FROM STABILITY TO AGILITY: INTEGRATING CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CHANGE MANAGEMENT FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the nature of organisational change, challenging the adequacy of traditional, linear change management models. While classical approaches to change management offer valuable structure, leadership direction, and stability, they often struggle to address the continuous, dynamic, and uncertain conditions associated with digital transformation. Contemporary approaches, on the other hand, emphasise agility, employee participation, iterative learning, and adaptability, but may lack the strategic discipline provided by classical frameworks. This paper adopts a conceptual research approach to synthesise recent literature (2020–2025) on classical and contemporary change management perspectives and proposes an integrated conceptual framework for managing digital transformation. Drawing on established models such as Lewin‘s and Kotter‘s frameworks alongside agile and emergent change perspectives, the study develops a cyclical model that combines structured planning with adaptive implementation and continuous learning. The proposed framework contributes to change management theory by bridging classical and contemporary paradigms and offers practical guidance for leaders navigating digital transformation initiatives. The paper concludes by discussing implications for theory and practice and suggesting directions for future empirical research.

Keywords: Change management; digital transformation; classical change models; contemporary change approaches; organisational agility; conceptual framework

INTRODUCTION

Change management has become a central concern for organisations seeking to remain competitive in environments shaped by technological advancement, globalisation, and shifting workforce expectations. Traditional change management theories viewed organisational change as a structured and predictable process managed through predefined steps or linear models. Classical approaches such as Lewin's Change Management Model and Kotter's 8−Step Change Model offered systematic guidance that helped organisations move from a current state to a

desired future state; these models are based on the assumption that change occurs in discrete stages and that stability can be restored after implementation (Nwachuku et al., 2023).

However, the rise of digital transformation has created new realities that challenge the effectiveness of these classical models (Burton, 2024). Digital transformation is increasingly described in the literature as a continuous journey rather than a one-time event, requiring ongoing adaptation, rapid decision-making, and proactive engagement with emerging technologies (Cosa & Torelli, 2024; Han et al., 2024). This transformation introduces frequent disruptions, shorter innovation cycles, and greater uncertainty, making it difficult for organisations to rely solely on linear or prescriptive change models. As a result, contemporary approaches have emerged to address the dynamic and fluid nature of modern organisational environments (Ndou et al., 2024).

Contemporary approaches, such as emergent change, complexity theory, and agile change, emphasise adaptability, learning, employee involvement, and responsiveness (Ndou et al., 2024). These approaches are particularly relevant in digital transformation contexts because they view change as ongoing rather than episodic. They highlight the importance of flexibility, organisational agility, and collaboration in navigating technological disruptions (Nguyen et al., 2025).

This conceptual paper examines how classical and contemporary approaches can be integrated to support effective change management in the era of digital transformation. The paper draws on existing theories to highlight the strengths and limitations of both traditions and argues that successful digital transformation requires a balance between structured planning and adaptive responsiveness. By synthesising insights from both perspectives, the paper will propose an integrated conceptual model that provides a comprehensive and practical framework for managing digital change.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Classical Approaches to Change Management

Classical approaches to change management emerged from early efforts to understand how planned change could be structured and guided systematically. These approaches are foundational because they establish how organisations intended to manage change before the rapid pace of digital disruption. At the core of classical theories is the assumption that change proceeds through identifiable stages and that leaders can use deliberate sequences of actions to guide organisations from an existing state to a desired future state.

Lewin's Change Management Model

Lewin (1947) created a three−stage model that is widely regarded as one of the earliest and most influential frameworks in change management. Although originally developed in the mid−20th century, its core principles continue to influence contemporary literature on planned change. The model conceptualises change as moving through three sequential phases:

i. Unfreeze: Preparing the organisation for change by challenging the status quo and overcoming resistance.

ii. Change (Movement): Implementing new processes, behaviours, or systems.

iii. Refreeze: Ensuring the new state becomes stabilised and integrated into organisational norms.

Biswas et al. (2024) describe Lewin's model as foundational because it provides a simple yet powerful structure for understanding planned change processes across diverse organisational contexts. The unfreeze phase recognises that people resist change, and change efforts must address both cognitive and social dimensions in preparing for transition. Despite its historical origin, the model's categorisation of change stages remains useful for designing structured interventions, particularly for incremental and defined change initiatives.

