

INTEGRATING CONTINUOUS AND EPISODIC PERSPECTIVES IN THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROCESS IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

Krzysztof KRUKOWSKI^{1*}, Marian OLÍŃSKI²

¹ University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn; kkruk@uwm.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1614-4397

² University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn; olinski@uwm.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-1707-0553

* Correspondence author

Purpose: This study aims to explore how Polish public organizations manage change by integrating continuous and episodic approaches.

Design/methodology/approach: The research was conducted in Poland using a structured survey based on original statements derived from change management theory. Data were collected from 576 employees working in various public institutions, including local government administrations, higher education institutions, healthcare services, and central government agencies. The sample comprised 63% women and 37% men, with the majority (86%) holding non-managerial positions. Respondents represented diverse educational backgrounds, with 42% holding technical degrees. A 5-point Likert scale was used, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was applied for analysis.

Findings: The results indicate that mechanisms of continuous change-such as communication of stable elements and teamwork-are positively associated with trust ($\rho = 0.449$) and cross-functional collaboration ($\rho = 0.399$). Conversely, features of episodic change-including decision reversals and repeated failed initiatives-are negatively correlated with trust ($\rho = -0.158$) and collaboration ($\rho = -0.156$). A strong correlation between trust and collaboration ($\rho = 0.682$) underscores the importance of social capital. These findings suggest that public organizations operate within hybrid models of change and that balancing both change logics enhances organizational adaptability and effectiveness.

Research limitations/implications: Reliance on self-reports, purposive sampling, and a cross-sectional design limits causal inference and generalizability. The brief scale's moderate internal consistency indicates room for refinement and validation (e.g., subscale development and longitudinal assessment). Future research should examine mediation pathways – specifically, whether communication fosters trust, which in turn facilitates collaboration – and test sector-level moderators.

Practical implications: During organizational change, explicitly communicate which elements will remain stable, establish cross-functional teams, and actively manage the initiative portfolio to avoid symbolic or duplicative efforts – i.e., “change for its own sake”. These practices are associated with higher levels of trust and collaboration and, in turn, support more sustainable implementation.

Social implications: Strengthening trust and collaboration in public organizations can reduce change fatigue, enhance service reliability, and improve stakeholder confidence in public administration.

Originality/value: This study offers an empirically grounded integration of continuous and episodic perspectives on public-sector change, quantifying how specific managerial practices – stability communication and cross-functional teamwork – are associated with social capital outcomes.

Keywords: change management, public organizations, continuous change, episodic change.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Organizational change has been a subject of intensive research in the organizational and management sciences for several decades. One of the key approaches to understanding this phenomenon is the distinction between continuous and discontinuous change, a framework thoroughly discussed in the work of Weick and Quinn (1999). These authors argue that the primary criterion distinguishing the two types of change lies in their rhythm and the way they are embedded in organizational practices. Discontinuous (episodic) change is infrequent, radical, and intentional, often triggered by a crisis or significant disruption to the organizational equilibrium. It disrupts the existing order and compels the organization to transition to a new state of balance. This form of change follows the “unfreeze–transition–refreeze” model originally proposed by Lewin (1991), which entails questioning the current state, undergoing a transitional phase, and then solidifying the new order.

In contrast, continuous change is characterized by an ongoing process of adjustments, minor adaptations, and evolutionary modifications that are embedded in everyday organizational practice. It does not require dramatic breakthroughs or formal external interventions but instead emerges from routine activities, improvisation, learning, and local initiatives. Weick and Quinn (1999, p. 366) describe it as a “freeze–rebalance–unfreeze” process, in which the organization continually identifies patterns of action, introduces small corrections, and then reopens itself to further adaptation. This type of change reflects the concept of a learning organization – one that is capable of adapting through a deeply embedded culture of reflection, experimentation, and knowledge sharing.

