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Article

Humanizing leadership for effective change management: Exploring the impact of organizational culture as a moderator

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Abstract: This research aimed to investigate the role of humanizing leadership in enhancing the effectiveness of change management strategies within organizations. Specifically, it focused on how humanizing leadership influences change outcomes and the extent to which organizational culture moderates this relationship. The study addressed critical questions regarding the impact of leadership behaviors, such as model vulnerability, emotional intelligence, open communication, and psychological safety on effective change management and employee performance. A quantitative approach was employed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the phenomena. Quantitative data were collected from a sample of 325 employees through surveys that measured perceptions of Humanizing leadership behaviors, organizational culture, and change outcomes. Data was analyzed by IBM SPSS 26.0. The findings revealed that humanizing leadership behaviors significantly enhances the success of change initiatives, primarily through improved employee engagement and reduced resistance. Organizational culture was found to play a moderating role, amplifying the positive effects of empathetic and inclusive leadership practices. The study provides actionable recommendations for organizational leaders and managers to foster a culture that supports humanizing leadership. By adopting leadership strategies that emphasize vulnerability, empathy, and inclusivity, organizations can enhance their adaptability and resilience against the backdrop of continuous change. These findings are particularly valuable for enhancing managerial practices and informing policy within corporate settings.

Keywords: humanizing leadership; model vulnerability; emotional intelligence; open communication; psychological safety; effective change management; employee performance

1. Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of today's business environment, particularly post the COVID-19 pandemic, the imperative for leadership to embody empathy and humanity has become increasingly apparent. As noted by Holt (2022) and corroborated by Cantarelli (2023), this humanizing aspect of leadership is essential not only for enhancing collective productivity but also for building a more profitable and sustainable business model. However, despite the rising acknowledgment of the importance of humanizing leadership, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning its impact on effective change management and the potential moderating role of organizational culture in this relationship. Recent contributions, including those of Gotsis and Grimani (2023) and Khilji (2022), have emphasized the need for a more nuanced exploration of these themes, particularly within diverse organizational settings.

Scholarly discourse in recent years has started to critically evaluate the traditional approaches to leadership. Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2015) have critiqued the trend towards dehumanization in leadership, where leaders may become detached from their community, contextual realities, and personal identities. Conversely, Khilji and List (2021) and MacLeod (2019) advocate for a humanizing leadership paradigm, emphasizing the importance of positive relationships, reflective practices, and an inclusive mindset that values every individual within the organization. Such approaches underscore the necessity for leaders to forge deep connections with their team members, thereby creating supportive environments that enhance employee well-being and facilitate organizational change.

The research on change management underscores the significant role that humanizing leadership plays in bolstering employee engagement, commitment, and satisfaction—factors that are vital for the successful implementation of change (Cantarelli, 2023; Leroy et al., 2015; Munir and Nielsen, 2009). Humanizing leaders are characterized by their empathetic communication, supportive leadership styles, and genuine concern for employee welfare, which foster an atmosphere of trust and psychological safety.

In this context, organizational culture is posited as a moderator that influences the integration and reception of humanizing leadership within an organization. A positive workplace culture, which encourages innovation, adaptability, and collaboration, can amplify the effectiveness of humanizing leadership in driving change (Flemming, 2017). In contrast, a culture that is hierarchical or resistant to change may impede these efforts (Ford et al., 2008).

The significance of this study lies in its potential to address critical gaps in understanding the practical and theoretical implications of humanizing leadership on change management. By focusing on the food and beverage industry in Saudi Arabia, particularly on SADAFCO, this research offers novel insights into leadership dynamics within an organizational context. Understanding how organizational culture moderates the relationship between leadership and change management provides significant contributions to the field, both in addressing practical challenges and advancing academic discourse on leadership. Furthermore, this research highlights how leadership approaches emphasizing empathy and inclusivity can drive organizational performance and sustainability. The study aims to achieve several objectives. First, it examines the impact of humanizing leadership on the effectiveness of change management, particularly in the context of SADAFCO. Second, it investigates the role of leadership components—model vulnerability, emotional intelligence, open communication, and psychological safety—in facilitating successful organizational change. Third, the moderating effect of organizational culture on the relationship between humanizing leadership and effective change management is explored. Finally, the research evaluates how effective change management contributes to improved employee performance. These objectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how leadership strategies can transform organizational outcomes, emphasizing the critical interplay between leadership, culture, and employee well-being.

Given this background, we raise and try to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How does humanizing leadership affect the effectiveness of change management?

RQ2: To what extent does organizational culture moderate the relationship between humanizing leadership and effective change management? Additionally, what are the direct and indirect impacts of this moderation?

RQ3: What role does model vulnerability play in influencing effective change management?

RQ4: How does employee intelligence contribute to effective change management?

RQ5: What is the impact of effective change management on employee performance?

2. Theoretical literature review

In today's rapidly evolving business landscape, effective change management has become a strategic imperative for organizations aiming to adapt, innovate, and stay competitive (Gardner et al., 2005; Kotter, 2008). Central to successful change initiatives is the role of leadership, particularly humanizing leadership, which prioritizes empathy, trust, collaboration, and employee well-being during periods of transition (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005). This theoretical review delves into the impact of humanizing leadership on change management effectiveness, with a specific focus on how organizational culture acts as a moderator in shaping this relationship.

Humanizing leadership emphasizes relational and ethical dimensions, contrasting traditional hierarchical paradigms (MacLeod, 2019). Rooted in servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977), transformational leadership theory (Bass and Riggio, 2006), and authentic leadership theory (Avolio and Gardner, 2005), humanizing leadership incorporates behaviors like active listening, empathy, and empowerment, fostering trust and collaboration during organizational change (Gardner et al., 2005; Montag and Smith, 2016). This leadership style addresses resistance to change by creating an environment of psychological safety and inclusion (Leroy et al., 2015; Schaubroeck and Walumbwa, 2009). Theoretical frameworks like Schein's Organizational Culture Model (2010) and the Competing Values Framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2011) provide a foundation for exploring how cultural dimensions shape the effectiveness of humanizing leadership.

2.1. Humanizing leadership and change management

Humanizing leadership is characterized by a commitment to fostering relational trust, addressing resistance, and enhancing employee engagement during transitions (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005). MacLeod (2019) emphasizes that this leadership approach challenges traditional hierarchical models by prioritizing ethical behavior and relational interactions. Empirical research supports the association between humanizing leadership and positive change management outcomes, demonstrating that leaders who exhibit empathy and transparency achieve higher employee buy-in and reduced resistance (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Montag and Smith, 2016). These behaviors align with organizational values, creating a supportive environment for change (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Gardner et al., 2005).