However, even classical reviews recognise that Lewin's model may not fully capture the realities of continuous and iterative change in contemporary organisations. This limitation arises because the refreezing stage implies a stable end point, an assumption that is increasingly incompatible with ongoing digital transformation (Burton, 2024). Recent scholarship further suggests that organisational systems must remain fluid rather than fixed in order to adapt to the rapid pace of technological and environmental change (Al-Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024).

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model

Building on Lewin's earlier work, Kotter (1996) developed a more detailed and structured framework consisting of eight steps designed to guide leaders through a change initiative. Kotter's model emphasises leadership behaviours and systematic progression through stages such as:

1. Creating a sense of urgency.
2. Building a guiding coalition.
3. Communicating a change vision.
4. Empowering broad-based action.
5. Generating short-term wins.
6. Consolidating gains.
7. Anchoring new approaches in the organisational culture.

Although this model was formulated in the 1990s, it continues to be widely referenced and used in both academic and practitioner literature to plan and execute change in a step-by-step manner. Its strength lies in providing clarity on leadership actions and stakeholder engagement throughout the change process, making it suitable for large-scale organisational initiatives where alignment across levels is essential. Research shows that Kotter's model emphasises both the structure and the social dimension of change management, particularly in enabling commitment and reducing resistance (Mugambi & Matula, 2025).

Nevertheless, many scholars also recognise limitations in the classical approach. The assumption of linear progression through predetermined steps can underestimate the complexity and unpredictability of organisational environments. In dynamic contexts where

change is frequent and emergent, such as in digital transformation, the rigidity of stepwise models may not fully capture the nonlinear and adaptive nature of change (Sittrop & Crosthwaite, 2021).

Other Classical Processual Models

Beyond Lewin (1947) and Kotter (1996), classical literature includes other staged process models such as the ADKAR framework (focusing on individual change), Kanter's wheel of change, and descriptive models that highlight variables influencing organisational performance during change. These models share the common logic that change can be planned, enacted, monitored, and reinforced through distinct phases or steps that provide practitioners with a roadmap for action (Fajaruddin et al., 2024).

Although some classical models differ in emphasis (for example, processual versus descriptive change models), they consistently stress planning, leadership involvement, communication, stakeholder engagement, and transition reinforcement as key features of effective change management. Their cumulative contribution is the establishment of a structured basis from which later, more flexible approaches have evolved (Phillips & Klein, 2022). This common emphasis on leadership, communication, planning, and stakeholder alignment as core components of change management is supported by recent research showing that strategic leadership significantly shapes change effectiveness by guiding structured planning and aligning stakeholders throughout the transition process (Ferede et al., 2024).

Summary of Classical Approaches

Classical change management approaches provide a valuable starting point for understanding how organisational change can be orchestrated in a planned and sequential way. They emphasise structure, clarity, and leadership involvement, which help organisations manage the human side of change. However, due to their inherent assumptions about linear progression and eventual organisational stability, they may be less effective on their own in environments characterised by rapid and continuous change, a challenge that contemporary approaches seek to address.

Contemporary Approaches to Change Management

While classical change models such as Lewin's (1947) three-stage framework and Kotter's (1996) eight-step model provide a structured and leadership-driven foundation for managing planned change, their underlying assumptions of linearity and stability have been increasingly questioned in contemporary organisational contexts. As organisations face ongoing digital disruption, environmental uncertainty, and complex stakeholder interactions, change is no longer a discrete event with a clear end point but an evolving and adaptive process. Consequently, contemporary approaches to change management have shifted attention toward emergent change perspectives, which emphasise flexibility, continuous learning, and the dynamic interplay of organisational actors in shaping change outcomes (Ndou et al., 2024; Leite & Audretsch, 2025).

Emergent Change

Emergent change refers to the notion that organisational change can arise spontaneously from within the system, rather than being fully planned in advance. This perspective emphasises flexibility and responsiveness to environmental shifts, allowing organisations to adapt as new opportunities or challenges emerge (Leite & Audretsch, 2025). In emergent approaches, change is often shaped by interactions among employees, teams, and external stakeholders, rather than imposed top-down by leadership (Ndou et al., 2024). Studies further highlight that emergent change is especially effective in complex, fast-moving industries where rigid, stepwise approaches may hinder innovation and adaptation (Ndou et al., 2024; Leite & Audretsch, 2025).

