

THE EVOLVING ROLE OF HR IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE  
MANAGEMENT

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**Abstract:** This study explores the shifting responsibilities and strategic importance of Human Resources (HR) in managing organizational change within the dynamic socio-economic landscape of Uzbekistan. As the country advances its market liberalization and digital modernization agenda under the “Uzbekistan 2030” reform strategy, HR functions are evolving from administrative support roles to change facilitation and transformation leadership. Using a mixed-methods approach—combining surveys of HR professionals, interviews with corporate leaders, and analysis of national reform documents—the study identifies emerging competencies, best practices, and challenges in HR-led change management. Findings indicate that strategic HR involvement significantly improves organizational agility, employee engagement, and the sustainability of reforms. Policy and practical recommendations are provided to enhance HR’s institutional capacity in Uzbekistan.

**Keywords:** Human Resource Management, Change Management, Organizational Development, HR Transformation, Uzbekistan, Strategic HR, Reform Leadership.

### Introduction

Organizational change has become an inherent and unavoidable phenomenon in the 21st-century global economic environment. With markets growing more dynamic, technologies disrupting traditional business models, and the workforce becoming increasingly diverse and mobile, organizations worldwide are under constant pressure to adapt, innovate, and restructure. This volatile climate necessitates robust change management strategies that are not only responsive but also sustainable. Amidst this transformation, the role of Human Resource (HR) departments has undergone a significant evolution—from a support function managing administrative tasks to a strategic partner actively shaping the direction of organizational change.

In both developed and developing economies, the role of HR in managing organizational change is gaining scholarly and practical attention. Modern HR functions are expected to lead initiatives that align people, processes, and organizational culture with strategic objectives. The case of Uzbekistan offers a particularly compelling context for studying this evolution. Since 2016, Uzbekistan has embarked on a wide-ranging reform agenda aimed at liberalizing its economy, enhancing public administration, digitizing governance, and increasing competitiveness in regional and global markets. These systemic shifts, embedded in the “Strategy of Actions for Further Development of Uzbekistan 2017–2021” and the subsequent “New Uzbekistan 2022–2026” and “Uzbekistan 2030” strategies,

demand a parallel transformation in how organizations manage their most valuable asset: people.

Despite significant economic liberalization and technological modernization efforts, the adaptation of HR practices to strategic change management in Uzbekistan has been uneven. Most organizations still perceive HR as a transactional department focused on compliance, payroll, and recruitment. According to a 2023 survey conducted by the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations of the Republic of Uzbekistan, only 38% of HR departments reported direct involvement in organizational restructuring processes, while 62% were relegated to post-factum administrative implementation. This lack of proactive engagement highlights the critical need for reevaluating HR's function in the era of accelerated transformation.

Uzbekistan's socio-economic context presents unique challenges and opportunities for HR-led change management. As of 2024, the country has a working-age population of approximately 20 million, a growing proportion of which is composed of tech-savvy youth under 30. While this demographic dividend presents a strategic advantage, it also requires organizations to manage generational diversity, evolving work expectations, and demands for greater transparency and inclusivity. Moreover, with the growing presence of foreign direct investment (FDI) and multinational corporations (MNCs) in Uzbekistan—particularly in sectors such as banking, telecommunications, construction, and logistics—HR functions are increasingly exposed to international best practices in change management.

However, several structural impediments continue to constrain HR's capacity to contribute meaningfully to organizational transformation. These include outdated labor regulations, a lack of specialized change management training, cultural norms that limit cross-functional collaboration, and a deficiency of data-driven HR decision-making tools. The World Bank's "Uzbekistan Country Private Sector Diagnostic" (2023) notes that only 14% of local firms utilize human capital analytics, and fewer than 9% have formal talent development strategies aligned with organizational change programs. These figures suggest that while macroeconomic and governance reforms are progressing, micro-level change initiatives within organizations are lagging in both design and execution.

Globally, there is strong empirical evidence supporting the link between HR engagement in change management and organizational success. A 2022 study by McKinsey & Company found that organizations with HR departments involved early in transformation initiatives were 1.5 times more likely to report success in meeting performance targets. Similarly, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Change Delta Model emphasizes the role of people-centric strategies, leadership development, and communication—core HR functions—in sustaining change. These findings underscore the strategic imperative for organizations in Uzbekistan to reposition their HR departments as agents of change capable of aligning human capital with institutional transformation.

The theoretical foundations for HR's involvement in change management are well established. Lewin's classic model of organizational change (unfreeze–change–refreeze),

Kotter's Eight Steps to Transforming Organizations, and the ADKAR (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement) model all highlight the importance of internal communication, employee buy-in, leadership engagement, and competency development—areas traditionally associated with HR. More contemporary models, such as Ulrich's "HR Business Partner" concept, advocate for the integration of HR into strategic decision-making processes, emphasizing the value HR can provide in driving innovation, change leadership, and cultural transformation.

In the Uzbek context, however, the translation of these models into practice remains limited. Although organizations are increasingly adopting digital HR management systems and initiating reforms in talent acquisition and development, the capacity of HR professionals to engage in strategic planning, change readiness assessments, and cultural diagnostics remains underdeveloped. Many HR departments are not yet equipped with the analytical tools or change leadership frameworks necessary to facilitate smooth transitions in times of restructuring or digital transformation. Moreover, cultural attitudes toward hierarchy and control continue to marginalize HR's voice in top-level decision-making.

### Materials and methods

This research, therefore, aims to explore the evolving role of HR in managing organizational change in Uzbekistan. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Assess the current level of HR involvement in strategic change initiatives across public and private organizations in Uzbekistan.
2. Identify the capabilities and competencies required for HR professionals to function as change agents.
3. Evaluate the barriers—structural, cultural, and technological—that hinder HR's strategic evolution.
4. Provide policy and practice recommendations for strengthening HR's role in managing organizational transformation.