2.2. Organizational culture as a moderator

Organizational culture is a critical determinant of leadership effectiveness, influencing employee attitudes and organizational outcomes (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Schein, 2010). **Figure 1** displays as a moderator, culture can either reinforce or diminish the impact of humanizing leadership on change management (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Gardner et al., 2005). Research highlights that transparent and collaborative cultures amplify the effectiveness of humanizing leadership, fostering psychological safety, and reducing resistance to change (Schaubroeck and Walumbwa, 2009; Schein, 2010). Conversely, rigid or hierarchical cultures may hinder these benefits, necessitating alignment between cultural values and leadership behaviors for successful change outcomes (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Gardner et al., 2005).

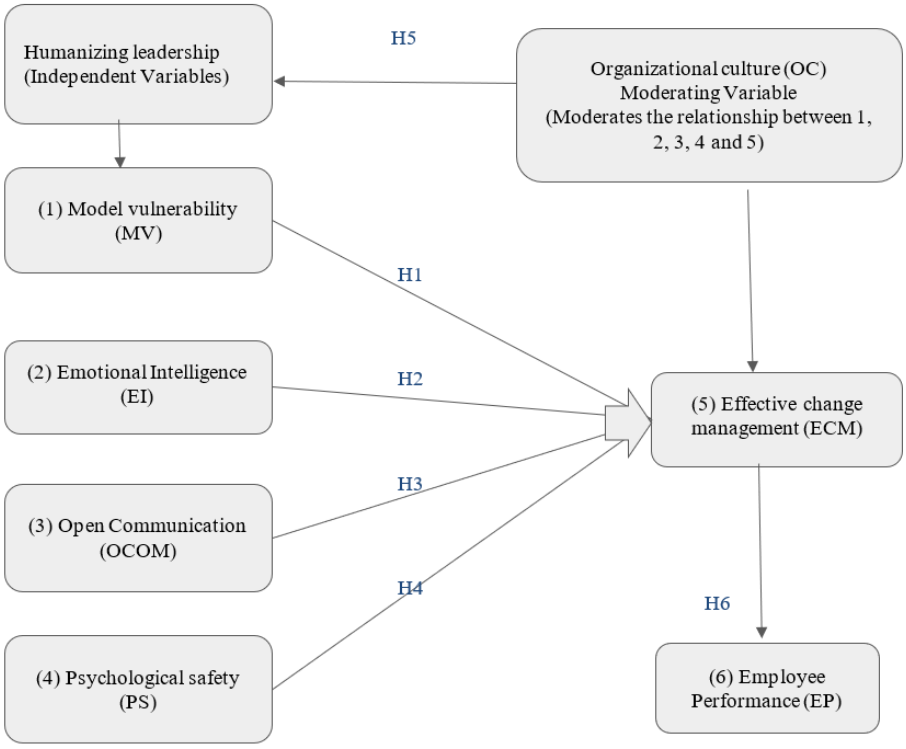

Figure 1. Depicts the integrated structural model that includes all the hypotheses.

2.3. Hypotheses development

H_1: Model vulnerability positively impacts effective change management within organizations.

Leadership vulnerability within the workplace was explored by Claeys (2017). He identified stages from unnoticed to supposed vulnerability. Aspects such as self-awareness and emotional regulation decide if vulnerability is perceived as a weakness or strength. However, revealing one vulnerability might also function as an impression management technique. For example, one might endeavor to stimulate favors from others by supplicating their weaknesses (Roberts, 2005). Gavin and Mayer (2005) focused on distinguishing passive and active manners of vulnerability. In active vulnerability, an individual shows active vulnerability behavior, whereas an employee can renounce self-protective conduct to accept vulnerability. Similarly,

Burke et al. (2007) distinguish the active reveal of sensitive data from reliance-cantered behaviors. The shared knowledge's nature in disclosure-cantered trust can be both personal and professional. Specific leadership was labeled by Möllering and Tsui-Auch (2010) as vulnerable behavior, capable of convincing followers to trust the leader. It was discovered that consultative decision-making, sharing mutual principles with team members, and modeling and communicating a value-driven collective vision greatly influence the trust of followers in leaders (Nienaber et al., 2015).

H_2: Emotional intelligence positively impacts effective change management within organizations.

It was stated by Wijewantha (2018) that empathy does not prove to be a character trait. Therefore, every individual is capable of developing empathy through a fleeting decision. Parks (2015) maintains that literature regarding social support shows that the most effective form of empathy is empathic listening. This behavior is most useful in situations of difficulty and distress. In an empirical context, empathic listening proves to be very helpful in conflict management, the success of a leader, the creation of a client-based business model, and the promotion of intimacy (Bodie, 2011). Other than these employee-level individual consequences of empathic listening, positive consequences at the organizational level have also been identified by Brownell (2008), such as improved performance, development, and organizational communication. Leaders seeking intercultural proficiency in an organization also require close associations with diverse people. The capability of comprehending the emotions of others and expressing empathy promotes cross-cultural adaptability and communication (Mor et al., 2013). Jit et al. (2017) say that empathic leaders instill a feeling of collaboration and cohesiveness thereby enhancing charitable behavior among followers, which leads to improvement in the scale of inclusion and diversity in the organization.

H_3: Open communication positively impacts effective change management within organizations.

Effective communication ensures that employees understand the rationale behind the proposed change, feel valued and heard, and are motivated to actively participate (Ford et al., 2008). Humanizing leaders can foster transparent and open communication to enhance employees' emotional connection to the change initiative (Leroy et al., 2015). Moreover, effective change leadership relies on the values, actions, and attitudes of leaders, rather than solely relying on the situational context. True effectiveness as a leader can only be achieved when one surpasses the limitations of other leadership styles. In complex settings, effective leadership encompasses dimensions such as trust, authenticity, hope, integrity, active listening, and addressing the genuine needs of followers. Without these factors, persistent resistance to change cannot be overcome (Levay, 2010). Gillespie and Mann (2007), associate open communication of ideas, values, and vision, and delegation of responsibility and power to team members with a leader's vulnerability. Thus, leadership communication is essential during change, as it sets the direction and tone for the whole program while addressing natural worries during the change process (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2017). Empirical studies have consistently shown that open communication is crucial in change management. Ford et al. (2008) and Leroy et al.

(2015) highlight how humanizing leaders who practice open communication can enhance employees' emotional connection to change initiatives, thus motivating them to actively participate. Gillespie and Mann (2007) link open communication with a leader's ability to delegate responsibility and power effectively, which is essential for fostering a collaborative environment during change processes.