The literature emphasizes that discontinuous changes are often driven by external factors such as technological advancements, regulatory changes, sudden market shifts, or financial crises. Studies by Tushman and Romanelli (1985) and Romanelli and Tushman (1994, p. 1162) suggest that organizations operate in cycles of long-term stability punctuated by periods of revolutionary transformation, aligning with the “punctuated equilibrium” model. Episodic change becomes necessary when the organizational structure – including entrenched norms, values, and relationships among system components – grows too rigid to respond effectively

to environmental demands. These types of changes are typically costly, provoke resistance, and may lack sustainability unless supported by appropriate reinforcement mechanisms.

In contrast, continuous change is theoretically grounded in concepts of organizations as open and self-learning systems. Research by Orlikowski (1996, pp. 89-90) demonstrates that even small, localized modifications in work processes – when repeated and reinforced through practice – can eventually lead to deep, structural transformations. Brown and Duguid (1991, pp. 11-12) emphasize the role of social practices and “communitas” in shaping and transforming organizational knowledge. This approach views change as an emergent process, difficult to capture within traditional, linear, goal-oriented change management models. From this perspective, managing change is less about designing and implementing formal plans and more about creating conditions that foster experimentation, improvisation, and knowledge sharing.

The aim of the study was to identify and assess how change management processes are perceived in public organizations from the perspective of integrating continuous and episodic change approaches. The analysis examined the extent to which the surveyed organizations employ mechanisms characteristic of both approaches, as well as the role of factors such as trust, collaboration, and communication in shaping perceptions of the effectiveness and sustainability of change processes.

2. Literature review

The differences between continuous and discontinuous change also have important implications for intervention strategies. Episodic change requires “unfreezing” existing structures and patterns, which involves confronting resistance, generating a sense of urgency, and creating a psychologically safe space for change, as described by Schein (1996). Burnes and Bargal (2017) offered a renewed analysis of Lewin’s “unfreezing” model, particularly in the context of episodic change. Continuous change, by contrast, does not necessitate such a dramatic disruption of the status quo. Instead, it focuses on creating space for reflection, sharing experiences, and building awareness of changes occurring at the “margins” of organizational life. The literature suggests that effective organizations are able to integrate both approaches, developing the capacity for everyday adaptation while also being prepared for moments that require more radical, episodic interventions. Brown and Eisenhardt (1997, p. 5) argue that the key to success in dynamic sectors of the economy lies in adopting a “semi-structured” approach – one that combines clearly defined frameworks with the flexibility needed for improvisation. This approach enables organizations not only to respond to change but also to actively shape it, harnessing the potential of both continuous and episodic change.

In the context of continuous and discontinuous change theories, ten statements regarding organizational change were formulated based on the literature. These statements reflect how respondents perceive transformation processes within their organizations and allow their responses to be interpreted through the lens of relevant theories and scholarly literature. The first statement – “S1: Despite changes in the organization, work has remained the same over the past several years” – is interpreted as an indication of organizational inertia and the limited scope of change. This suggests that although the change may have been formal in nature, it did not meaningfully affect day-to-day operations (Adler et al., 2022). This phenomenon aligns with episodic change theory, as supported by references to the works of Weick and Quinn (1999), Romanelli and Tushman (1994), and Gersick (1991).

The second statement – “S2: The management hierarchy has become significantly flatter than it was a few years ago” – points to a structural transformation resulting from an episodic change, though it also reflects elements of continuous adaptation, as the organization’s structure has evolved toward greater flexibility. This interpretation combines features of episodic change with aspects of continuous change, in line with the frameworks proposed by Weick and Quinn (1999), Dunphy (1996), and Tushman and O’Reilly (1996) (Hazelzet et al., 2022). The study by A. Gofen et al. (2023) highlights that minor adaptations in public organizations play a critical role in ensuring the stability and integration of change (Andriopoulos, Lewis, 2009).

The third statement – “S3: Informing employees about what will remain unchanged during the implementation of changes” – emphasizes the communication of stability and the maintenance of balance throughout the change process (Ellis et al., 2023; Hall, 2023; Krukowski et al., 2021). This approach is characteristic of continuous change, which aims to preserve the organization’s identity. This interpretation is supported by the works of Weick and Quinn (1999), Schein (1996), and Kotter and Heskett (1992).

