcomes: while fear, stress, and anxiety are common, so too are excitement and hope. These positive emotions can be leveraged to transform change resistance into change acceptance (Santos De Souza & Chimenti, 2024). Emotional responses in the change initiation phase are influenced by perceived fairness, job security, and the degree of emotional validation offered by management (Smollan & Sayers, 2009; Thomson et al., 2024). Emotional exhaustion during change initiation is a recurrent theme, with distributive justice at the team level serving as a buffer against burnout (Thomson et al., 2024). Prior research has also shown that the way in which change leaders communicate about the change largely shapes emotional responses of change recipients in this initial phase. For example, hope and curiosity have been shown to be more likely when leaders communicate effectively and supportively, and acknowledge negative feelings among employees (Slater et al., 2016).

Change Implementation

During the change implementation phase, new systems, structures, identities, and values are introduced into the organization. Employees start to assess and register the effects of certain changes on their present and future well-being, resulting in a wide range of emotional experiences and responses. This phase is complex and is characterized by ambivalence, adaptation, and heightened relational dynamics (Gover & Duxbury, 2012). A key theme in this change phase is trust, which emerges as a critical moderator of affective responses. Studies by Allen et al. (2007) and Innocenti et al. (2012) demonstrate that trust in leadership reduces emotional distress and increases change acceptance, especially when psychological contracts are perceived to be at risk. Communication plays again a key role. For example, participatory and transparent communication during the change implementation phase have been shown to foster emotional safety on the side of change recipients as well as increasing change engagement (Biggane et al., 2017; Clampitt et al., 2001; Fuchs & Prouska, 2014).

Leadership's emotional intelligence is also emphasized as a core capability in managing the emotional responses of change recipients. Leaders who demonstrate emotional awareness, integrity, and empathy can reduce change resistance and foster commitment on the side of change recipients (Neil et al., 2016). Organizational culture and identity also play a key role in influencing emotional responses in this phase. Cultural misalignment and identity threats, such as during mergers and acquisitions, can exacerbate emotional dissonance, whereas a shared identity fosters change recipients' resilience (Gover & Duxbury, 2012; Slater et al., 2016; Spicer, 2011). Finally, research building on institutional perspectives has provided insights into how emotional responses are shaped by both internal and external contexts, such as broader societal pressures, organizational history, and sectoral norms (Scott, 2010).

Change Settlement

The change settlement phase starts when new practices, structures, and behaviors are embedded within the organization. From an emotional perspective, this phase involves recovery, reorientation, and sometimes the long-term resolution of prior emotional strain on the side of change recipients. Positive emotions such as happiness, pride, and optimism which are often experienced in this phase are associated with improved performance and change acceptance (Allen et al., 2007). Dixon et al. (2016) propose that cultivating positive affect through strength-based practices improves organizational resilience. The concept of emotional transcendence, introduced by Fiorito et al. (2023), highlights how rhetorical and emotional strategies can be used to navigate any remaining ambivalence in this phase and achieve alignment around shared goals. Studies on psychological contracts further suggest that while remediation can sometimes restore trust, significant breaches often result in persistent emotional fallout (Van Gilst et al., 2020). Finally, the role of a shared identity and purpose is central to sustaining emotional cohesion during change settlement. Developing a psychologically resilient culture post-change is a key driver of long-term adaptation (Slater et al., 2016).

Current State of Research on Emotions in the Field of Organizational Change

Having reviewed articles published in JCM between 2000 and 2024, we will now proceed to situate this research in the broader field. We will discuss how research published in JCM relates to and has influenced research on the role of emotions during organizational change and highlight how work published in JCM has contributed to the knowledge generated in the wider field.