H_4: Psychological safety positively impacts effective change management within organizations

It was stated by Schaubroeck and Walumbwa (2009) that establishing psychological safety comprises both positive and negative consequences for leaders. On one hand, it generates favorable learning outcomes. On the other side, the leader must be comfortable permitting dissent, resisting the urge to unfairly use his or her power, and respecting unexpected or unwanted feedback (Inandi et al., 2020). More recently, Harkiolakis and Komodromos have discussed the vital role of psychological safety and security in the context of knowledge workers during the post-lockdown era (2023). Their paper underscored the importance of organizations fostering environments that prioritize well-being and mental capital to combat such issues, suggesting that enhancing job satisfaction and job security could be achieved through empathetic management, flexible work arrangements, and support for social interaction and professional growth. Contrarily, according to Mayer et al. (1995), characteristics like reliability, honesty, and skills are the objectives of Managers for the staff which builds up confidence in them. The research by Maximo and colleagues found that authentic leadership significantly fosters trust in supervisors and enhances psychological safety, which in turn, indirectly boosts work engagement by creating a supportive and trustworthy work environment. This linkage underscores the pivotal role of authentic leadership in cultivating an atmosphere where trust and psychological safety thrive, thereby promoting higher levels of work engagement among employees.

H_5: There is a positive moderating effect of Organizational Culture on the relationship between Humanizing Leadership and effective change management, enhancing the impact of Humanizing Leadership.

Culture is not just a combination of a few guidelines and rules that employees follow to ensure improved performance. Organizational cultures are described as irreducibly and distinctively social phenomena, which contrasts with atomistic individualism (Solomon, 2004). Belias and Koustelios (2014) stressed the significance of transformational leadership's role, as it explores changing culture and its challenges, i.e. describing the change and utilizing organizational instruments for changing mindsets.According to Belias and Koustelios (2013), both genders perceive organizational cultures in a completely different manner. Clan culture in organizations is preferred by females, while an increasingly competitive market is preferred by males. A humanizing organizational culture enhances associability and trust, which are crucial attributes of social capital that assist leaders in achieving a common goal (Mele, 2003b).

According to Nadler et al. (2001), when there are multiple leaders present, they hold the fallacy that changing organizational culture can also change the behavior of individuals. They propose that the executive team and CEO must actively engage to ensure effectual cultural change. The emphasis of the humanizing approach is upon

the co-constitutive and relational features of leadership. Leaders must understand how they can communicate with their surroundings and collaborate with their followers to truly lead (Mele, 2003a; Shapiro, 2016). It is argued by Hogg and Van Knippenberg (2003) that the effectiveness of leadership within prominent groups is highly impacted by the way employees prototypically view their group leader. The approach of humanizing management maintains that any business enterprise is a community of individuals, which promotes unity and favors the attainment of human qualities to enhance organizational efficiency (Mele, 2003a).

H_6: Effective change management within organizations positively impacts employee performance.

Leadership acts as a crucial factor in promoting positive change in an organization and directing employees toward chosen directions to acquire overarching goals (Mansaray, 2019). It was stated by Kotter (2008) that leadership activities contribute towards managing the team and help them follow the desired direction. Moreover, a leader's actions can support and inspire the team in overcoming stumbling blocks as well. Recently, it was observed by Alqatawenh (2018) that change management proves to be among the biggest tests for leadership. It requires decisive planning and ample resources capable of dealing with external and internal variations equally within the business setting and proffering appropriate solutions simultaneously (Saira, et al., 2021). However, it is claimed by Huff and Pondy (1988) that implementing any change often leads to problems as the top management improperly frames it. That is why a change process must be guided by the involved human factors. Meanwhile, Monaci (2020) argues that the management of human resources can nurture humanizing cultures in an organization, by stressing the institutional leadership's role and the moral identity of employees in facilitating effectual change.

3. Methodology

Data sampling and collection

The research employs a cross-sectional design, focusing solely on quantitative data collection and analysis to investigate how humanizing leadership affects the effectiveness of change management. Stratified random sampling is utilized to divide the population into strata based on industry sector or firm size. Within each stratum, participants are purposively selected using specific criteria directly related to the research question, ensuring the inclusion of individuals with relevant experience or expertise in key factors being studied, such as Model Vulnerability, Emotional Intelligence, Open Communication, Psychological Safety, and Organizational Culture as a moderator. This sampling strategy ensures the representativeness of the sample while maintaining focus on the variables of interest. The sample size is calculated using robust statistical formulae that account for population variability, desired confidence levels, and acceptable margins of error, ensuring the methodological rigor of the study.

Data will be collected from employees working across various organizational locations, including the Jeddah headquarters, distribution branches within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), manufacturing facilities in Jeddah and Dammam,

Jeddah Central Warehouse (JCW), and the distribution branch located outside KSA. The surveys are distributed online and through other digital platforms, allowing for wide coverage and efficient data collection. The structured survey is meticulously designed to gather comprehensive data on the primary research variables, ensuring alignment with the study's objectives. It incorporates multiple sections targeting perceptions of humanizing leadership, communication effectiveness, organizational culture, and change outcomes.

The survey instrument includes closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items, which are integral to the quantitative approach. Closed-ended questions provide a standardized set of response options, facilitating efficient data collection and enabling straightforward quantitative analysis. Likert-scale items further enhance the depth of the data by capturing participants' attitudes, opinions, and preferences on a graded continuum, offering nuanced insights into their perceptions of the study's focal variables. The primary data collected through this survey is rigorously designed to provide robust and reliable insights into the relationships among the key constructs of humanizing leadership, organizational culture, and change outcomes.

4. Result

4.1. Data analysis

This research study will use a variety of statistical methods to examine the relationship between humanizing leadership affects the effectiveness of change management Descriptivestatistics will summarize sample characteristics and variable distribution. Details of respondents are provided in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Sample demographic statistics (N = 324).

Demographic factors	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	20–29	16	4.9
	30–39	186	57.4
	40–49	95	29.3
	50 and above	27	8.3
	Total	324	100.0
Gender	Female	119	36.7
	Male	205	63.3
	Total	324	100.0
Education	PhD	12	3.7
	Master	133	41.0
	Bachelor	157	48.5
	High School	22	6.8
	Total	324	100.0

Table 1. (*Continued*).

