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## Exploring the Interplay of Leadership and Organizational Changes in Education: A Recent Systematic Review

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**Abstract.** This paper explored the interplay of leadership and organizational changes in education. This study has examined dynamic interaction of leadership and organizational changes in educational context. This paper provides a recent overview. The number of studies analyzed in the present study via preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) approach is 204 papers between 2023-2025 through Scopus and WoS database. The systematic review was accomplished after the peer review process of the data that were collected and reviewed. The results of the present study are likely to underline the important aspects of leadership as a catalyst of organizational changes. This review also enlightens the systemic factors contribute to readiness of change and the influence of stakeholder's engagement to change initiatives success. The total number of findings data is (n=22), with review indicating some key themes such as leadership functions as well as organizational changes. The results are categorized into three themes that include i) role of leadership style in organizational changes, ii) systemic dynamics that lead to change preparedness, as well as iii) influence of stakeholder engagement on change success. Overall, findings conclude that leadership is the primary driver of successful organizational change. Cultural, contextual, leadership role, resource allocation and disciplinary contexts are factors contribute to readiness for change. Effective stakeholder engagement, role communication transparency, institutional support and resource allocation influencing the success of change.

**Keywords:** leadership; organizational changes; education; management; education leadership; PRISMA; systematic review

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## 1. Introduction

Contemporary education systems operate in an environment of rapid transformation, where globalization, technological advancement, and evolving societal demands necessitate continuous organizational adaptation (Albrecht et al., 2020; Isik, 2021; Maak et al., 2021; Borgos et al., 2023; Bilbokaitė et al., 2024; Crable et al., 2024; Sarpong & Adelekan, 2024; Kuran et al., 2025; Vandelannote et al., 2025). The importance of leadership in addressing such changes has become increasingly evident, as demonstrated by recent research across diverse educational contexts (Schell, 2019; Miharja & Hayati, 2021; Okereka & Okolie, 2024; Kang & Headley, 2025; Vassel, 2025). Organizational change in education requires more than structural adjustment (Lancet et al., 2023; Nedzinskaite-Maciuniene et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023; Crable et al., 2024; Som & Chan, 2024; Vîlcică et al., 2025). It demands leadership that fosters cultural transformation, stakeholder engagement, and systemic resilience (Joo et al., 2023; Ren et al., 2023; Davis et al., 2025; Kang & Headley, 2025; Iglesias Vidal et al., 2025; Kuran et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025; Vassel, 2025).

First of foremost, the paper explores several leadership approaches and organizational change processes within educational institutions, synthesizing empirical evidence from multiple international studies to identify patterns, challenges, and effective strategies for sustainable transformation. The role of leadership in shaping changes in education, stakeholder engagement and institutional readiness for change is becoming the purpose of this study. Moreover, the paper also emphasize the requirement of context-sensitive leadership strategies that align with institutional cultures and stakeholder values (Mingyu et al., 2024; Adewale & Ghavifekr, 2025; Austin et al., 2025; Veseli et al., 2025). These findings indicate that sustainable change requires not only leadership commitment but also systemic investments in capacity building and stakeholder engagement.

The research outcomes are predicted to focus on the critical role of leadership as a catalyst of organizational changes. This review also enlightens the systemic factors contribute to readiness of change and the influence of stakeholder's engagement to change initiatives success. As a whole, the finding of this research will substantially drive the discourse of leadership and organizational changes. Via an extensive research of current literature, this review also addresses significant gaps in the literature by systematically analyzing the interplay between leadership styles and organizational change outcomes across different educational levels and cultural contexts (Wang et al., 2023; Supriharyanti et al., 2024; Davis et al., 2025; Austin et al., 2025; Muirhead et al., 2025; Olson et al., 2025; Veseli et al., 2025; Vîlcica et al., 2025; Youngblood et al., 2025).