The fourth statement – “S4: Despite declarations of strengthening change, employees are still controlled in the same way as before” – illustrates a situation in which the formal narrative of change does not lead to an actual shift in power relations. This reflects symbolic actions typical of episodic change, where the outcomes remain superficial. This interpretation is based on the analyses of Weick and Quinn (1999, pp. 361-386), Jacobsen et al. (2022), Marshak (1993), and Beer et al. (1990).

The next statement – “S5: Teamwork has significantly improved the effectiveness of implementing change” – emphasizes the role of local, bottom-up adaptations and collaboration. This is an example of continuous change enacted through micro-innovations and learning processes, in line with the concepts developed by Weick and Quinn (1999), Brown and Eisenhardt (1997), and Orlikowski (1996). Teamwork played a crucial role in significantly enhancing change implementation effectiveness (Ward et al., 2022). This can also be linked to an adaptive culture oriented toward innovation (Siemiński, Krukowski, 2011).

The sixth statement – “S6: The need to appear dynamic is more important than implementing real changes” – points to the simulation of change or so-called “change for the sake of change.” This approach is characteristic of certain management practices within episodic change, focusing on visible but superficial transformations (Meneses et al., 2025). This interpretation is supported by the research of Doyle et al. (2008) and Weick and Quinn (1999).

The seventh statement – “S7: It was necessary to reverse some of the radical organizational changes that had been implemented” – reflects a failure to sustain the outcomes of episodic change, which often requires correction. This interpretation is supported by the works of Lewin (1997), Weick and Quinn (1999), and Beer et al. (1990).

The eighth statement – “S8: The changes currently being discussed are similar to previously attempted and abandoned initiatives” – highlights the cyclical nature of change (Cianetti, 2023; Kleizen, MacCarthaigh, 2023). This phenomenon is typical of organizations that undergo repeated episodes of change without fostering continuous learning or accumulating experience. This interpretation is supported by the works of Weick and Quinn (1999), Kotter (1996), and Gersick (1991).

The ninth statement – “S9: There has been an increase in trust between managers and employees compared to a few years ago” – illustrates the process of building relationships and fostering collaboration (Bentzen, 2022). This is characteristic of continuous change, carried out through adaptation and the development of organizational culture, in line with the research of Weick and Quinn (1999), Barrett et al. (1995), and Schein (1993).

The final statement – “S10: There is now more authentic collaboration between managers of different functions than there was a few years ago” – indicates a deepening of cross-functional collaboration and integration. This interpretation points to continuous change (Meneses et al., 2024) and the development of the organization as a learning system, as reflected in the analyses of Weick and Quinn (1999), Brown and Duguid (1991), and Crossan et al. (1996).

In summary, the literature review reveals that organizational change is a multidimensional process, and effective change management requires the ability to discern when an episodic approach is appropriate and when continuous change should be supported. Contemporary organizations operating under conditions of complexity and uncertainty must develop the capability to navigate both logics of change simultaneously, while also strengthening social capital, trust, and organizational learning capacity.

3. Research methodology

Respondents evaluated specific statements they considered important for implementing change in public organizations. The survey questionnaire was directed at employees of public sector institutions. The research sample consisted of 576 individuals employed across various types of public organizations, including central government administration, local government administration, government agencies, the education sector, healthcare services, and higher education institutions. To fulfill the study's objectives, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted. The sample was diverse in terms of gender, length of service, education level, and job position, allowing for comparative analyses based on these variables as potential factors influencing perceptions of change.

Eligibility for participation in the study was based not only on employment in the public sector but also on actual involvement in organizational change processes. The sampling process took into account the need to ensure an adequate level of domain-specific knowledge among respondents to minimize the risk of misinterpreting terms used in the survey. To increase the reliability of the collected data, the survey was designed to capture respondents' evaluations of current experiences, rather than retrospective recollections. A Likert scale was used to assess the factors, with the following response options: 1 – strongly disagree, 2 – somewhat disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – somewhat agree, 5 – strongly agree.