Demographic factors	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Which of the following categories best represents your current job title/position?	Business and Management	81	25.0
	Technology and IT	17	5.2
	Human Resources	26	8.0
	Sales and Marketing	170	52.5
	Manufacturing and Engineering	26	8.0
	Finance and Accounting	4	1.2
	Total	324	100.0
How long have you been employed with the organization	1–3 years	140	43.2
	3–5 years	66	20.4
	5–10 years	65	20.1
	10–15 years	34	10.5
	15+ years	19	5.9
	Total	324	100.0
What is your level of work experience in years?	Less than 1 year	3	0.9
	1–3 years	130	40.1
	3–5 years	24	7.4
	5–10 years	34	10.5
	10–15 years	55	17.0
	15–20 years	31	9.6
	More than 20 years	47	14.5
	Total	324	100.0
What is your job location?	Jeddah HQ	56	17.3
	Distribution branch inside KSA	224	69.1
	Jeddah Factory	21	6.5
	Dammam Factory	11	3.4
	Distribution branch outside KSA	6	1.9
	JCW	6	1.9
	Total	324	100.0

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.

4.2. Measurement model

CFA was conducted to validate the measurement model, with each scale assessed based on constructs established in prior studies (Del-Castillo-Feito et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2018). Given the non-normality of the data distribution, asymptotically distribution-free estimation methods were employed to ensure accurate parameter estimation under non-normal conditions. To further ensure robustness, the Bootstrap method was utilized to generate2000bootstrap samples at a 95% confidence interval, following the recommendations of Agbedra and Oppong (2016). The model's goodness-of-fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including

the ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom (X^2/df), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The following thresholds, based on Escobedo et al. (2016) and Useche et al. (2021), were applied: X^2/df < 5, GFI, NFI, TLI, IFI, and AGFI > 0.8, and RMSEA < 0.08. In cases where RMSEA values were above the recommended range, standardized regression weights below 0.6 were examined, and theoretically justified error covariances with high modification indices were introduced to refine the model, consistent with Marsh et al. (2004).

Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with AVE values exceeding 0.5 considered acceptable. Reliability was measured using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha (α), with CR values above 0.7 and α values above 0.8 indicating strong internal consistency. Discriminant validity was established by confirming that Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) and Average Shared Variance (ASV) were lower than AVE, ensuring the distinctiveness of each construct.

4.3. Means and standard deviation

Employees' perceptions of humanizing leadership for effective change management that are rated as most important to them and their readiness for the change were determined using descriptive statistics. The descriptive table represents scores from subscales of the 324 sample when reporting the results. It is calculated descriptive statistics on employee responses to perceptions of humanizing leadership for effective change management. The mean, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, and zero-order Pearson correlations are shown in **Table 2**. A check for multi-collinearity between variables was also performed. If Pearson R-values exceed 0.90, a multi-collinearity problem will be assumed (Hair et al, 2010).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the variables.

***N* = 324**	**MV**	**EI**	**OCOM**	**PS**	**HL**	**OC**	**ECM**
Mean	2.0062	2.0031	1.7407	1.6821	1.7407	1.7994	1.8179
Std. Deviation	0.71686	1.00924	0.65888	0.81824	0.65888	0.66760	0.67291
Variance	0.514	1.019	0.434	0.670	0.434	0.446	0.453
Skewness	0.752	0.594	1.184	0.851	1.184	1.133	0.602
Kurtosis	1.651	−0.758	4.414	−0.208	4.414	4.094	1.070
Correlation							
HL	MV		EI	OCOM	PS	OC	ECM
MV	1		0.678**	662**	581**	0.566**	0.434**
EI	0.490**		1	0.459**	497*	0.636**	0.544**
OCOM	0.661**		0.467**	1	567*	0.736**	0.683**
PS	0.590**		0.972**	0.467**	1	0.866**	0.644**
OC	0.496**		0.663**	0.365**	667***	1	0.482**
ECM	0.663**		0.439**	667*	0.459**	0.366**	1

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.
Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level. MV = Model vulnerability, EI = Emotional intelligence, OCOM = Open Communication, PS = Psychological safety, HL = humanizing leadership, OC = Organizational Culture, ECM = Effective change management.

4.4. Correlation coefficient

Based on the above **Table 2** MV-ECM—Correlation coefficient of 0.434** indicates a moderate positive correlation between Model Vulnerability (MV) and (ECM). EI–ECM Correlation coefficient of 0.544** indicates a strong positive correlation between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and (ECM). OCOM-ECM—A correlation coefficient of 0.683** indicates a strong positive correlation between Open Communication (OCOM) and (ECM). PS-ECM-Correlation coefficient of 0.644** indicates a strong positive correlation between Psychological Safety (PS) and (ECM). OC-ECM Correlation coefficient of 0.482** indicates a moderate positive correlation between Organizational Culture (OC) and (ECM). EI, OCOM, and PS show strong positive correlations with ECM, indicating that these factors are closely related to effective change management.MV and OC also exhibit moderate positive correlations with effective change management suggesting a moderate relationship with these variables. The correlations in the table suggest complex relationships among the variables. Humanizing Leadership variables (Emotional Intelligence, Open Communication, Psychological Safety, and Organizational Culture) and Effective Change Management appear to be closely intertwined, with some variables showing stronger associations than others.

4.5. Factor analysis exploratory

The researchers used principal component factoring to condense a total of 35 Likert scale items into the three required variables. For change perceptions of humanizing leadership for effective change management, By examining the proportion of variance among variables that may be attributed to common variance, the KMO test determines the suitability of data for factor analysis. The KMO statistic, which ranges from 0 to 1, serves as an indicator of sampling adequacy. Higher KMO values, particularly those close to 1, suggest that the data is more appropriate for factor analysis. Generally, a KMO value exceeding 0.6 is deemed acceptable, while values above 0.8 are considered very good (Kaiser, 1974).The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy values for Model Vulnerability, Emotional Intelligence, Open Communication, Psychological Safety, Organizational Culture (as a moderator on Humanizing Leadership and Effective Change Management), and Effective Change Management were 0.735, 0.781, 0.745, 0.712, 0.706, 0.783, and 0.820, respectively. These values exceed the threshold of 0.70 (as shown in **Table 3**), indicating that each variable is adequately measured by a sufficient number of items. The results from the KMO and Bartlett's tests suggest that the questionnaire data are appropriate for confirmatory factor analysis. All items were provided in a pool format. First, we concluded an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to generate the factors using IBM SPSS 25. Two items had to be removed because of very low factor loadings.EFA provides six factors with 93.2% of the variance extracted.

Table 3. Summary of exploratory factor analysis results to examine the validity of the questionnaire.