Complexity Theory and Change

Complexity theory views organisations as dynamic, adaptive systems composed of multiple interconnected elements (Cincotti et al., 2024). Change is understood as non-linear, unpredictable, and sensitive to small variations within the system, often leading to emergent outcomes rather than predetermined results (Ochoa et al., 2024). Leaders adopting a complexity perspective therefore focus on fostering conditions that support experimentation, continuous learning, and decentralised decision-making, rather than relying exclusively on rigid, sequential change processes (Rahma, 2025). Research further indicates that applying complexity theory principles can enhance organisational resilience and strengthen the capacity to respond effectively to rapid technological and market shifts (Ochoa et al., 2024; Cincotti et al., 2024).

Agile Change Management

Agile change management derives principles from agile software development, emphasising iterative planning, rapid feedback, collaboration, and continuous improvement (Chukwunweike & Aro, 2024). In this approach, change initiatives are executed in short cycles, allowing organisations to test, learn, and adjust quickly. The agile perspective aligns closely with digital transformation initiatives, as it enables responsiveness to emerging technologies and evolving market demands. Recent studies indicate that agile change management not only enables rapid adaptation to technological and market shifts but also fosters higher levels of employee engagement, flexibility, and openness to change by promoting collaboration, iterative learning, and shared ownership of change processes (Chukwunweike & Aro, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025).

Continuous Improvement and Learning Organisations

Contemporary frameworks also emphasise ongoing learning and improvement as central to organisational change. Continuous improvement initiatives, such as Total Quality Management (TQM) or Lean methodologies, encourage incremental adjustments informed by feedback and performance metrics (Ugwu, 2024; Aichouni et al., 2024). Similarly, the concept of the learning organisation highlights the importance of knowledge sharing, innovation, and an adaptive culture as key drivers of sustained change (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2025). Literature further highlights that organisations integrating learning-oriented strategies, including continuous feedback, employee involvement, and capability development, are better equipped

to maintain competitiveness in rapidly evolving environments (Okolie et al., 2024; Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2025).

Summary of Contemporary Approaches

Contemporary approaches to change management shift the focus from rigid, stage-based planning to flexible, adaptive, and participatory strategies (Al-Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025). These approaches recognise the unpredictability of modern organisational environments and emphasise continuous learning, collaboration, and agility (Boerma et al., 2025). By integrating emergent change, complexity theory, agile principles, and learning-oriented practices, contemporary frameworks provide organisations with tools to navigate technological disruption and digital transformation effectively (Malik et al., 2025; Al-Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024). Compared to classical models, contemporary approaches are better suited for ongoing, iterative change, particularly in high-velocity contexts where innovation and adaptability are essential (Nguyen et al., 2025; Boerma et al., 2025).

Digital Transformation and Its Implications for Change

Digital transformation refers to the integration of digital technologies into all aspects of organisational operations, fundamentally altering how organisations create value, interact with stakeholders, and respond to market demands (Elbolok et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Unlike traditional change initiatives, which are often episodic and planned in advance, digital transformation represents a continuous, organisation-wide process that requires sustained adaptability, innovation, and learning (Awad & Martín-Rojas, 2024; Elbolok et al., 2025).

Characteristics of Digital Transformation

Several key characteristics distinguish digital transformation from other forms of organisational change:

i. Continuous Nature of Change: Digital transformation is ongoing rather than a one-time initiative, necessitating constant evaluation and adjustment of processes, culture, and systems (Awad & Martín-Rojas, 2024).

ii. Technological Integration: Adoption of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and data analytics drives change across functional areas (Vărzaru & Bocean, 2024).

iii. Employee Involvement and Digital Mindset: Successful transformation requires employees to develop digital competencies and a mindset that embraces learning, collaboration, and experimentation (Okolie et al., 2024).

iv. Rapid Innovation Cycles: Organisations must be able to quickly adapt products, services, and processes in response to technological advances and competitive pressures (Awad & Martín-Rojas, 2024).