In terms of educational background, the largest group of respondents held technical higher education degrees, accounting for 41.67% of the sample. This was followed by respondents with degrees in the humanities (28.82%) and social sciences (19.97%), while 9.55% reported having a secondary education. The majority of participants occupied non-managerial positions (85.59%), whereas 14.41% held managerial roles. Analysis of work experience revealed that the largest proportion of respondents (29.17%) had less than five years of professional experience. Additionally, 24.27% had between 11 and 20 years of experience, 9.55% reported 6 to 10 years of experience, and 17.01% had more than 20 years of service.

Women constituted the majority of the sample, representing 63.19% of all respondents, while men accounted for 36.81%. Regarding qualifications in change management – acquired through courses, training programs, or postgraduate studies – 24.83% of respondents reported having such qualifications, while 75.17% did not. A total of 26.39% of participants identified the implementation of organizational change as a key element of their role, whereas 73.61% did not associate it with a core aspect of their job duties.

With respect to the type of public organization, the largest groups of respondents were employed in local government administration (40.97%) and higher education institutions (35.07%). Other groups included healthcare services (7.99%), government agencies (7.47%), the education sector (4.86%), and central government administration (3.65%).

To account for potential common method bias (CMB), the questionnaire design incorporated Brewer's split-sample method (Brewer, 2006). This approach aimed to minimize CMB by using one respondent group to assess the independent variable and another to measure the dependent variable. In the present study, the independent variable – i.e., the type of public organization – was derived from administrative data (Podsakoff et al., 2012; Jakobsen, Jensen, 2015). The survey was distributed to multiple individuals within each organization who were involved in the change management process, which also helped to reduce the risk of bias (MacKenzie, Podsakoff, 2012).

Before conducting the factor analysis, the quality and internal consistency of the measurement instrument were evaluated. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.601, indicating a moderate level of internal consistency, which nonetheless requires further refinement. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively novel context of analysis (types of change within public organizations), an acceptable threshold for internal consistency was set at 0.5 or above (Nunnally, 1978). The Cronbach's alpha value was partly influenced by the limited number of items, which constrained the potential for achieving higher reliability (Cortina, 1993). Additionally, the alpha level reflects the high heterogeneity of the sample – respondents came from diverse types of public institutions – resulting in natural variation in the perception of the phenomena studied, which may have contributed to the lower consistency coefficient.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.695, indicating a moderate yet acceptable level for conducting factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's test of sphericity reached statistical significance ($\chi^2(45) = 1019.452$; $p = 0.00$), allowing the null hypothesis of a homogeneous correlation matrix to be rejected and thus justifying further analysis (Bartlett, 1954). However, the aim of the study was not to establish relationships between variables but rather to identify and assess their presence, as they pertain to a single phenomenon.

To analyze dependencies, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used. This choice was justified by the ordinal nature of the data, the lack of need to meet assumptions of normality and linearity, the method's robustness to outliers, and its suitability for detecting monotonic relationships between variables representing complex psychosocial phenomena occurring during organizational change processes. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$. Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS.

For analytical purposes, the ten statements were categorized according to their theoretical alignment with either continuous or episodic change perspectives. Statements S3, S5, S9, and S10 were identified as indicators of continuous change, reflecting communication of stability, teamwork, and trust-building. Statements S4, S6, S7, and S8 represented episodic change mechanisms, such as reversals, symbolic actions, and repeated initiatives. Statements S1 and S2 captured structural or contextual aspects that could co-occur with either logic, depending on organizational dynamics.

4. Results

Respondents' indications revealed how they perceive changes within their organizations and allowed their responses to be related to established theoretical frameworks. The descriptive statistics for the statements concerning change implementation in public organizations provide a synthesized view of how these processes are perceived by employees (Table 1). An analysis of the median values suggests a moderate perception of change – most statements had a median of 3.00, indicating a predominance of neutral responses and a lack of clear positive or negative evaluations. An exception is the statement, “We talk about strengthening change, but our people are controlled just as much as always,” which had a median of 4.00. This indicates greater agreement among respondents and may reflect a critical view of the effectiveness of change initiatives, as well as a perception of such changes as superficial. The mode supports this interpretation – most statements had a mode of 3.00 or 4.00, with “4” being the most frequently selected response. This may suggest that respondents tend to assess the situation as moderately true or commonly observed.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics for Statements on Change Implementation in Public Organizations
(*n* = 576)