	KMO	Bartlett's test chi-square	Df.	Significance
Model vulnerability	0.735	244.050	10	0.010
Emotional intelligence	0.781	1105.092	10	0.007
Open Communication	0.745	733.217	10	0.012
Psychological safety	0.712	978.680	10	0.020
Organizational Culture	0.716	509.634	10	0.021
Effective change management	0.783	794.007	10	0.011
Employee performance	0.820	948.100	10	0.014

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.

4.6. Rotation method

Figure 2 shows a scree plot. The outcomes were obtained through orthogonal relation with varimax rotation and all factor loadings greater than 0.300 were retained as principal component analysis. The above eigenvalues indicate the amount of variance explained by each factor. Higher eigenvalues suggest that the factor accounts for more variance in the data. A scree plot displays the eigenvalues in descending order.The scree plot is used in factor analysis to guide the selection of the optimal number of factors to retain, ensuring a balance between model complexity and explanatory power. Next, **Figure 3** we ran a confirmatory factor analysis for individual items to revalidate the Exploratory Factor Analysis. Redundant items in the questionnaire that measure the same underlying concept have been removed. Factor loadings are based on a subset of these items to avoid redundancy and improve model parsimony. Items that have shown significant correlations with the latent construct in previous exploratory factor analyses (EFAs) or pilot studies are included in factor loadings.

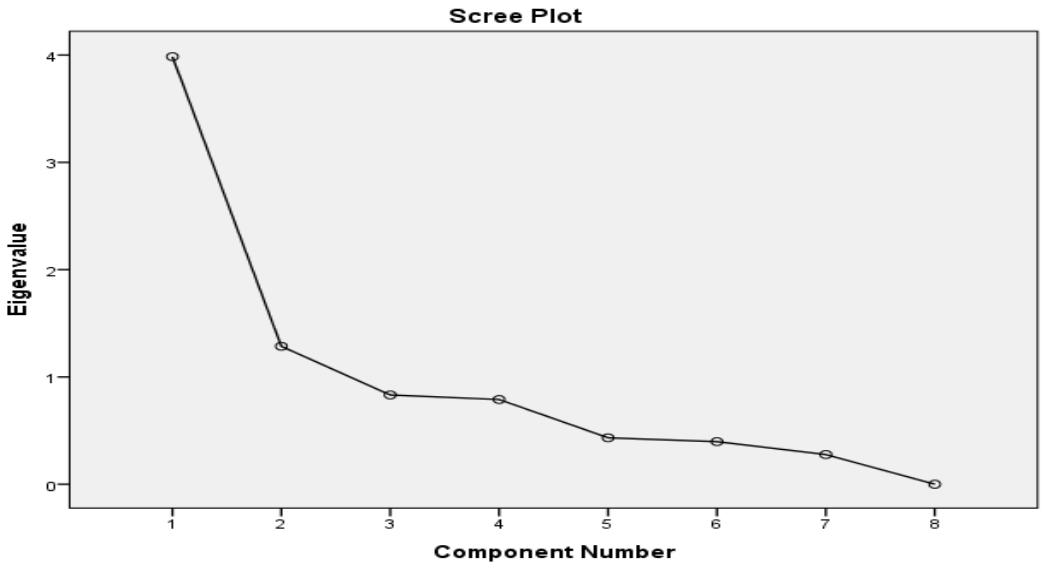

Figure 2. Scree plot: Eigenvalue for factor analysis.

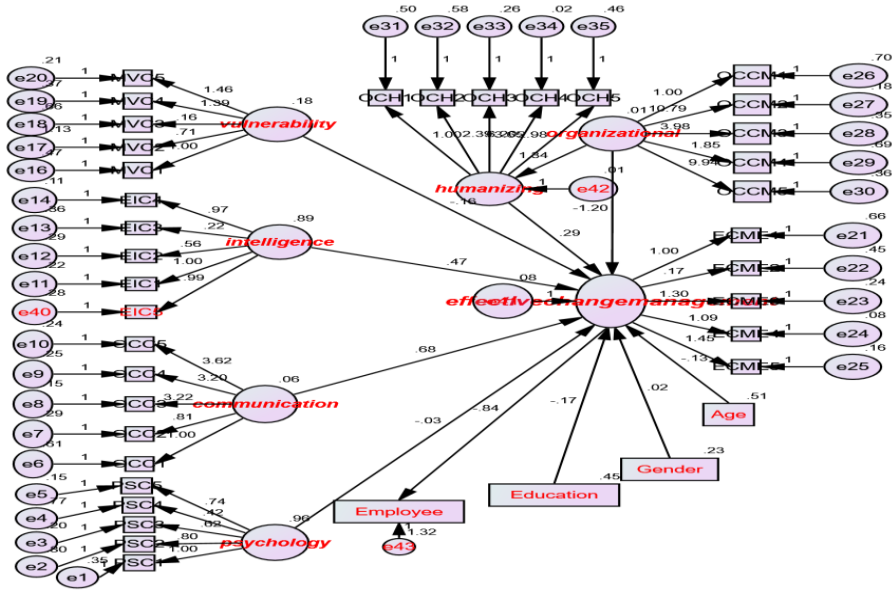

Figure 3. The outcomes of confirmatory factor analysis (measurement model).

Table 4 of The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) measurement model outlines the standardized factor loadings for each item on its corresponding latent construct. High factor loadings, typically above 0.5 or 0.6, indicate a strong association between the item and the latent construct. Conversely, items with low loadings may suggest poor measurement or conceptual issues. As shown in **Table 4**, items with factor loadings above 0.7 demonstrate good validity of the measures. The standard errors associated with factor loadings indicate the precision of these estimates; lower standard errors, as reflected in the table, suggest more precise estimates. Additionally, the *p*-value of 0.005 is below the conventional significance level of 0.05, indicating statistical significance and reinforcing the validity of the measurement model. *R*-square values represent the proportion of variance in each item explained by its corresponding latent construct and are crucial for assessing convergent validity. An *R*-square value above 0.5, or 50%, is considered quite good in CFA, **Table 4**, proposing that the model has higher values indicating better explanatory power of the construct on the item and it is a good fit for the data and that the indicators are effective in measuring the intended construct.

Table 4. Confirmatory factor analysis measurement model summary.

	Items/Statements (Finally used)	**Factor Loading**	**StandardError (SE)**	***p*-Value**	R^2
Model venerability (MV)	MV_1: Acknowledging vulnerabilities and limitations within the organization contributes to successful change management	0.754	0.052	0.021	0.682
	MV_2: Leaders in your organization openly discuss their own vulnerabilities and mistakes during change management initiatives.	0.828	0.041	0.010	0.761
	MV_3: Embracing vulnerability has led to better outcomes during change management efforts	0.786	0.115	0.041	0.632

Table 4. (*Continued*).