JCM scholarship on the role of emotions has made important distinctive contributions to broader theoretical conversations by helping move the field from its earlier focus on organizational change as a primarily rational and cognitive process to recognizing its inherently emotional and affective nature (e.g. Santos De Souza & Chimenti, 2024; Thomson et al., 2024). While change scholarship and change management models have traditionally conceptualized change as a step-wise process that can be implemented in a top-down fashion, a view that is rooted in conceptualizing change processes as largely rational and cognitive and almost void of individuals' affective responses (cf., Stouten et al., 2018), JCM scholarship has helped pave new ways of conceptualizing change as an inherently emotional process in several ways. For example, recent JCM studies have highlighted how emotions operate at different levels (e.g. individual, group, and organizational) (e.g. Thomson et al., 2024), thus helping to move field-level conversations towards change as a process that happens and is shaped by individuals and their emotions across levels as opposed to being confined to leader-follower dyads, a view that tended to largely leave change leaders' as well as collective group emotions and how they play a role unaccounted for (cf. Jarrett & Vince, 2024; Vuori & Huy, 2022). Further, recent studies in JCM helped to extend traditional views by highlighting the need to consider the influence of the wider social and institutional context on individuals' emotions, thus helping to broaden change perspectives by recognizing that change must be studied in the wider context in which it unfolds rather than in isolation (Santos De Souza & Chimenti, 2024). Collectively, these and other insights from JCM

scholars have helped the field move to a conceptualization of change as an emergent process that unfolds in a non-linear way and is largely shaped by the affective responses by those involved in the change (both change leaders and recipients) (e.g. Van de Ven & Poole, 2021). We will in the following zoom in on some of the more granular contributions of JCM scholarship.

Recurring themes in JCM articles, such as change resistance, trust in leaders, as well as leaders' communication and emotional intelligence, identity and cultural alignment, and emotional recovery, have closely mirrored and contributed to broader developments in organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, and management studies. For example, studies in JCM have consistently highlighted how emotional triggers, such as a lack of trust in leadership or uncertainty about the future, lead to emotional experiences such as fear, anxiety, and grief, which in turn manifest in resistance to change (Klonek et al., 2014; Smollan & Sayers, 2009). This aligns with broader research in organizational psychology (e.g. Oreg et al., 2011), which conceptualizes change resistance not as irrational defiance on the side of change recipients but as a deeply affective and psychologically grounded response triggered by perceived threats to an individual's well-being (Elfenbein, 2007). By emphasizing emotions as structured and meaningful responses, JCM has helped consolidate a view of resistance as embedded in emotional trajectories rather than as isolated acts of opposition.

More broadly, JCM has contributed to the trend of conceptualizing emotions during change as dynamic, multi-level, and heterogeneous. Emotions are increasingly understood as part of a trajectory that unfolds over time – beginning with an emotional trigger, followed by cognitive and affective registration, lived experience, and culminating in an observable emotional response (Elfenbein, 2007). Studies in JCM reinforce that these trajectories can drive change outcomes, clarifying how negative emotions undermine adaptation and how positive emotions enable cooperation and resilience (Klok et al., 2023). For example, trust emerges as a recurrent theme: Allen et al. (2007) and Innocenti et al. (2012) show that when trust in leaders is maintained, even initially negative reactions can be transformed into cooperative engagement. This resonates with wider research on psychological contracts and emotional resilience, which highlights how positive emotions can buffer negative ones and sustain commitment during difficult transitions (e.g. Kramer, 1999; Rousseau et al., 1998).

Another important contribution of JCM concerns identity-based emotional dynamics. Articles examining mergers, acquisitions, and restructuring highlight how identity threats can amplify emotional resistance, but also how shared organizational identities and deliberate cultural integration can redirect emotional trajectories toward constructive outcomes, for instance by steering the emotional trajectory through cognitive mapping, e.g. clear communication and change plans (Gover & Duxbury, 2012; Spicer, 2011). These findings extend theoretical conversations in social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Giessner et al., 2016) and the organizational culture literature. Moreover, these studies have laid the groundwork for broader explorations of how emotional attachment to people's professional identity can shape responses to organizational change (e.g. Ashforth et al., 2008).