Various studies conducted worldwide had explore the role of leadership or change processes in isolations (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; Koliopoulos et al., 2021; El-Hage & Sidani, 2023; Eustachio et al., 2024; Guyottot & Thelisson, 2024; Thondhlana & Nkosi, 2024; Kimble, 2025; Smith et al., 2025). Therefore, this study comprehensively examined dynamic interaction of leadership and organizational changes (Gentsoudi, 2024; Vassel, 2025; Youngblood et al., 2025) through recent

years analysis review between 2023-2025 extracted from Web of Science (WoS) as well as Scopus.

This study is conducted to address the following research questions:

- (i) What is the role of leadership styles in facilitating organizational changes in education?
- (ii) (ii) What systemic factors contribute to readiness for change in educational institutions?
- (iii) (iii) How does stakeholder engagement influence the success with regard to change initiatives?

## 2. Literature Review

Leadership within educational settings play as the principal mechanism that drives and sustains organizational change. According to Nedzinskaite-Maciuniene et al. (2023), the COVID-19 pandemic transformed school principals into agent of change, demonstrating how adaptive, distributed, and collaborative leadership styles positively predict leader's attitudes toward reform. This finding aligns with Wan Muda et al. (2024), whose research in Malaysian vocational colleges demonstrated a significant relationship between distributive leadership and effective change management strategies.

Both studies emphasize that leadership influences to not only the readiness for change but also the collective commitment to continuous improvement. Complementarily, Wang, Olivier, and Chen (2023) conceptualized readiness for change as a multidimensional construct in education systems, stressing the integration of individual and organizational readiness for effective reform. Together, these findings highlight that adaptive, distributive, and systemic leadership practices are crucial in fostering environments where educational change can be both initiated and sustained.

The relationship between leadership and employee attitudes toward change also reveals how leaders mediate cognitive and emotional reactions within organizations. Okereka and Okolie (2024) found that leadership change, particularly communication and involvement build employee support and aligns behaviors with change initiatives. This process mirrors El-Hage and Sidani's (2023) exploration of transformational leadership in Lebanese higher education, where intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation were instrumental in institutionalizing change.

Similarly, Kang and Headley (2025) discovered that leadership enhanced change valence among bureaucrats directly influenced active representation in South Korea's National Police, thereby linking leadership values with positive change perceptions. Collectively, these studies underscore that leadership behaviors shape both emotional and cognitive engagement with organizational transformation, ensuring alignment between institutional objectives and individual motivation.

At the systemic level, leadership in higher education has emerged as a determining factor in achieving sustainable organizational transformation. Umar

et al. (2025) emphasized that transformational leadership acts as a mediator linking change management and sustainable institutional performance in Malaysian private universities. In parallel, Adewale and Ghavifekr (2025) revealed that academic leaders in Nigeria must overcome human and resource-related challenges by employing principles of change leadership and planned transformation to ensure institutional growth. Dean, Sigler, and Sharma (2024) further illustrated the importance of grassroots-led initiatives in universities, showing that informal, bottom-up leadership approaches can effectively support long-term organizational renewal. These studies collectively reinforce that sustainable transformation in education relies on leadership's capacity to align strategic vision, staff engagement, and institutional readiness through both formal and informal pathways.

Beyond internal institutional settings, educational leadership also interacts with cultural, social, and policy dynamics in shaping change outcomes. Vassel (2025) demonstrated that cultural beliefs, parental expectations, and leadership styles collectively influence teachers' readiness to implement pedagogical innovations in Arab Israeli schools. Iglesias Vidal et al. (2025) further expanded this understanding through the concept of ecological leadership, illustrating how distributed and systemic leadership fosters collaborative learning ecosystems in Italy and Spain.

Likewise, Gentsoudi (2024) established a linkage between educational leadership and national economic outcomes in Greece, suggesting that leadership practices not only influence school level performance but also contribute to broader socio-economic resilience. Together, these studies highlight that leadership in education extends beyond managerial tasks to encompass cultural and social responsiveness, which strengthens institutional adaptation to global and local challenges.