	Items/Statements (Finally used)	Factor Loading	StandardError (SE)	*p*-Value	R^2
Emotional Intelligence (EI)	EI_1: Empathy and understanding of leaders positively influence change management initiatives.	0.819	0.068	0.011	0.590
	EI_2: Social skills help leaders navigate resistance and conflicts during change management processes.	0.760	0.032	0.033	0.613
	EI_3: Emotional intelligence contributes to a leader's ability for effective change management	0.971	0.013	0.009	0.756
Open Communication (OCOM)	$OCOM_1$: Communication openness within the organization positively influences change management initiatives.	0.804	0.041	0.005	0.682
	$OCOM_2$: Lack of communication hinders effective change management within an organization.	0.748	0.051	0.046	0.694
	$OCOM_3$: Open communication fosters trust and engagement among team members during change management efforts	0.839	0.042	0.014	0.713
Psychological Safety (PS)	PS_1: Psychological safety influences your willingness to embrace new changes.	0.831	0.046	0.006	0.780
	PS_2: Valuing an employee's opinion during discussions about change psychologically motivates employees for change in the organization.	0.792	0.032	0.016	0.893
	PS_3: Trust among team members during change management efforts positively influence change management	0.822	0.013	0.019	0.785
Organization Culture (OC)	OC_1: Organization Cultural background influences the perception of humanizing leadership	0.789	0.022	0.008	0.763
	OC_2: Organizational culture plays an important role in motivating leaders to connect with their team on a personal level.	0.814	0.051	0.041	0.678
	OC_3: Organizational culture balances task-oriented leadership with people-oriented leadership.	0.801	0.023	0.022	0.854

Table 4. (*Continued*).

	Items/Statements (Finally used)	Factor Loading	StandardError (SE)	*p*-Value	R^2
Effective change management (ECM)	ECM_1: Effective change management contributes to employee satisfaction and retention in the organization.	0.794	0.013	0.004	0.789
	ECM_2: Recognizing and rewarding employees for successful change management efforts enhances their morale and loyalty towards the organization.	0.891	0.034	0.028	0.684
	ECM_3: Effective change management reduces stress levels and improves employee performance at work.	0.733	0.012	0.019	0.732

4.7. Cronbach's alpha (reliability)

Furthermore, for the sample reliability, Cronbach's alpha (reliability) (Dash and Paul, 2021; Hair et al., 2010; Malhotra et al., 2006), composite reliability (reliability) (Chakraborty et al., 2021; Dash and Paul, 2021; Henseler et al., 2015; Urbach and Ahlemann, 2010), average variance extracted (AVE) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) were used to assess the measurement model.

AVE values were more than 0.6 for all the constructs which surpassed the threshold for AVE i.e., 0.50 or higher. CR values exceeded the accepted threshold of 0.70, reaching above 0.8, and Cronbach's alpha values also surpassed their threshold of 0.7 or higher, indicating a robust level of internal consistency (**Table 5**).

Table 5. Construct reliability and validity.

	Cronbach's Alpha	Compositereliability (CR)	Average varianceextracted (AVE)
Model vulnerability	0.835	0.852	0.653
Emotional intelligence	0.791	0.876	0.731
Open Communication	0.836	0.942	0.740
Psychological safety	0.760	0.873	0.642
Organizational Culture	0.781	0.843	0.765
Organizational Culture	0.873	0.928	0.752
Effective change management	0.846	0.865	0.650

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.

To evaluate the measurement model, a suite of major goodness-of-fit (GoF) metrics was employed, as recommended by Byrne (2013) and Lomax and Schumacker (2004). These metrics included the Chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (CMIN/DF), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), the adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), the normed fit index (NFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), also known as the non-normed fit index (NNFI), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). These measures are among the most widely used for assessing model fit.

The table of model fit indices is an essential instrument for evaluating, refining, validating, and reporting on structural equation models. It plays a crucial role in

enabling researchers to determine the adequacy and appropriateness of a model for data analysis and interpretation. In this instance, the model demonstrated a good fit to the data, evidenced by various indices: GFI = 0.932, AGFI = 0.867, NFI = 0.961, CFI = 0.962, and RMSEA = 0.057. A GFI value of 0.932 indicates that the model accounts for approximately 93.2% of the variance within the data. This level of explanation is typically regarded as satisfactory (Good Fit) when the value exceeds 0.8. (**Table 6**).

Table 6. Model fit indices.

	CMIN/DF	***p*-value**	**GFI**	**AGFI**	**NFI**	**TLI**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**
Recommended	< 5	Insignificant	≥0.85	≥0.80	>0.90	>0.95	>0.90	0.05–0.08
CFA (measurement)	1.323	0.000	0.932	0.867	0.961	0.984	0.962	0.057

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.

Table 7. Model comparison.

Structural model	**Chi-square**	**df**	**GFI**	**AGFI**	**NFI**	**TLI**	**CFI**	**RMSEA**
Hypothesized model	7174.245	695	0.875	0.863	0.896	0.920	0.934	0.062
Mediating effect	7174.344	695	0.675	0.668	0.596	0.722	0.836	0.094

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.

Table 7 represents the overall results of the structural model analysis using SEM for model comparison are shown in **Table 6**. The full hypothesized model shows sufficient model ft (Chi-square = 7174.245, df = 695, GFI = 0.875; AGFI = 0.863; NFI = 0.896; TLI = 0.920; CFI = 0.934; RMSEA 0.062.

GFI (Goodness of Fit Index): This index measures the proportion of variance in the observed data that is accounted for by the model. A GFI value of 0.875 suggests that the model explains about 87.5% of the variance in the data, which is generally considered a good fit if it's above 0.8.

AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index): The AGFI is similar to the GFI but adjusted for the degrees of freedom in the model. It penalizes for model complexity. An AGFI value of 0.863 indicates that the model has a good fit after considering its complexity.

NFI (Normal Fit Index): The NFI compares the fit of the specified model to a null model (typically a model with no relationships between variables). An NFI value of 0.896 suggests that the specified model fits significantly better than the null model.

TLI (Tucker-Lewis Index): The TLI (or NNFI, Non-Normed Fit Index) compares the fit of the specified model to a baseline model. A TLI value of 0.920 indicates a good fit relative to the baseline model.

CFI (Comparative Fit Index): Similar to TLI, CFI compares the fit of the specified model to a baseline model. A CFI value of 0.934 suggests a good fit relative to the baseline model.

RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation): Measures the discrepancy between the model-implied covariance matrix and the observed covariance matrix, standardized by degrees of freedom. An RMSEA value of 0.062 is below the commonly accepted threshold of 0.08, indicating a good fit between the

model and the observed data. The model appears to have a good fit according to GFI, AGFI, NFI, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA.

All of these model fit indices are above the recommended level, indicating that the structural model has an acceptable goodness of fit (GoF) to the sample Byrne, (2013) and Hair et al. (2010); Lomax and Schumacke (2004). The researcher compared the hypothesized model to one alternative model to see if it was robust. The alternative mediating model specified a mediating-only model with communication as a mediating variable that differed from the original model only in that the impact of Model Vulnerability, Emotional Intelligence, and Psychological Safety on humanizing leadership and effective change management was set to zero. As a result, when compared to the alternative model, the original model produced a better fit. In the mediating model, a GFI value of 0.675 is relatively low, indicating that the model does not provide a good fit to the observed data, and an AGFI value of 0.668 falls below the desirable threshold of 0.90, indicating that the model fit is only moderate and could be improved. An NFI value of 0.596 falls below the desirable threshold for a good fit, which is typically set at 0.90 or higher. TLI value of 0.722 suggests that the model's fit to the data is somewhat below the desired level for good fit and may require further examination and improvement. A CFI value of 0.836 suggests that the model's fit to the data is moderate but may still require further refinement for better fit. An RMSEA value of 0.094 suggests that the model's fit to the data is relatively poor and may require further investigation and improvement.

4.8. Structural model

We validated the measurement model in the previous section and conducted further analysis. First, we assessed the conceptual model derived from the literature (**Figure 1**). There were five direct hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4 and H6 and one moderating hypothesis H5. Next, we evaluated the model with the following tool: Sstandardized regression (path), *t* value and *p*-values for significance level and R^2 and adjusted R^2 values for the model for predictability assessment (Dash and Paul, 2021; Hair et al., 2010, 2017; Malhotra et al., 2006)

From the above **Table 8** it has been found that the estimate of 0.259 and 0.329 suggests a moderate positive relationship between Model Vulnerability (MV) and Effective Change Management (ECM) and Psychological Safety (PS) and Effective Change Management (ECM) further the estimate of 0.466, 0.679 and 0.538 suggest a strong positive relationship between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Effective Change Management (ECM), Open Communication (OC) and Effective Change Management (ECM) and between Effective Change Management (ECM) and Employee Performance (EP). The *p*-values of H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4, and H_5 are below the conventional significance level of 0.05, indicating that the regression coefficient estimate is statistically significant. This means there is sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that Model Vulnerability, Emotional Intelligence, Open Communication, and Psychological Safety positively impact Effective Change Management within organizations and Effective Change Management passively

impacts employee performance within organizations, based on the provided data and model.

Table 8. Hypothesis testing regression analysis.

Hypothesis	Regression path Hypothesized Relationship	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	*p*-value	Result
H_1	MV→ECM	0.259	0.056	2.826	0.031	Supported
H_2	EI→ECM	0.466	0.044	3.508	0.020	Supported
H_3	OCOM→ECM	0.679	0.073	2.176	0.005	Supported
H_4	PS→ECM	0.329	0.061	2.295	0.011	Supported
H_6	ECM→EP	0.538	0.033	3.296	0.008	Supported

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.

Table 9 shows the values of interaction between Humanizing leadership (MV, EI, OCOM, and PS) × (OC) which are calculated through PROCESS-macro by following the bootstrapping method with 5000 samples as recommended by Hayes (2018). We put the proposed organizational culture as a moderator (H_5).

Table 9. The outcomes of moderation effects analysis.

Relationships	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*T*	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Model-1 (Constant)	0.652	0.177		3.681	0.012
MV	0.565	0.111	0.553	5.077	0.006
OC (Moderator)	0.242	0.094	0.240	2.564	0.011
MV*OC (Interaction Term)	0.174	0.038	0.287	1.931	0.034
Model-2 (Constant)	0.542	0.145		3.362	0.004
EI	0.536	0.223	0.432	4.145	0.020
OC (Moderator)	0.412	0.186	0.422	2.319	0.021
EI * OC (Interaction Term)	0.310	0.053	0.359	3.824	0.002
Model-3 (Constant)	0.342	0.135		4.232	0.023
OCOM	0.426	0.229	0.483	3.238	0.004
OC (Moderator)	0.383	0.186	0.428	3.524	0.031
OCOM * OC (Interaction Term)	0.348	0.033	0.382	2.735	0.015
Model-4(Constant)	0.363	0.129		4.212	0.011
PS	0.426	0.182	0.361	3.365	0.024
OC (Moderator)	0.335	0.193	0.452	3.410	0.008
PS* OC (Interaction Term)	0.439	0.032	0.330	2.412	0.004

Source: Calculated using IBM SPSS.
Note: MV = Model vulnerability, EI = Emotional intelligence, OCOM = Open Communication, PS = Psychological safety, OC = Organizational Culture. PS * OC (Interaction Term): The asterisk (*) indicates that the model includes an interaction effect between PS and OC. It tests whether the effect of PS on the outcome variable changes depending on the level of OC.

As per the data (**Table 9**), the positive coefficient of all four Models i.e., Model-1 (B = 0.174), Model-2 (B = 0.310), Model-3 (B = 0.348), and Model-4 (B = 0.439) indicates that as the interaction between independent variables of Humanizing

Leadership i.e., MV, EI, OCOM, and PS and (OC) increases, so does the dependent variable (DV) i.e., ECM or outcome. The statistically significant *p*-value of all the models i.e., Model-1 (0.034), Model-2 (0.002), Model-3 (0.015), and Model-4 (0.004) suggest that the interaction effect of Humanizing leadership independent variables (MV, EI, OCOM, and PS) and OC on the outcome is unlikely to be due to chance. The standardized coefficient of all the models i.e., Model-1 (Beta = 0.287), Model-2 (Beta = 0.359), Model-3 (Beta = 0.382), and Model-4 (Beta = 0.330) except Model-1 (*B* = 0.287) which indicates a moderate effect size the other models show that beta coefficient is greater than ± 0.30 which indicates a moderate to large effect size.This means that the interaction between all the independent variables of Humanizing Leadership i.e., MV, EI, OCOM PS, and OC accounts for a significant proportion of the variability in the outcome i.e., Effective Change Management (dependent variable). This finding is important as it highlights the combined influence of independent variables and moderating variables on the dependent variable.