Leadership and emotional competence form a further area of intersection with a wide body of leadership research published in journals like *The Leadership Quarterly* and *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. JCM has examined leaders' emotional intelligence,

communication, and transformational leadership styles (Neil et al., 2016), which corresponds to research done in the broader field, increasingly emphasizing leaders' emotional competence as critical to team morale and adaptive capacity (Conroy et al., 2017; Kaplan et al., 2014). Hence, leaders' ability to recognize and regulate emotions is pivotal in navigating change successfully.

One of JCM's strengths lies in its willingness to engage with interdisciplinary approaches. Over time, articles published in JCM on the role of emotions during organizational change have drawn on a variety of theories from adjacent disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, communication studies, institutional theory, and even anthropology, to better understand emotional dynamics in context. For example, Scott (2010) has emphasized how institutional histories and societal narratives shape emotional responses to organizational change – an approach increasingly echoed in institutional theory and historical organizational studies. Other scholars (e.g. Fiorito et al., 2023; McClellan, 2014) have explored how emotional sensemaking occurs through narratives and discourse. This intersects with research in the fields of communication theory, linguistics, and rhetorical studies on how language and storytelling evoke and regulate emotions in organizational settings. Finally, JCM publications have emphasized emotional recovery and resilience (Allen et al., 2007; Dixon et al., 2016), aligning with trends in occupational health psychology and positive organizational scholarship. This focus broadens the conversation from immediate emotional reactions to longer-term well-being and sustainability, underscoring how change leaders can design processes that not only mitigate harm but also foster growth and emotional flourishing.

Future Research Agenda

Based on the insights from research contributions in JCM and the wider field, outlined above, we will now proceed to identify gaps in the current literature and propose avenues for future research. Specifically, we will propose novel research topics and questions, suggest innovative methodological approaches to explore these topics, and discuss the implications of emerging trends on our future research agenda, as well as their impact on policy and practice. In doing so, we highlight the need to move away from traditional phase-based change models and call for a paradigm shift that accounts for ongoing and non-linear change, thus allowing us to focus on the emergent and recursive nature of emotional trajectories and how they influence change.

Key Gaps, Future Research Topics, and Questions

While much has been accomplished in the field over the last two and a half decades, and research published in JCM and beyond has substantially advanced our understanding of the role of emotions during organizational change, several critical gaps persist.

Collective Emotions, Emotional Contagion, and Affective Climates at Different Levels

While research published in JCM, reviewed above, acknowledges relational and systemic influences, more work is needed to explore collective emotions, emotional contagion, and affective climates at the team and organizational levels (Ashkanasy et al., 2017; Klok et al.,

2023; Thomson et al., 2024). While individual emotional responses (e.g. anxiety, hope, anger) have been extensively studied, the collective, group-based, and systemic dimensions of emotions remain largely neglected. Emotions such as moral outrage, group pride, or collective grief, especially during large-scale restructurings, crises, or social movements, require greater conceptual clarity and empirical attention. Moreover, emotions are often not experienced by individuals in the same way, further highlighting a need to focus on emotional contagion and affective climates at different levels and how individual emotions might transcend and be shaped across levels and influence change over time (Graebner et al., 2017).

The Politics of Affect

Power asymmetries, organizational hierarchies, and individual identity factors (e.g. race, gender, age, religion, culture) shape whose emotions are acknowledged, dismissed, and weaponized and who is tasked with the emotional labor of upholding positive emotions during organizational change. However, how power and inequality shape emotional experiences and expectations remain peripheral concerns in most prior studies, calling for a need to theorize the politics of affect more explicitly. For example, most prior studies assume that change leaders are the ones expected to engage in the emotional work involved in maintaining change enthusiasm and preventing change resistance and failure without sufficiently accounting for the impact emotions have on those individuals themselves (e.g. Jarrett & Vince, 2024; Vuori & Huy, 2022). Similarly, emotions such as anger or grief on the side of change recipients are often discounted as mere resistance without accounting for the valuable feedback the individuals experiencing such emotions can provide.