Implications for Change Management

The rise of digital transformation has significant implications for how organisations approach change management:

i. *Integration of Classical and Contemporary Approaches:* Traditional models, such as Lewin's (1947) and Kotter's (1996) frameworks, provide useful guidance for structured planning and stakeholder engagement, but digital transformation demands dynamic and adaptable approaches that integrate both classic and contemporary perspectives (Al‐Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024). In the digital era, organisations are compelled to adopt flexible systems and continuous learning practices, as digital technologies introduce rapid environmental shifts that traditional, stage‐based models alone cannot fully accommodate (Cosa & Torelli, 2024). Research also shows that digital transformation reshapes organisational leadership, culture, and processes, requiring holistic change management that goes beyond linear planning and embraces adaptability, continuous engagement, and performance-oriented decision-making (Shuxratovich, 2025). Consequently, contemporary approaches, including emergent and agile change strategies, are essential to cope with continuous and unpredictable digital shifts (Al‐Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024).

ii. *Organisational Agility:* Digital transformation requires organisations to become agile, promoting iterative development, rapid feedback loops, and decentralised decision‐making to respond quickly to technological disruption. Research shows that organisational agility positively influences digital transformation performance, enabling firms to adapt their operations and strategies in dynamic environments (Zhang et al., 2023). Agility is strengthened through knowledge sharing and innovation, which help organisations foster flexible structures and collaborative practices that support rapid responses to change (Bux et al., 2025). Further, implementing strategic agility practices, such as adaptive policies and responsive organisational structures, has been shown to improve an organisation's capacity to navigate technological disruption and enhance flexibility during digital transformation initiatives (Fachridian et al., 2024).

iii. *Cultural and Behavioural Adjustments:* Success depends on developing a culture that supports experimentation, psychological safety, and openness to learning, as a culture of adaptability and continuous learning has been shown to enhance the benefits of digital transformation initiatives by encouraging proactive adoption of digital tools and collaborative change behaviour (Hasan et al., 2025). Research demonstrates that organisations with innovation‐oriented and adaptable cultures are more likely to embrace change and involve employees in experimentation and digital tool adoption (Okolie et al., 2024). Furthermore, empirical studies find that a culture of continuous learning, support, and openness to adaptation facilitates smoother transitions to new technologies and strengthens employee engagement throughout transformation efforts (Müller & Weber, 2023). Finally, organisations that invest in cultural adaptation, including learning, experimentation, and employee involvement, tend to experience

higher success in digital transformation compared to traditional, risk averse cultures (Shuxratovich, 2025).

iv. *Leadership Role:* Leaders must balance structured planning with adaptive facilitation, guiding organisations through both predictable stages and emergent challenges, particularly in digital transformation contexts where uncertainty is constant (Sacavem et al., 2025; Singh, 2023). Effective communication, vision-setting, and employee empowerment are critical for fostering engagement and trust, helping teams understand the rationale behind change and reducing resistance (Singh, 2023; Memon et al., 2020). Research further shows that transformational leadership styles enhance employees' positive reactions to organisational change by aligning individuals around a shared vision and encouraging innovative behaviour and two-way communication (Tharuni et al., 2025). Clear and consistent leadership communication has also been empirically linked with heightened change readiness and workforce adaptability, thereby minimising resistance and strengthening employee commitment during change initiatives (Memon et al., 2020).

Linking Change Approaches to Digital Transformation

Digital transformation demonstrates that neither classical nor contemporary approaches alone are sufficient. Classical models provide stability and clarity, helping organisations understand sequential processes and ensure stakeholder alignment, yet they must be complemented by flexible and adaptive strategies capable of responding to unpredictable digital shifts (Kherrazi & Roquilly, 2025). Contemporary approaches emphasise rapid adaptation and continuous learning, which are particularly critical in dynamic digital environments where traditional planning alone is inadequate (Cosa & Torelli, 2024). Adaptive strategies that integrate leadership, collaboration, and digital literacy further enable organisations to navigate continuous and complex change effectively (Rahma, 2025).

By integrating these perspectives, organisations can design change strategies that are both planned and adaptive, providing a balanced framework to guide digital transformation initiatives effectively.

Limitations of Classical Approaches in Digital Contexts

Classical change management frameworks have long provided foundational guidance for organisational change; however, their applicability in digital transformation contexts is increasingly contested. Digital environments are characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and rapid technological evolution, conditions that challenge the linear and episodic assumptions embedded in traditional models (Kherrazi & Roquilly, 2025). Evidence suggests that linear approaches are insufficient in settings of continuous digital disruption, where adaptation must be iterative, responsive, and emergent rather than sequentially prescribed (Peñarroya-Farell et al., 2025). Moreover, while classical models such as Lewin's (1947) and Kotter's (1996) offer valuable structural guidance and insights into managing resistance, they fail to fully capture the systemic and human complexities inherent in digital transformation unless complemented by adaptive and flexible strategies (Sharma, 2025).