Recent research also portrays leadership shapes organizational identity and inclusivity. Triantari (2024) positioned the mentor leader as a driver of cultural change through empathy, mindfulness, and ethical guidance key traits that humanize organizational transformation. Davis et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of integrating theories of learning, power, and change in leading diversity and inclusion initiatives, while Felix, Galan, and Perez (2025) described the emotional toll experienced by educational leaders driving racial equity reforms in community colleges.

Complementing these, Youngblood, Franzen, and Priest (2025) demonstrated that leadership as practice development, grounded in reflective and collaborative inquiry, enhances organizational adaptability and innovation. Taken together, these contributions affirm that leadership and organizational change in education are interdependent processes shaped by vision, ethics, inclusion, and collective learning factors.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Identification

Three fundamental stages of the systematic review procedure were implemented to retrieve relevant papers from the selected databases. The first step involves identifying keywords and looking for similar terms, keywords from dictionaries, encyclopaedias, and previous research. Search strings for the database Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) have been created once all relevant phrases have been chosen shown as Table 1. 204 publications related to the present study project in the initial phase of the systematic review procedure from both databases were successfully extracted.

**Table 1: Search keywords used according to database**

Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ( ( leadership OR captainship OR directorship ) AND ( "Organizational Change" OR "Managerial Change" ) AND ( education* ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2023 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2024 ) OR LIMIT-TO ( PUBYEAR , 2025 ) )
WoS	( ( leadership OR captainship OR directorship ) AND ( "Organizational Change" OR "Managerial Change" ) AND ( education* ) ) (Topic) and 2025 or 2024 or 2023 (Publication Years) and Paper (Document Types) and English (Languages)

#### 3.2 Screening

The initial screening process should include duplicate papers with zero paper. In the next phase, 103 papers were filtered against a host of exclusion and inclusion criteria that the researcher designed; in the first phase, there were none. The primary criterion for selection was literature in the form of research papers, as it provides practical information. This led to the exclusion of publications like systematic reviews, reviews, meta-analysis, meta-syntheses, books, book chapters, and conference proceedings from the study. The review was also limited to the papers that were published in the English language. Moreover, some terms are limited to relevant paper searches only. It is important to highlight that the chosen timeline for the study was in recent three years (2023–2025). A total of 101 publications were eliminated based on specific criteria.

#### 3.3 Eligibility

In the third phase, referred to as the eligibility assessment, 69 papers were assembled as shown in Table 2. In this step, meticulous examination of the titles and core content of all the papers was conducted to confirm their alignment with the inclusion criteria and their relevance to the ongoing study's research objectives (Paul & Criado, 2020). Consequently, 47 papers were excluded due to the out of field, title not significantly, abstract not related on the objective of the study and no full text access founded on empirical evidence. As a result, a total of 22 papers remain for the upcoming review.

**Table 2: The searching selection criterion**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
<b>Language</b>	English	Non-English
<b>Timeline</b>	2023 – 2025	< 2023
<b>Literature type</b>	Journal (Paper)	Conference, Book, Review
<b>Publication Stage</b>	Final	In Press

### 3.4 Data Abstraction and Analysis

An integrative analysis was used as one of the assessment strategies in this study to examine and synthesise a variety of research designs (van Riel & Snyder, 2024). The goal of the competent study was to identify relevant topics and subtopics. The stage of data collection was the first step in the development of the theme. Figure 1 shows a compilation of 22 publications for assertions or material relevant to the topics of the current study meticulously analysed. The authors then evaluated the current significant studies related to leadership and organizational changes in education. The methodology used in all studies, as well as the research results, are being investigated. Next, the researcher collaborated with co-researcher to develop themes based on the evidence in this study's context. A log was kept throughout the data analysis process to record any analyses, viewpoints, riddles, or other thoughts relevant to the data interpretation.

Finally, the researcher compared the results to see if there were any inconsistencies in the theme design process. The researcher also compared the findings to resolve any discrepancies in the theme creation process. It is important to highlight, that in the presence of disagreements between the concepts and findings, the authors discuss them among themselves. The produce theme underwent refinement to ensure coherence. Two experts in leadership and educational management were involved to validate the rigor of the analysis. The expert review phase helped to ensure each sub-theme's clarity, importance, and adequacy by establishing domain validity. Adjustments based on the discretion of the author based on feedback and comments by experts have been made.