5. Discussion

The study investigates the impact of humanizing leadership on effective change management and organizational culture as a moderator variable. According to the findings, model vulnerability and psychological safety have a moderate positive relationship with effective change management within SADAFCO Company. The hypothesis that model vulnerability positively impacts effective change management (H1) is strongly supported. Leaders who demonstrate vulnerability by openly acknowledging their limitations and mistakes create an atmosphere of trust and inclusivity, which is crucial for successful organizational change. This aligns with Nienaber et al. (2015), who highlight the significance of vulnerability in fostering trust between leaders and their teams. Vulnerability allows leaders to connect with employees on a deeper level, encouraging participation and reducing resistance during transitions (Leroy et al., 2015). Such behaviors emphasize relational trust, critical for achieving buy-in from employees, as noted by Montag and Smith (2016).

The role of emotional intelligence (H2) in enhancing effective change management is further validated by our findings, which show a significant positive relationship. Emotional intelligence, characterized by empathy, self-awareness, and social skills, enables leaders to navigate resistance and conflicts during change initiatives. This aligns with Ganta and Manukonda (2018), who stress that emotionally intelligent leaders can effectively motivate teams by addressing their concerns and fostering collaboration. Furthermore, Jit et al. (2017) argue that empathy, a core component of emotional intelligence, helps leaders create a cohesive and inclusive work environment, which is essential for managing complex organizational changes. Open communication (H3) emerges as another critical driver of effective change management. The findings reveal that transparent and consistent communication enhances employees' emotional connection to change initiatives, reducing uncertainty and fostering engagement. This is consistent with Mayfield and Mayfield (2017), who emphasize that effective leadership communication sets the tone for change programs and addresses employees' concerns, thereby minimizing

resistance. Additionally, Gillespie and Mann (2007) highlight that open communication fosters trust, enabling leaders to delegate responsibilities effectively and build collaborative environments that are conducive to change. Psychological safety (H4) is shown to significantly influence effective change management by creating a supportive environment where employees feel secure in expressing their ideas and concerns. This finding aligns with Schaubroeck and Walumbwa (2009), who stress the importance of psychological safety in promoting learning and innovation during organizational transitions. Employees are more likely to embrace change when they perceive that their contributions are valued and their well-being is prioritized. This underscores the need for leaders to cultivate an environment of trust and respect, as supported by Maximo et al. (2021), who highlight the role of authentic leadership in enhancing psychological safety and work engagement. The moderating role of organizational culture (H5) is validated, with results indicating that a collaborative and adaptive culture amplifies the positive effects of humanizing leadership on change outcomes. This finding aligns with the Competing Values Framework proposed by Cameron and Quinn (2011), which underscores the importance of cultural alignment in driving leadership effectiveness. A culture that prioritizes innovation, collaboration, and adaptability enhances the efficacy of humanizing leadership, creating an environment where employees feel motivated to support change initiatives. Conversely, rigid or hierarchical cultures may hinder these efforts, as noted by Ford et al. (2008). Finally, the hypothesis that effective change management enhances employee performance (H6) is supported by evidence linking successful change initiatives with improved morale, retention, and productivity. This aligns with Kotter (2008), who emphasizes that effective change management not only addresses immediate organizational challenges but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement. Mansaray (2019) further highlights that leadership plays a pivotal role in guiding employees through change, ensuring alignment with organizational goals, and enhancing overall performance. These findings provide robust empirical support for theoretical frameworks that integrate humanizing leadership and organizational culture in the context of change management. The data underscore the critical interplay between leadership behaviors, cultural attributes, and change outcomes, advocating for an integrated approach rather than an isolated examination. By situating this research within established paradigms while providing novel insights, this study contributes significantly to both academic discourse and practical applications in leadership and organizational change.

Key implications

This study provides several actionable insights for managers and organizational leaders seeking to enhance the effectiveness of change management initiatives. First, humanizing leadership practices, characterized by empathy, emotional intelligence, and transparent communication, have been shown to significantly improve employee engagement and reduce resistance to change (Gardner et al., 2005; Leroy et al., 2015). Managers should prioritize cultivating these behaviors to foster trust and

psychological safety, which are essential for facilitating successful organizational transitions (Munir and Nielsen, 2009; Schaubroeck and Walumbwa, 2009).

Second, the findings emphasize the critical moderating role of organizational culture in amplifying the positive impacts of humanizing leadership. Leaders operating within cultures that promote openness, adaptability, and collaboration can drive more effective change outcomes, as these cultural attributes align with the principles of humanizing leadership (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Schein, 2010). Managers should therefore invest in cultural assessments and interventions that align organizational values with inclusive and people-centric leadership approaches (Flemming, 2017; Ford et al., 2008).

Moreover, training programs focused on enhancing leaders' emotional intelligence and vulnerability can further strengthen their capacity to lead during periods of change. The research underscores the importance of such programs in improving leaders' ability to navigate conflicts, address employee concerns, and build cohesive teams (Brownell, 2008; Jit et al., 2017). Organizations should also institutionalize mechanisms that allow employees to voice their opinions and participate in decision-making processes, as this fosters a sense of ownership and psychological safety (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2017; Montag and Smith, 2016). Finally, managers must recognize that effective change management extends beyond immediate organizational goals to influence broader employee outcomes, including job satisfaction and performance (Kotter, 2008; Mansaray, 2019). By adopting a holistic approach to leadership and culture, managers can not only achieve successful change initiatives but also build resilient and engaged workforces capable of sustaining long-term organizational growth (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Gardner et al., 2005).

6. Limitations and suggestions for future studies

The study will have its own set of limitations, which future researchers can address. This study is one of the few studies conducted in this context centered on change leadership's role in determining employee readiness for change, with humanizing leadership and organizational culture serving as a moderator. Future studies should include many more variables to get a more comprehensive result. It is necessary to conduct a comparative analysis of the effects of different leadership styles on employees' readiness for change in organizations. This study was conducted using cross-sectional data. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to determine the level of commitment employees require to successfully implement a change initiative. Carefully designed studies that seek to investigate changes over time can aid in understanding the phenomenon and devising possible intervention mechanisms to improve employees' change readiness levels. Furthermore, future research on the antecedents of change readiness and the potential moderating effects of organizational culture and other variables should be studied and reported. Future studies may also consider conducting different types of systematic reviews (Fakhar et al., 2023; Ishrat et al., 2023; Khan, Anas, et al., 2024; Khan, Azam, et al., 2024; Khan, Uddin, et al., 2024; Marzi et al., 2024) on the concepts investigated in this study.

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