Itemization	Median	Mode	Minimum	Maximum
S1 – Despite changes in the organization, my work has remained the same over the past few years.	3.00	4.00	1.00	5.00
S2 – Our management hierarchy is significantly flatter than it was a few years ago.	3.00	3.00	1.00	5.00
S3 – We always inform people about what will remain unchanged when implementing changes.	3.00	4.00	1.00	5.00
S4 – We talk about strengthening change, but our people are still controlled just as much as before.	4.00	4.00	1.00	5.00
S5 – Teamwork has significantly improved the effectiveness of implementing change.	3.00	4.00	1.00	5.00
S6 – The need to appear dynamic is more important than implementing real change.	3.00	4.00	1.00	5.00
S7 – We will likely have to reverse some of the radical organizational changes we implemented.	3.00	3.00	1.00	5.00
S8 – The changes we are currently discussing are similar to initiatives that were tried and abandoned some time ago.	3.00	3.00	1.00	5.00
S9 – There is more trust between managers and employees than there was a few years ago.	3.00	3.00	1.00	5.00
S10 – There is now more genuine collaboration between managers across different functions than there was a few years ago.	3.00	3.00	1.00	5.00

Source: authors' own work based on research results.

The response range, from a minimum of 1.00 to a maximum of 5.00 for all statements, indicates a wide variation in respondents' perceptions – from strong disagreement to full agreement. This suggests that experiences related to change processes in public organizations are heterogeneous and dependent on individual contexts.

It is particularly noteworthy that none of the statements received an unequivocal, extreme rating from respondents – both the median and the mode tend to cluster around mid-scale values. This may indicate either a lack of clear successes or failures in change processes or their limited visibility in day-to-day work. It is also worth noting that statements related to collaboration and trust – such as “There is more trust between managers and employees than there was a few years ago” and “There is now more genuine collaboration between managers across different functions than there was a few years ago” – both recorded a median and mode of 3.00. This may suggest that the processes of relationship-building and collaboration are not clearly perceived as improving.

The analysis of Spearman correlation coefficients revealed several statistically significant relationships between variables describing perceptions of organizational change processes (Table 2). The correlation results illustrate how various aspects of organizational change are interconnected and how they are perceived by respondents. The correlation coefficient values make it possible to assess which relationships are strong or weak, as well as whether they are statistically significant. The strongest correlation was observed between the level of trust between managers and employees (S9) and collaboration among managers across different functions (S10), with a statistically significant correlation coefficient of 0.682. This indicates that an increase in vertical trust is associated with improved horizontal collaboration.

Significant correlations also emerged between informing employees about what will remain unchanged during changes (S3) and both trust (S9) and inter-manager collaboration (S10). This suggests that clear communication during change processes fosters a sense of security and enhances organizational relationships.

Other notable relationships include the link between a flatter management hierarchy (S2) and the likelihood of needing to reverse some radical changes (S7), as well as the emphasis on the need to appear dynamic (S6). These findings imply that more flexible, less hierarchical organizations exhibit greater awareness of the need to adapt to changing conditions and adjust previously implemented measures.

An additional noteworthy result is that teamwork (S5) is correlated with levels of trust and collaboration, reinforcing the notion that a team-based approach is one of the key foundations for effective change implementation.

One of the more pronounced negative correlations was observed between the statement “We always inform people about what will remain unchanged when implementing changes” (S3) and the statement “We will likely have to reverse some of the radical organizational changes we implemented” (S7), with a statistically significant coefficient of -0.128 . This indicates that in cases where communication regarding stable organizational elements is stronger, the perceived need to reverse changes is lower. This may be interpreted as evidence that clearly defined boundaries of stability reduce the sense of organizational chaos and enhance the quality of the change process, thereby limiting the need for subsequent corrective actions.