i. Assumption of Linear and Sequential Change: A key limitation of classical change approaches is their assumption that organisational change occurs in a linear, sequential manner. Frameworks such as Lewin's (1947) three-stage model and Kotter's (1996) eight-step process imply a stepwise progression toward a stable end state. In practice, however, digital transformation rarely follows such predictable trajectories. Change initiatives often overlap, require continuous experimentation, and demand frequent recalibration, as organisations must respond iteratively to evolving internal and external conditions (Sacavém et al., 2025). In digitally driven contexts, multiple changes frequently occur simultaneously, decisions must be revised in real time, and emergent challenges arise continuously, rendering stage-based models rigid and less effective (Shuxratovich, 2025; Sharma, 2025).

ii. Emphasis on Stability and Refreezing: Classical change approaches often assume that change culminates in a period of stability, as reflected in Lewin's (1947) refreezing stage or Kotter's (1996) emphasis on anchoring change into organisational culture. While stability may be desirable in traditional settings, digital transformation demands continuous evolution rather than equilibrium. Organisations operating in digital ecosystems face overlapping initiatives, iterative experimentation, and ongoing recalibration, rendering permanent stabilisation unrealistic (Hanelt et al., 2020). Empirical studies highlight that continuous innovation and adaptive responses are essential in digitally driven contexts, challenging the relevance of refreezing as a meaningful endpoint (Besio et al., 2024). Even frameworks that seek to reconcile stability with flexibility acknowledge that technological and institutional factors continuously reshape processes and roles, requiring organisations to maintain adaptability rather than pursue a fixed end state (Seidel et al., 2025). Accordingly, the expectation of refreezing can constrain organisational learning and inhibit sustained improvement in digital environments.

iii. Top-Down Orientation and Limited Employee Agency: Classical change models predominantly adopt a top-down orientation in which senior leaders define the vision, plan change, and oversee implementation. Although leadership remains essential, digital transformation increasingly relies on employee involvement, cross-functional collaboration, and decentralised decision-making (Shuxratovich, 2025). Empirical studies demonstrate that employee participation through training, upskilling, and inclusive change practices enhances ownership, creativity, and engagement during transformation initiatives (Zolfaghari, 2023). Moreover, empowerment has been identified as a key enabler of strategic flexibility, linking organisational adaptability with technological integration and sustained employee commitment (Bagherian et al., 2025). Consequently, the limited emphasis on employee agency in classical approaches can constrain innovation, weaken engagement, and intensify resistance to change. In contrast, participatory change approaches better support the dynamic and emergent nature of digital transformation.

iv. Limited Responsiveness to Environmental Complexity: Classical change frameworks were developed in relatively stable environments where external conditions evolved

gradually. In contrast, digital transformation unfolds within complex ecosystems characterised by technological platforms, regulatory shifts, global competition, and rapidly evolving customer expectations. Traditional models struggle to address such complexity because they rely on prediction, control, and linear progression rather than adaptation and sense-making, which are increasingly required in digitally volatile contexts (Sharma, 2025). Digital transformation research further indicates a shift toward malleable organisational designs embedded within digital business ecosystems, where change is continuous, interconnected, and non-episodic, thereby exposing the limitations of classical stage-based change logics (Hanelt et al., 2021). Moreover, digital transformation reshapes organisational responses to complexity by necessitating flexible coordination, adaptive decision-making, and dynamic capabilities to manage uncertainty and emergent challenges effectively (Chen et al., 2025). Consequently, organisations relying solely on classical approaches may struggle to respond to unexpected disruptions or emerging opportunities, highlighting the need for more adaptive change perspectives aligned with complex digital ecosystems.

Summary of Limitations

Classical approaches offer valuable structure, clarity, and foundational insights into change management; however, their limitations are increasingly evident in digital transformation contexts. Assumptions of linear progression, organisational stability, centralised control, and environmental predictability are misaligned with the realities of continuous, iterative, and complex change (Cosa & Torelli, 2024; Sharma, 2025). Consequently, these frameworks must be complemented with contemporary approaches that emphasise agility, continuous learning, employee participation, and adaptability, which are essential for managing overlapping initiatives, decentralised decision-making, and rapid technological shifts (Akinbiyi et al., 2025). This critique highlights the need for integrated change strategies that leverage the strengths of both classical and contemporary models while addressing the demands of dynamic digital environments.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a conceptual research approach to develop an integrated framework for managing digital transformation. Using a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature published between 2020 and 2025, the study examined classical change management approaches (e.g., Lewin, Kotter) and contemporary approaches (e.g., agile change, emergent change, complexity-informed strategies). A comparative synthesis of these approaches were conducted to identify their strengths, limitations, and relevance in digital transformation contexts. Insights from this analysis were used to develop a holistic conceptual model integrating classical and contemporary perspectives, illustrated in the model below. The approach ensures theoretical coherence, relevance to current digital environments, and transparency in the development of the framework.