Future research should critically examine whose emotions 'count' more or less in change discourses and how emotional labor is unevenly distributed. A novel and promising opportunity for research in this area is the *positive deviant* employee who uses emotional intelligence to exert power by behaving differently from peers. Such individuals often display transformational leadership, influencing others and driving sustainable organizational change (Bloch, 2000). Further, critical management studies offer important insights into how power, inequality, emotional labor, and emotional intelligence shape organizational processes. JCM would benefit from integrating these approaches to better understand how organizational change is experienced differently across hierarchies and identities, and how this influences change outcomes, thus deepening theoretical understanding of the politics of affect.

The Non-Linear and Temporal Nature of Emotional Experiences and Responses

Emotional experiences and responses differ not just between individuals, but also over time, thus challenging traditional phase-based change models that largely compress individuals' emotions into linear 'steps'. We know from adjacent bodies of literature such as psychology that individuals' emotional trajectories are unique and that individuals move through emotional experiences at difference paces (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Moreover, such individual emotional trajectories are influenced by multiple aspects, such as prior change experience (Santos De Souza & Chimenti, 2024). This highlights the need to study emotional trajectories, cycles, and tipping points to capture the non-linear, emergent, and recursive nature of change processes. This is particularly essential in contexts such as long-term digital transformations, agile organizational models, or decarbonization

strategies. While prior research on emotional trajectories remains fragmented and often focuses on linear emotional sequences (Klok et al., 2023), recent research in JCM provides a timely platform for a paradigm shift in how we model emotional trajectories during change by focusing on its recursive nature (By, 2005). For instance, emergent research in the wider field on emotional fatigue (e.g. Klein & Amis, 2021), collective trauma (e.g. Tcholakian et al., 2019), and insights into how positive emotions can counteract negative affective experiences during change (e.g. Allen & McCarthy, 2016) all provide promising research areas that are insufficiently accounted for in theoretical models that presuppose a distinct 'settlement' phase (Neil et al., 2016).

Research Questions for Future Research

Drawing on the gaps and suggested topics for future research identified above, several research questions emerge as especially promising:

- How do collective emotions form and evolve in response to organizational change? What role do symbols, rituals, and narratives play in shaping shared emotional responses?
- How do digital technologies (e.g. AI, remote platforms, emotion-recognition software) mediate emotional labor, expression, and surveillance during organizational change?
- What emotional challenges arise in transitions related to climate change, sustainability, or circular economy models? How do these affect organizational commitment and employee well-being?
- Who is tasked with the emotional labor of maintaining enthusiasm during prolonged change initiatives? Who is blamed for their lack of emotional labor during change failure?
- Whose emotions (those of change leaders or change recipients) are legitimized, and whose are dismissed as mere 'resistance'?
- How do marginalized or underrepresented groups emotionally experience structural changes such as DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) reforms or anti-discrimination initiatives?
- In what ways do leaders' emotional displays shape organizational culture and employee trust during periods of uncertainty and ambiguity?
- How do long-term, slow-burn changes (e.g. digital transformation) generate emotional fatigue, disengagement, or adaptive resilience over time?