Table 2.*Correlation Analysis Between Statements Describing Organizational Change*

Specification			Statements									
			S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	S9	S10
Statements	S1	Correlation coefficient	1	.133**	.167**	0.075	0.054	0.013	-0.032	.136**	.235**	.159**
		Significance	.	0.001	<.001	0.072	0.199	0.757	0.444	0.001	<.001	<.001
	S2	Correlation coefficient	.133**	1	-0.003	-0.019	0.014	.214**	.291**	.182**	0.019	-0.028
		Significance	0.001	.	0.943	0.642	0.737	<.001	<.001	<.001	0.642	0.504
	S3	Correlation coefficient	.167**	-0.003	1	.256**	.317**	0.044	-.128**	0.075	.449**	.399**
		Significance	<.001	0.943	.	<.001	<.001	0.297	0.002	0.072	<.001	<.001
	S4	Correlation coefficient	0.075	-0.019	.256**	1	-0.005	.143**	.136**	.117**	-0.027	0.033
		Significance	0.072	0.642	<.001	.	0.912	<.001	0.001	0.005	0.513	0.423
	S5	Correlation coefficient	0.054	0.014	.317**	-0.005	1	.116**	-.116**	0.005	.392**	.428**
		Significance	0.199	0.737	<.001	0.912	.	0.005	0.005	0.897	<.001	<.001
	S6	Correlation coefficient	0.013	.214**	0.044	.143**	.116**	1	.272**	.165**	0.018	0.048
		Significance	0.757	<.001	0.297	<.001	0.005	.	<.001	<.001	0.668	0.246
	S7	Correlation coefficient	-0.032	.291**	-.128**	.136**	-.116**	.272**	1	.291**	-.158**	-.156**
		Significance	0.444	<.001	0.002	0.001	0.005	<.001	.	<.001	<.001	<.001
	S8	Correlation coefficient	.136**	.182**	0.075	.117**	0.005	.165**	.291**	1	.082*	0.06
		Significance	0.001	<.001	0.072	0.005	0.897	<.001	<.001	.	0.048	0.152
	S9	Correlation coefficient	.235**	0.019	.449**	-0.027	.392**	0.018	-.158**	.082*	1	.682**
		Significance	<.001	0.642	<.001	0.513	<.001	0.668	<.001	0.048	.	<.001
	S10	Correlation coefficient	.159**	-0.028	.399**	0.033	.428**	0.048	-.156**	0.06	.682**	1
		Significance	<.001	0.504	<.001	0.423	<.001	0.246	<.001	0.152	<.001	.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Source: authors' own work based on research results.

The findings suggest that key elements positively influencing the perception of organizational change include communication about stable aspects, trust-building, and teamwork. In contrast, more flexible and flatter organizational structures may enhance the perception of dynamism but are also associated with a higher risk of overload and the need to retract certain decisions. These results imply that organizations should pay attention not only to the substantive content of change but also to the manner in which it is communicated and to the strengthening of relationships across various levels of management.

5. Discussion

The results confirm the findings of classical literature (Weick, Quinn, 1999; Orlikowski, 1996; Brown, Duguid, 1991) and are consistent with recent research (Khumalo Jackson, 2024; Knies et al., 2018; Bradley, 2020; Bentzen, 2022; Bianchi et al., 2021), which emphasize the pivotal role of trust, collaboration, and transversal leadership in the effective implementation of change within complex and dynamic organizational environments.

The distinction between continuous and episodic practices is empirically supported by the correlation patterns observed. Continuous change indicators (S3, S5, S9, S10) are positively associated with trust and collaboration, confirming their reinforcing role in social capital development. Conversely, episodic change indicators (S4, S6, S7, S8) demonstrate weak or negative correlations with these variables, suggesting that discontinuous, top-down interventions may erode relational foundations when not balanced by continuous learning and communication mechanisms.

The findings indicating statistically significant positive correlations between communicating stability (S3) and both trust (S9) and collaboration (S10) align with the theory of continuous change as articulated by Weick and Quinn (1999), in which minor adaptations, the reinforcement of stability, and the integration of change into routine organizational practices play a central role. D. Lamba (2023) emphasizes that top-level managers in public organizations are instrumental in facilitating incremental adaptations that underscore stability while concurrently embedding change. A. Lambright (2023) similarly demonstrates that effective communication about what remains unchanged fosters individual-level trust, which in turn reinforces collaborative behaviors. These findings are also consistent with Orlikowski's (1996) perspective, which highlights the importance of local, micro-level adaptations as a mechanism for enacting deeper structural transformations (Dries, 2024).