An Integrated Conceptual Model for Managing Digital Transformation

Digital transformation requires organisations to balance structured planning with adaptive responsiveness. Classical approaches, such as Lewin's (1947) and Kotter's (1996) models, provide a strong foundation for planning, leadership, and stakeholder alignment, but are insufficient when applied alone in highly dynamic digital environments. Evidence from digital transformation research shows that combining structured change frameworks with agile, participatory, and learning-oriented strategies enhances organisational adaptability and success in complex digital ecosystems (Shuxratovich, 2025; Al-Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024; Chen et al., 2025). Moreover, critical success factors in agile-based digital transformation include not only structured governance and leadership commitment but also team capability, adaptive governance, and stakeholder engagement, bridging the gap between traditional and contemporary change paradigms (Shuxratovich, 2025; Chen et al., 2025). An integrated conceptual model that leverages both classical change foundations and contemporary adaptive practices thus offers a comprehensive framework for managing digital transformation effectively.

Conceptual Integration

The integrated model conceptualises change management for digital transformation as a continuous cycle that combines the stability of classical approaches with the adaptability of contemporary approaches. The model consists of four interconnected dimensions.

i. *Structured planning and leadership:* This forms the classical foundation, as organisations initiate change with a clear vision, defined goals, and coordinated early-stage actions aligned with Lewin's (1947) unfreezing and Kotter's (1996) initial steps (Al-Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024). Empirical digital transformation research further confirms that leadership commitment, governance structures, and stakeholder alignment remain essential for initiating and sustaining transformation, even as organisations adopt more adaptive and iterative practices (Shuxratovich, 2025).

ii. *Adaptive Implementation and Iterative Feedback (Contemporary Enhancement):* Agile and emergent strategies are central to implementation, where short iterative cycles, continuous evaluation, and flexible adjustments enable organisations to respond rapidly to technological and market disruptions. Iterative methods such as Scrum and Kanban, combined with ongoing feedback loops, allow real-time adaptation rather than rigid stepwise progression (Chukwunweike & Aro, 2024). Complementary organisational agility strategies, including adaptive policies, collaborative structures, and responsive cultures, further enhance responsiveness in dynamic environments (Fachridian et al., 2024). Integrating change management with agile practices has been shown to strengthen overall project agility and responsiveness, highlighting the value of flexible implementation in digital transformation initiatives (Zangana et al., 2025).

iii. *Continuous Learning and Employee Engagement (Contemporary Enhancement):* Employees are empowered to participate, experiment, and contribute knowledge, fostering innovation and reducing resistance during digital transformation. Research

indicates that knowledge sharing plays a critical role in enabling digital transformation and organisational agility by facilitating collaboration, information exchange, and collective learning across teams, which in turn supports rapid adaptation and competence development (Bux et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2025). Digital leadership and collaborative work structures have been shown to promote environments where employees engage in self−organised learning and share knowledge openly, reinforcing engagement and motivation (Bux et al., 2025). Furthermore, organisational learning mechanisms, including feedback loops, cross−functional platforms, and continuous training, enhance problem−solving skills and adaptive capability, enabling employees to build digital competencies that support sustained change (Yang et al., 2025).

iv. *Evaluation and Sustainability:* Outcomes are monitored using both classical metrics (goal achievement, milestone completion) and contemporary measures (agility, adaptability, employee innovation). Digital transformation research shows that organisational learning and innovation contribute to enhanced resilience and sustainability, as organisations that systematically capture lessons and feedback build adaptive capabilities that support long−term performance (Awad & Martín−Rojas, 2024; Cosa & Torelli, 2024). Performance measurement systems in digitally transforming organisations increasingly combine traditional indicators with agile and adaptability metrics to capture real−time responsiveness and strategic flexibility (Cosa & Torelli, 2024). Furthermore, evidence suggests that digital transformation can enhance sustainable corporate performance by promoting innovation and knowledge acquisition, demonstrating how continuous learning contributes to ongoing organisational resilience and sustainability (Asbeetah et al., 2025).