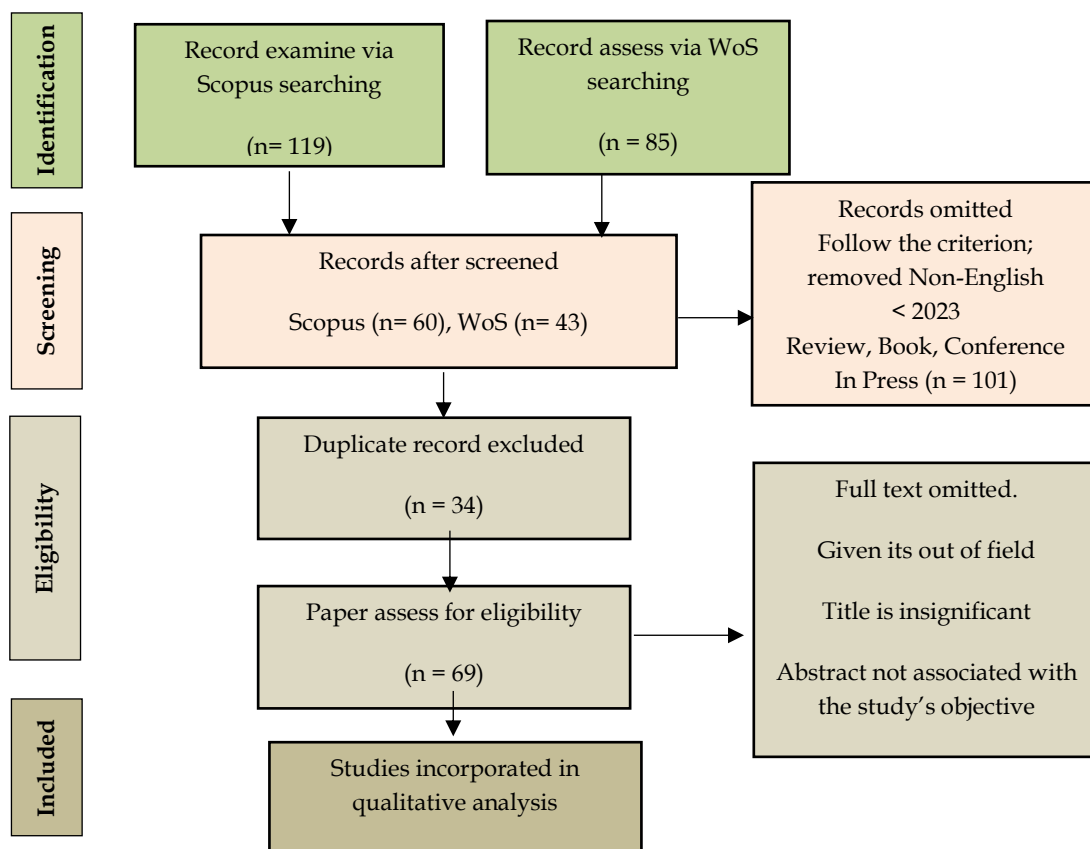


Figure 1: PRISMA flow chart of the paper search process

#### 4. Results and Discussion

This section observes the findings from 22 reliable papers from WoS and Scopus executed from 2023 to 2025 via systematic literature review (SLR). It is significant to highlight, that this research finding examined from cross globe as shown in Figure 2: Africa (2), Europe (6), North America (6), Asia (7), and South America (1). This classification helps to identify regional trends (Cortellazzo et al., 2019; McGinity et al., 2022; Torres, 2022) in leadership and organizational change research in education as well as proving that this topic remains vital and growing in recent years (Koliopoulos et al., 2021).

All findings were summarized as shown in Table 3 and followed by discussion based on three main themes; role of leadership style, systemic factors contribute to readiness of change, and influence of stakeholder engagement to the success of change initiatives.