Methodological Innovations and Approaches

Although rich in its generated insight, much of the work published in JCM on the role of emotions during organizational change is based on small-sample case studies. This has led to a certain degree of depth without breadth, which limits generalizability across industries and cultures. Moreover, the majority of studies draw on cases from Western contexts, with limited attention to how cultural frameworks might shape emotional expression, suppression, and engagement during organizational change. To break away from these methodological boundaries and enable scholars to study the topics and research questions proposed above, future studies must adopt methodological pluralism and innovation. The following methodological innovations and approaches are particularly promising in this context:

- Longitudinal designs that trace emotional experiences over the course of change processes. This enables a more nuanced understanding of emotional trajectories and adaptation.
- Multi-level studies that integrate individual, team, and organizational analyses of emotional dynamics. Combining interviews, ethnography, and surveys can further illuminate how micro-level feelings translate into macro-level climate or culture.
- Visual and multimodal methods (e.g. emotion mapping, visual diaries, narrative photo-elicitation) can help surface emotions that are difficult to articulate verbally, especially in hierarchical or emotionally repressive cultures.
- Cross-cultural comparative studies using culturally adapted instruments and interpretive frameworks will help challenge and potentially extend universalist assumptions about emotional expression and regulation.
- Digital ethnography and computational methods, including sentiment analysis and digital trace data, can explore emotional responses in online workspaces (e.g. Slack, Zoom, Microsoft Teams), something especially relevant for hybrid and remote organizations.

The Impact of Emerging Trends, Policy, and Practice Implications

Finally, we outline how emerging trends will reshape the emotional landscape of organizational change and discuss their implications for policy and practice. One important emerging trend is digital advancement. Digital transformation introduces new emotional dynamics: from technostress and algorithmic alienation to digital joy and empowerment. As organizations automate roles and adopt emotion-sensing technologies, ethical questions around emotional privacy and manipulation will grow. Furthermore, climate change and green transitions bring existential dimensions to organizational change. Fear, guilt, eco-anxiety, and moral conviction will increasingly surface in employee responses to organizational change in such contexts, especially in industries under regulatory or reputational pressure to decarbonize (Austen & Piwovar-Sulej, 2025). Finally, geopolitical instability or global health crises generate emotional ambivalence, helplessness, and complexity. These conditions challenge traditional change models and demand emotionally intelligent leadership.

Advancing research on emotions in organizational change that considers these emerging trends is not solely an academic exercise. It has tangible implications for management practice, human resource development, and organizational design, especially as emotions become increasingly visible and instrumentalized in the workplace. Policymakers and change leaders should be trained in emotional foresight – anticipating and preparing for affective responses to change, not merely reacting to them afterwards. Especially in prolonged or high-stress transitions (e.g. ESG transformations, mergers and acquisitions, crisis management), change leaders must ensure that emotional resources – such as meaning, energy, and morale – are not depleted over time. Building emotional awareness and regulation into leadership development and employee training can foster organizational cultures that are more resilient, responsive, and humane.

Conclusion

Over the past twenty-five years, JCM has played a key role in foregrounding the role of emotions as a critical dimension during organizational change. Early conceptual work

(e.g. Jarrett, 2004; Smollan & Sayers, 2009) has fundamentally challenged rationalist models of change by emphasizing the affective underpinnings of change resistance and adaptation. Subsequent research introduced empirical approaches, including longitudinal and mixed-methods designs (e.g. Giæver, 2009; Harikkala-Laihininen, 2022), which highlighted the non-linear, dynamic nature of emotional responses across different change phases. This development illustrates the increasing maturation of the field from foundational theorization toward more nuanced, context-and temporally-sensitive analyses.

Our review of JCM research published between 2000 and 2024 reveals several key insights. First, emotional responses are non-linear and temporally contingent, fluctuating across change initiation, implementation, and settlement phases (By, 2005). Fear, anxiety, and resistance are particularly salient during initiation (Smollan & Sayers, 2009; Thomson et al., 2024), whereas ambivalence, trust, and emotional intelligence of leaders play a key role during implementation (Allen et al., 2007; Neil et al., 2016). In the settlement phase, research has increasingly focused on recovery and resilience, drawing on positive psychology to explore how emotions such as pride, optimism, and transcendence sustain post-change adaptation (Dixon et al., 2016; Fiorito et al., 2023). Second, trust and communication are consistently identified as key moderators of emotional responses (Clampitt et al., 2001; Fuchs & Prouska, 2014), underscoring the inherently relational character of organizational change. Third, identity and cultural alignment strongly shape emotional experiences, particularly in contexts of mergers, acquisitions, and restructuring (Gover & Duxbury, 2012; Spicer, 2011). Importantly, the influence of research published in JCM has extended into adjacent fields, including organizational psychology, leadership, and institutional theory, where emotions are widely recognized as integral to processes of meaning-making, resistance, and resilience (e.g. Ashforth et al., 2008; Oreg et al., 2011; Scott, 2010). JCM's interdisciplinary engagement has thereby catalyzed theoretical innovation and broadened scholarly understanding of the socio-emotional foundations of change.