Conceptual Model Diagram

The integrated conceptual model for managing digital transformation visually illustrates how classical and contemporary change management approaches interact. Classical approaches provide structure and leadership guidance, while contemporary approaches enable adaptability, iterative feedback, and continuous learning. This model highlights the cyclical nature of digital transformation and the feedback loops that sustain organisational change.

Figure 1: Integrated Conceptual Model for Managing Digital Transformation



The diagram was developed by the author (2026) based on the conceptual framework discussed in this paper. It illustrates how classical approaches (structured planning and leadership) are integrated with contemporary approaches (adaptive implementation, iterative feedback, and continuous learning) to achieve sustainable digital transformation.

As shown in Figure 1, the integrated model combines classical and contemporary approaches to guide digital transformation.

Explanation:

i. The model is cyclical, reflecting the ongoing nature of digital transformation.

ii. Classical approaches anchor the process with structure and leadership, ensuring clarity and stakeholder alignment.

iii. Contemporary approaches allow flexibility, responsiveness, and employee involvement.

iv. Feedback and learning integrate both approaches, ensuring continuous improvement and sustainable transformation.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The integrated conceptual model developed in this paper offers significant implications for both theory and practice in change management and digital transformation.

Theoretical Implications

i. *Bridging Classical and Contemporary Approaches:* This model demonstrates that classical and contemporary change management frameworks are complementary. Classical approaches provide structure, leadership guidance, and clarity, while contemporary approaches contribute flexibility, continuous learning, and employee engagement. Integrating these perspectives advances theory by offering a holistic

framework capable of addressing both planned and emergent change in digital contexts (Al−Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024; Sharma, 2025).

ii. *Expanding Conceptual Understanding of Digital Transformation:* Digital transformation is inherently unpredictable and continuously evolving. The model emphasises that theoretical frameworks must account for iterative, adaptive, and emergent processes rather than rely solely on linear or stage-based assumptions. This contributes to scholarship by providing a lens that integrates stability with adaptability in complex digital environments (Awad & Martín−Rojas, 2024).

iii. *Foundation for Future Research:* The framework serves as a theoretical basis for empirical studies investigating the effectiveness of integrated change approaches. Future research can explore how combining classical and contemporary strategies influences outcomes such as agility, innovation, and employee engagement (Al−Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024; Sharma, 2025).

Practical Implications

i. *Guiding Leaders and Change Practitioners:* Managers can leverage structured classical frameworks for planning, vision setting, and stakeholder alignment while incorporating contemporary strategies for flexibility, iterative feedback, and continuous learning. This dual approach ensures responsiveness in dynamic digital contexts (Shuxratovich, 2025).

ii. *Enhancing Employee Engagement and Organisational Agility:* By embedding participatory and agile mechanisms, the model emphasises employee involvement, fostering innovation, reducing resistance, and increasing organisational adaptability in rapidly changing digital environments (Awad & Martín−Rojas, 2024).

iii. *Supporting Sustainable Digital Transformation:* The model‘s cyclical nature, incorporating feedback loops and learning mechanisms, allows organisations to continuously refine strategies, align technology adoption with objectives, and build long-term resilience (Al−Moaid & Almarhdi, 2024; Sharma, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a conceptual examination of change management in the era of digital transformation, highlighting the strengths and limitations of classical and contemporary approaches. Classical models such as Lewin‘s three-stage framework and Kotter‘s eight-step process provide essential structure, leadership guidance, and stakeholder alignment. However, they are limited in environments characterised by continuous, emergent, and technology-driven change. Contemporary approaches, including agile change, emergent change, and complexity-informed strategies, address these limitations by promoting flexibility, employee engagement, continuous learning, and responsiveness to environmental complexity. By integrating classical and contemporary approaches, the proposed conceptual model offers a holistic, cyclical framework that guides organisations through digital transformation in a structured yet adaptive manner.

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The integrated model has important theoretical implications, bridging classical and contemporary paradigms and providing a foundation for future empirical research. Practically, it offers leaders and managers a roadmap to balance structure with adaptability, foster employee engagement, and sustain transformation initiatives. Ultimately, this framework contributes to the evolving understanding of change management in digital contexts and provides actionable guidance for organisations seeking to thrive in a rapidly evolving technological environment.

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