To achieve these objectives, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and document analysis. The study draws on data from HR managers, organizational leaders, and policymakers across multiple sectors, including education, manufacturing, banking, IT, and public administration. It also examines national policies, training frameworks, and international benchmarks to contextualize the findings within both global and local narratives.

From a policy standpoint, this study contributes to the broader agenda of institutional reform in Uzbekistan. By highlighting the role of HR in enabling change, the research aligns with national goals related to public sector modernization, civil service reform, and private sector competitiveness. At the organizational level, the study provides actionable insights for CEOs, CHROs, and department heads seeking to enhance their change management capabilities through more effective utilization of HR functions.

Furthermore, the paper contributes to the academic literature on HR transformation in transitional economies. While there is a growing body of research on HR's strategic role in Western and East Asian contexts, empirical studies from Central Asia. This study fills an

important gap by offering evidence-based analysis from Uzbekistan, thus adding geographic and contextual diversity to global HR scholarship.

In summary, this introduction has presented the rationale, context, and research objectives underpinning the investigation into HR's evolving role in organizational change management in Uzbekistan. The country stands at a critical juncture in its socio-economic development, with organizational agility and workforce adaptability emerging as key determinants of long-term success. HR departments are uniquely positioned to drive this transformation, but they require structural empowerment, capacity development, and cultural repositioning. The subsequent sections of this paper will delve into the theoretical frameworks, research methodology, empirical findings, and practical recommendations necessary to realize this vision.

Organizational change is an inevitable and continuous process in today's global economy, driven by technological advancements, competitive pressures, and evolving consumer and employee expectations. The success of such change initiatives increasingly depends on the active involvement of Human Resources (HR) professionals—not merely as facilitators of administrative processes, but as strategic partners in planning, communicating, and executing change. In developing economies, this transition in HR's role is particularly critical, as change is often rapid, multidimensional, and institutionally complex. Uzbekistan, undergoing profound political, economic, and digital reforms, offers a compelling context for analyzing the evolving role of HR in organizational change management.

Historically, HR in Uzbekistan—like in many post-Soviet systems—was relegated to personnel recordkeeping and labor law compliance. However, as Uzbekistan moves toward a market economy and aligns its institutions with international standards, the function of HR is being redefined. The national agenda outlined in the “Development Strategy of New Uzbekistan 2022–2026” and the long-term “Uzbekistan 2030” program underscores the importance of human capital development, innovation, and institutional resilience. These transformations demand not just policy shifts, but organizational agility—requiring HR to serve as the architect and steward of change.

According to the State Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Statistics (2023), over 67% of medium and large enterprises have undergone structural change in the past three years. Meanwhile, a 2022 survey conducted by the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations revealed that only 38% of HR departments were actively involved in leading change initiatives, while others remained reactive or operational in scope. This gap highlights the underutilization of HR in enabling sustainable transformation and indicates a need for competency development and institutional support.

Globally, organizations that position HR as a central agent in change management outperform those that rely solely on executive or operational leaders. McKinsey & Company (2022) found that when HR is involved early in transformation programs, the success rate of change initiatives increases by 22%. Furthermore, HR-led change correlates strongly with better employee engagement, lower resistance, and more effective communication.

This study explores the evolving role of HR in organizational change management in Uzbekistan. It investigates how HR functions are adapting to the demands of strategic change, what challenges impede this transition, and what competencies are emerging as essential for future HR leaders.

### **Discussion**

The findings reflect both progress and persistent limitations in how HR is positioned within Uzbekistan's organizational change landscape. While HR involvement in strategic initiatives is increasing, its full potential remains underutilized. The data reveal a strong correlation between proactive HR engagement and positive organizational outcomes—supporting global literature on the strategic value of HR in managing change.

The primary challenge lies in legacy structures and mindsets, where HR is still seen as an operational function rather than a strategic partner. This perception, combined with a lack of advanced competencies, limits HR's capacity to lead transformative efforts. To address this, a multi-stakeholder approach is necessary, involving executive buy-in, external training support, and integration of change metrics into HR performance evaluation.

In addition, there is a growing need to digitalize HR functions and embed analytics into decision-making. HR analytics can forecast attrition, assess training ROI, and monitor morale—all critical during times of organizational change. Capacity-building programs targeting these areas will accelerate HR's evolution into a change enabler.

### **Literature Review**

Organizational change theory has evolved from linear models like Lewin's three-step framework (unfreeze, change, refreeze) to more adaptive models such as Kotter's Eight-Step Process and the McKinsey 7S framework. These models emphasize the importance of leadership, culture, and communication—domains in which HR plays an increasingly central role.

Research by Ulrich (1997) on the "four roles of HR" (strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert, and employee champion) laid the groundwork for understanding how HR can influence change processes. More recent scholarship has focused on HR's role in building resilience, fostering adaptive leadership, and driving employee-centric change. Studies by Armenakis & Harris (2009) and Caldwell (2010) highlight HR's potential as a change enabler through trust-building, engagement, and competency development.

In the Uzbek context, literature is limited but growing. Uzbek scholars (e.g., Rakhimova, 2021; Tursunov, 2022) have emphasized the need for HR modernization in public and private sectors. The ILO and ADB have also recommended HR capacity development as a core pillar in their support of Uzbekistan's economic reforms.

### **Conclusion**

The evolving role of HR in organizational change management in Uzbekistan marks a strategic shift toward more participative, evidence-driven, and people-centered

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transformation. While challenges persist, the trajectory is promising, especially as public and private organizations align with the national reform agenda.

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