Despite these advancements, significant gaps remain. Research has disproportionately emphasized individual-level emotions in Western contexts, often privileging small-sample case studies. Research on topics such as collective emotions, emotional contagion, and affective climates offers promising opportunities to advance the field, as do studies focused on the politics of affect, and the non-linear and temporal nature of emotional experiences and responses. Leveraging the research opportunities requires methodological pluralism, such as longitudinal and cross-cultural designs, multimodal approaches, and computational methods. This is particularly important given that the salience of emotions will only intensify amid digital transformation, sustainability transitions, and geopolitical crises. Future research should investigate how technologies mediate emotional labor and surveillance, how existential challenges such as climate change evoke collective affect, and how organizations can foster emotional resilience during large-scale transformations. By continuing to advance theoretically rich and empirically rigorous studies, JCM is well-positioned to promote future research that foregrounds emotions as central to understanding and managing organizational change processes in increasingly complex and uncertain environments.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Allen, J., Jimmieson, N. L., Bordia, P., & Irmer, B. E. (2007). Uncertainty during organizational change: Managing perceptions through communication. *Journal of Change Management*, 7(2), 187–210. doi:10.1080/14697010701563379
- Allen, M. S., & McCarthy, P. J. (2016). Be happy in your work: The role of positive psychology in working with change and performance. *Journal of Change Management*, 16(1), 55–74. doi:10.1080/14697017.2015.1128471
- Ashforth, B. E., Harrison, S. H., & Corley, K. G. (2008). Identification in organizations: An examination of four fundamental questions. *Journal of Management*, 34(3), 325–374. doi:10.1177/0149206308316059
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(1), 20–39. doi:10.2307/258189
- Ashkanasy, N. M., Humphrey, R. H., & Huy, Q. N. (2017). Integrating emotions and affect in the theories of management. *Academy of Management Review*, 42(2), 175–189. doi:10.5465/amr.2016.0474
- Austen, A., & Piwowar-Sulej, K. (2025). An integrative literature review on sustainability-oriented HRM: How multilevel thinking May help to extend the state of the Art. *Journal of Change Management*, 229–259. doi:10.1080/14697017.2025.2526367
- Biggane, J. E., Allen, D. G., Amis, J., Fugate, M., & Steinbauer, R. (2017). Cognitive appraisal as a mechanism linking negative organizational shocks and intentions to leave. *Journal of Change Management*, 17(3), 203–227. doi:10.1080/14697017.2016.1219379
- Bloch, S. (2000). Positive deviants and their power on transformational leadership. *Journal of Change Management*, 1(3), 273–279. doi:10.1080/714042473
- By, R. T. (2005). Organisational change management: A critical review. *Journal of Change Management*, 5(4), 369–380. doi:10.1080/14697010500359250
- Clampitt, P., Williams, M. L., & DeKoch, R. (2001). Embracing uncertainty: The executive's challenge. *Journal of Change Management*, 2(3), 212–228. doi:10.1080/738552753
- Conroy, S., Henle, C. A., Shore, L., & Stelman, S. (2017). Where there is light, there is dark: A review of the detrimental outcomes of high organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 38(2), 184–203. doi:10.1002/job.2164
- Dixon, M., Lee, S., & Ghaye, T. (2016). Strengths-Based reflective practices for the management of change: Applications from sport and positive psychology. *Journal of Change Management*, 16(2), 142–157. doi:10.1080/14697017.2015.1125384
- Elfenbein, H. A. (2007). 7 Emotion in organizations. *Academy of Management Annals*, 1(1), 315–386. doi:10.5465/078559812
- Fiorito, T. L., Nagel, C., Veenswijk, M. B., & Drori, I. (2023). Navigating paradoxical tensions in the context of coopetition: Emotional transcendence in a Dutch public-private partnership. *Journal of Change Management*, 23(2), 177–199. doi:10.1080/14697017.2023.2197908
- Fuchs, S., & Prouska, R. (2014). Creating positive employee change evaluation: The role of different levels of organizational support and change participation. *Journal of Change Management*, 14(3), 361–383. doi:10.1080/14697017.2014.885460
- Giessner, S. R., Horton, K. E., & Humborstad, S. I. W. (2016). Identity management during organizational mergers: Empirical insights and practical advice. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 10(1), 47–81. doi:10.1111/sipr.12018
- Giæver, F. (2009). Looking forwards and back: Exploring anticipative versus retrospective emotional change-experiences. *Journal of Change Management*, 9(4), 419–434. doi:10.1080/14697010903360616
- Gover, L., & Duxbury, L. (2012). Organizational faultlines: Social identity dynamics and organizational change. *Journal of Change Management*, 12(1), 53–75. doi:10.1080/14697017.2011.652375