Table 3: Key finding analysis from 22 selected papers

No	Paper (Authors, Year)	Key finding
<b>Role of leadership style in Organizational Changes</b>		
1	Kang & Headley (2025)	<b>Transformational/ Inclusive leadership</b> fostering positive perception of change ability among bureaucrats.
2	Okereka & Okolie (2024)	<b>Change leadership</b> reduce resistance of communication and involvement barrier. Change leadership also albe to address cognitive/emotional employee reactions.
3	Lancet et al. (2023)	Distributed/Collaborative leadership form a clear vision, inclusive decision-making, and psychological safety drive policy implementation leader.
4	Wan Muda et al. (2024)	Distributive leadership always shared decision-making and collective engagement correlate with effective change management. Vocational colleges (Malaysia)
5	Nedzinskaite-Maciuniene et al. (2023)	Adaptive leadership strongly predicts positive attitudes toward imposed change (COVID-19) Schools in Lithuania.
6	Gentsoudi (2024)	Transformational leadership improves educational performance and economic outcomes through motivation and vision.
7	Supriharyanti et al. (2024)	Empowering leadership Empowers teams via psychological capital (PsyCap), enhancing learning adaptability during change.
8	Umar et al. (2025)	Transformational leadership creates a mediating effect between change readiness and sustainable performance; requires climate for change.
9	El-Hage & Sidani (2023)	Transformational leadership stimulate intellectual and inspirational motivation, institutionalizing change.
10	Triantari (2024)	Mentor/ethical Leadership fosters cultural change and employee adaptability.
<b>Theme 2: Systemic Factors Contributing to Readiness for Change</b>		
11	Vasel (2025)	Cultural resistance (cultural belief and parent perceptions) slows adoption of changes. Leadership and policy alignment can mitigate barriers.
12	Vilciã et al. (2025)	Ineffective communication and inadequate training diminish stakeholder engagement, whereas transparent leadership practices foster organizational trust and commitment.
13	Wang et al. (2023)	Systems perspective highlights need for alignment between teacher and institutional readiness. Dynamic interaction between levels is important to support changes.
14	Iglesias Vidal et al. (2025)	Cultural, social trust and collaboration, and materials were ecological factors fostering ecosystem engagement and sustainability.
15	Adewale & Ghavifekr (2025)	Economic constraints, political interference, resource shortages are list of systemic inequities hindering sustained change implementation.

16	Dean et al. (2024)	were bottom-up initiatives succeed when aligned with institutional mission and stakeholder values; grassroots collaboration, values alignment, iterative action research.
17	van den Hende et al. (2024)	Strategic alignment linked to mismatched disciplinary strategies, academic staff resistance, and resource deployment.
18	Youngblood et al. (2025)	Observational interventions of work-based learning and leadership practices enhance collective reflection and adaptive leadership practices to the readiness of changes.
<b>Theme 3: Influence of Stakeholder Engagement on Change Success</b>		
19	Davis et al. (2025)	Successful equity-centered change depends on inclusive engagement and addressing systemic barriers. Organizational change team and faculty experience shaped by identity and intersectional power influencing the success of changes
20	Felix et al. (2025)	Lack of support from Student equity leaders, and administrators hinders the success of changes. Equity leaders face burnout and resistance is often unacknowledged.
21	Vilcica et al. (2025)	Staff input and transparent communication are critical during policy rollout.
22	Eustachio et al. (2024)	Influence of Top-down support and resources enable faculty to drive responsible management education and provide more institutional support for changes sustainability.