- Graebner, M. E., Heimeriks, K. H., Huy, Q. N., & Vaara, E. (2017). The process of postmerger integration: A review and agenda for future research. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(1), 1–32. doi:10.5465/annals.2014.0078
- Harikkala-Laihinen, R. (2022). Managing positive change: Emotions and communication following acquisitions. *Journal of Change Management*, 22(4), 373–400. doi:10.1080/14697017.2022.2091635
- Innocenti, L., Peluso, A. M., & Pilati, M. (2012). The interplay between HR practices and perceived behavioural integrity in determining positive employee outcomes. *Journal of Change Management*, 12(4), 399–415. doi:10.1080/14697017.2012.728763
- Jarrett, M. (2004). Tuning into the emotional drama of change: Extending the consultant's bandwidth. *Journal of Change Management*, 4(3), 247–258. doi:10.1080/1469701042000255383
- Jarrett, M., & Vince, R. (2024). Mitigating anxiety: The role of strategic leadership groups during radical organisational change. *Human Relations*, 77(8), 1178–1208. doi:10.1177/00187267231169143
- Kaplan, S., Cortina, J., Ruark, G., LaPort, K., & Nicolaidis, V. (2014). The role of organizational leaders in employee emotion management: A theoretical model. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25(3), 563–580. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2013.11.015
- Kark Smollan, R. (2006). Minds, hearts and deeds: Cognitive, affective and behavioural responses to change. *Journal of Change Management*, 6(2), 143–158. doi:10.1080/14697010600725400
- Klein, J., & Amis, J. (2021). The dynamics of framing: Image, emotion, and the European migration crisis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 64(5), 1324–1354. doi:10.5465/amj.2017.0510
- Klok, Y., Kroon, D. P., & Khapova, S. N. (2023). The role of emotions during mergers and acquisitions: A review of the past and a glimpse into the future. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 25(3), 587–613. doi:10.1111/ijmr.12322
- Klonek, F. E., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., & Kauffeld, S. (2014). Dynamics of resistance to change: A sequential analysis of change agents in action. *Journal of Change Management*, 14(3), 334–360. doi:10.1080/14697017.2014.896392
- Kramer, R. M. (1999). Trust and distrust in organizations: Emerging perspectives, enduring questions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50(1), 569–598. doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.569
- Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying*. Macmillan.
- Maitlis, S., Vogus, T. J., & Lawrence, T. B. (2013). Sensemaking and emotion in organizations. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 3(3), 222–247. doi:10.1177/2041386613489062
- McClellan, J. G. (2014). Announcing change: Discourse, uncertainty, and organizational control. *Journal of Change Management*, 14(2), 192–209. doi:10.1080/14697017.2013.844195
- Neil, R., Wagstaff, C. R. D., Weller, E., & Lewis, R. (2016). Leader behaviour, emotional intelligence, and team performance at a UK government executive agency during organizational change. *Journal of Change Management*, 16(2), 97–122. doi:10.1080/14697017.2015.1134624
- Oreg, S., Vakola, M., & Armenakis, A. (2011). Change recipients' reactions to organizational change: A 60-year review of quantitative studies. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 47(4), 461–524. doi:10.1177/0021886310396550
- Rousseau, D. M., Sitkin, S. B., Burt, R. S., & Camerer, C. (1998). Not so different after all: A cross-discipline view of trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 23(3), 393–404. doi:10.5465/amr.1998.926617
- Santos De Souza, F. D. O., & Chimenti, P. (2024). Emotions in organizational change. *An Integrative Review. Journal of Change Management*, 24(2), 137–176.
- Scott, W. R. (2010). Reflections: The past and future of research on institutions and institutional change. *Journal of Change Management*, 10(1), 5–21. doi:10.1080/14697010903549408
- Slater, M. J., Evans, A. L., & Turner, M. J. (2016). Implementing a social identity approach for effective change management. *Journal of Change Management*, 16(1), 18–37. doi:10.1080/14697017.2015.1103774
- Smollan, R. K., & Sayers, J. G. (2009). Organizational culture, change and emotions: A qualitative study. *Journal of Change Management*, 9(4), 435–457. doi:10.1080/14697010903360632
- Spicer, D. P. (2011). Changing culture: A case study of a merger using cognitive mapping. *Journal of Change Management*, 11(2), 245–264. doi:10.1080/14697017.2010.550266