#### 4.1 RQ 1: What is the Role of Leadership Styles in Facilitating Organizational Changes in Education?

Leadership style significantly influences the success of organizational change initiatives, as evidenced by multiple studies across various sectors. Research shows that transformational leadership, which involves inspiration, intellectual stimulation, as well as individualized consideration, enhances employees' willingness to embrace change (El-Hage & Sidani, 2023; Gentsoudi, 2024; Umar et al., 2025). For instance, in Greek public sector education, transformational leadership was found to improve institutional performance by fostering motivation and job satisfaction among employees (Gentsoudi, 2024). Similarly, in Lebanese higher education, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation were critical in institutionalizing accreditation-related changes (El-Hage & Sidani, 2023). These findings suggest that leaders who articulate a compelling vision and encourage innovation facilitate smoother transitions during organizational transformations.

Distributive and adaptive leadership styles also play a pivotal role in managing change, particularly in educational settings. A study in Malaysian vocational colleges revealed that distributive leadership emphasizing shared decision-making and collective engagement positively correlates with effective change management strategies (Wan Muda et al., 2024). Likewise, Lithuanian school principals demonstrated that adaptive leadership, which focuses on flexibility and problem-solving, was the strongest predictor of positive attitudes toward

pandemic-induced changes (Nedzinskaite-Maciuniene, et al., 2023). These leadership approaches promote inclusivity and resilience, enabling organizations to navigate uncertainties more effectively. The emphasis on collaborative decision-making aligns with findings from charter schools, where leaders who valued diverse perspectives fostered greater commitment to institutional goals (Lancet et al., 2023).

Employee attitudes toward change are heavily influenced by leadership communication and involvement. Research in Nigeria's Delta State Ministry of Education highlighted that leaders who prioritize transparent communication and employee participation cultivate stronger support for change initiatives (Okereka & Okolie, 2024). This aligns with studies on empowering leadership, where middle managers who foster psychological capital within teams enhance their capacity to adapt to change (Supriharyanti et al., 2024). Furthermore, Kang and Headley (2025) found that leaders who frame organizational changes as valuable and necessary to increase employee's willingness to support such initiatives. These outcomes reveal the significance of leadership in shaping cognitive as well as emotional responses to change, ultimately determining its success.

#### **4.2 RQ 2: What Systemic Factors Contribute to Readiness for Change in Educational Institutions?**

Organizational readiness for change is significantly influenced by cultural and contextual factors, as demonstrated by multiple studies across different sectors. Research in Arab Israeli elementary schools revealed that teachers' pedagogical beliefs and cultural traditionalism played a crucial role in their resistance to educational innovations such as playful pedagogy and inquiry-based learning (Vasel, 2025). Similarly, in the Philadelphia District Education's Office, policy implementation faced challenges due to staff perceptions of leadership style, training adequacy, and internal transparency (Vilcić et al., 2019).

These findings align with the conceptual framework of leadership, which emphasizes the interaction between teacher attitudes readiness and organizational readiness including leadership support and policy alignment (Kwok & Wang, 2023). Collectively, these studies highlight that cultural norms, leadership approaches, and structural support systems are critical in determining whether change initiatives gain traction or encounter resistance.

The leadership role in fostering readiness for change is further underscored by research on learning ecosystems and higher education institutions. In Italy and Spain, ecological leadership characterized by shared purpose, trust, and collaborative culture was found to nurture sustainable learning environments (Iglesias Vidal et al., 2025). Conversely, in Nigerian higher education, academic leaders faced systemic barriers such as economic constraints, political interference, and resource shortages, which hindered change implementation (Adewale & Ghavifekr, 2025).

These contrasting cases suggest that while distributed and adaptive leadership can enhance readiness, external systemic challenges (e.g., funding limitations,

governance issues) may undermine even well-designed initiatives. The importance of aligning leadership strategies with organizational culture and resource availability is further supported by grassroots change efforts in universities, where bottom-up initiatives succeeded by engaging faculty in values-driven reforms (Forsyth et al., 2024).

Resource allocation and disciplinary contexts also shape readiness for change, particularly in academic settings. A study on curriculum internationalization found that academic staff were not inherently resistant to change but required strategic alignment with disciplinary needs and adequate leadership support (van den Hende et al., 2024). This aligns with observations from work-based leadership interventions, where structured reflection on team dynamics improved adaptability and collective problem-solving (Youngblood et al., 2025). These findings suggest that systemic readiness depends on integrating change strategies with core organizational processes, ensuring resource availability, and fostering continuous learning. The interplay between individual agency and structural support emerges as a recurring theme, reinforcing the need for multidimensional approaches to change management.

### **4.3 RQ 3: How Does Stakeholder Engagement Influence the Success of Change Initiatives?**

Effective stakeholder engagement emerges as a critical determinant of successful organizational change, particularly in initiatives addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Research on equity-centered change projects in STEM departments highlights the necessity of integrating intersectional power dynamics with learning and change theories to understand faculty experiences (Davis et al., 2025). Findings reveal that faculty members involved in such projects often face challenges shaped by identity and institutional power structures, underscoring the importance of inclusive engagement strategies.

Similarly, in community colleges, administrators leading racial justice initiatives report feelings of isolation and burnout due to inadequate institutional support and resistance from stakeholders (Felix et al., 2025). These studies collectively emphasize that meaningful stakeholder participation, coupled with leadership commitment, is essential for sustaining equity-focused reforms. Without addressing power imbalances and fostering collaborative environments, change efforts risk stagnation or failure.

The role of communication and transparency in stakeholder engagement further influences the outcomes of organizational change. In the Philadelphia District Education's Office, policy reforms were more successful when staff perceived opportunities for input and clear communication during implementation (Vilciã et al., 2025). This aligns with findings from responsible management education, where faculty in PRME-affiliated business schools reported greater institutional support for integrating sustainability concepts into curricula (Eustachio et al., 2024).

These cases demonstrate that transparent communication and participatory decision making enhance stakeholder buy-in, thereby facilitating smoother

transitions. Conversely, inconsistencies in messaging or limited engagement opportunities can lead to skepticism and resistance, as observed in both legal and educational settings. The evidence suggests that structured feedback mechanisms and leadership accountability are pivotal in maintaining stakeholder trust throughout change processes.

Institutional support and resource allocation also play a decisive role in enabling effective stakeholder engagement. Research on PRME business schools indicates that top-management backing significantly increases faculty willingness to adopt sustainability-related teaching practices (Eustachio et al., 2024). This parallels findings from community colleges, where equity leaders stressed the need for systemic support to mitigate burnout and sustain long-term change (Martorell et al., 2025).

The interplay between leadership commitment and stakeholder involvement is further evident in STEM departments, where faculty engagement in DEI initiatives required alignment with institutional priorities (Davis et al., 2025). These insights highlight that successful change incorporation depends on engaging stakeholders and on providing them with adequate resources, recognition, and institutional alignment. Without such support, even well-intentioned initiatives may falter due to disengagement or resource constraints.

## **5. Conclusion**

Effective leadership styles, particularly transformational, distributive, and adaptive approaches, are crucial in facilitating successful organizational change by fostering employee motivation, inclusivity, and resilience. By prioritizing transparent communication and collaborative decision-making, leaders can significantly enhance employee support for change initiatives, ultimately driving institutional success across various sectors.

The successful implementation of change initiatives within organizations is profoundly shaped by cultural norms, leadership styles, and resource availability, as evidenced by diverse studies across educational contexts. By recognizing the intricate interplay between individual readiness and systemic support, stakeholders can better navigate the complexities of change management, ultimately fostering environments conducive to innovation and growth.

Adequate stakeholder engagement, characterized by transparent communication, institutional support, and a commitment to addressing power dynamics, is essential for the success of organizational change initiatives focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Without these critical elements, efforts to implement meaningful reforms risk stagnation and failure, underscoring the need for a collaborative and well-resourced approach to drive sustainable change. Overall, the synthesis shows that leadership is the most effective when it explicitly links to organizational changes.

## **6. Conflict of Interest**

The authors stated that they have no interest conflicts relating to this research.

## 7. Acknowledgments

This study could be an extension of the prior study. To this end, the researcher would like to express a genuine gratitude to all those involved in the organization and any other parties that would have helped in establishing this research.

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