- Stouten, J., Rousseau, D. M., & De Cremer, D. (2018). Successful organizational change: Integrating the management practice and scholarly literatures. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12(2), 752–788. doi:10.5465/annals.2016.0095
- Tcholakian, L. A., Khapova, S., van de Loo, E., & Lehman, R. (2019). Collective traumas and the development of leader values: A currently omitted, but increasingly urgent, research area. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 1009. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01009
- Thomson, B., Klasmeier, K. N., & Nielsen, K. (2024). The fair share – Multilevel distributive justice as cross-level moderator for the impact of restructuring perceptions. *Journal of Change Management*, 24(2), 102–122. doi:10.1080/14697017.2024.2337443
- Turner, J. H., & Stets, J. E. (2005). *The sociology of emotions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Van de Ven, A. H., & Poole, M. S. (2021). Introduction: Central issues in the study of organizational change and innovation. In M. S. Poole & A. H. Van de Ven (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of organizational change and innovation* (pp. 1–20). Oxford University Press.
- Van Gilst, E., Schalk, R., Kluijtmans, T., & Poell, R. (2020). The role of remediation in mitigating the negative consequences of psychological contract breach: A qualitative study in the banking sector. *Journal of Change Management*, 20(3), 264–282. doi:10.1080/14697017.2020.1737180
- Vince, R. (2006). Being taken over: Managers' emotions and rationalizations during a company take-over. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(2), 343–365. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00593.x
- Voronov, M., & Vince, R. (2012). Integrating emotions into the analysis of institutional work. *Academy of Management Review*, 37(1), 58–81. doi:10.5465/amr.2010.0247
- Vuori, T., & Huy, Q. (2022). Regulating top managers' emotions during strategy making: Nokia's socially distributed approach enabling radical change from mobile phones to networks in 2007–2013. *Academy of Management Journal*, 65(1), 331–361. doi:10.5465/amj.2019.0865