On the other hand, the observed negative correlations between the recurrence of change initiatives (S8) and both trust (S9) and collaboration (S10) ($\rho = -0.158$; $\rho = -0.156$) corroborate concerns raised in the literature regarding the costs and risks associated with episodic change (Vernon-Wilson et al., 2023). Weick and Quinn (1999), along with Beer et al. (1990), emphasized that such change processes may result in "change fatigue" and a gradual erosion of trust – particularly when successive initiatives fail to deliver expected outcomes or are prematurely withdrawn. These findings are also consistent with Marshak's (1993) assertion that episodic change often assumes a symbolic form, without generating genuine transformation of deeper organizational structures. This may help explain the high levels of agreement among respondents with statements indicating that core practices remain unchanged despite formal declarations of change. Recent research has also highlighted the importance of adaptation, innovation within tradition, and the strategic modification of organizational rituals in times of crisis (Kapoor et al., 2022).

The presence of significant correlations between a flattened management hierarchy (S2) and the need to reverse changes (S7) ($\rho = 0.291$), as well as between the repetition of change initiatives (S8) and reversals (S7) ($\rho = 0.291$), aligns with the perspective of Tushman and Romanelli (1985), Hazelzet et al. (2022), and Gersick (1991), who conceptualize organizational change within the framework of the "punctuated equilibrium" model. The findings of this study suggest that public organizations within the examined sample operate in a cycle of alternating periods of stability and abrupt, radical interventions, some of which prove to be unsustainable or problematic in terms of implementation.

Moreover, the strong positive correlation between trust (S9) and collaboration (S10) ($\rho = 0.682$) reinforces the findings of Barrett et al. (1995), Bentzen (2022), and Schein (1993), who argue that trust constitutes a fundamental pillar for cultivating an organizational culture conducive to collaboration, knowledge sharing, and learning – values essential to the logic of continuous change. In the context of this study, it is worth emphasizing that despite the presence of episodic change elements, public organizations also exhibit adaptive characteristics typical of learning organizations. This observation is consistent with the conceptualizations offered by Brown and Duguid (1991), Piubello Orsini et al. (2024), and Crossan et al. (1996).

The interpretation of the findings thus points to the necessity of integrating the theoretical approaches described in the literature. The results suggest that effective change management in public organizations cannot be confined to a single model, but instead requires the simultaneous application of strategies rooted in continuous adaptation – grounded in teamwork, communication, and trust-building – as well as the capacity to plan and implement more radical, episodic interventions when required by environmental conditions. This reinforces the proposition advanced by Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) concerning the value of a “semi-structured” approach that combines structural frameworks with the flexibility needed to make deliberate decisions under conditions of complexity and uncertainty. Theoretical insights further indicate that optimal policy design is inherently complex and demands a nuanced understanding of institutional structures and the preferences of both bureaucratic actors and political overseers (Patty, 2023).

In summary, the findings of this study complement the existing literature by illustrating the complexity of change processes in public organizations and underscoring the need to balance the logics of continuous and episodic change.

The conducted study provided valuable insights into the perception of change processes in public organizations. Still, several important limitations should be noted, as they may affect the interpretation and generalization of the findings. First, a key limitation lies in the use of a questionnaire-based method relying on respondents' self-assessments. Although sampling procedures and instrument validation were applied, participants' responses may have been influenced by subjectivity, as well as by attitudes, concerns, or organizational pressure. It cannot be ruled out that some individuals adjusted their answers to align with perceived norms or the official image of the organization. Second, the moderate value of Cronbach's alpha

coefficient (0.601) indicates limited internal consistency for some scale items. While this level was deemed acceptable due to the exploratory nature of the study, it points to the need for further refinement of the instrument and the potential expansion of the scale with additional indicators that better capture the complexity of the phenomenon. Third, the sampling strategy was purposive, which limits the ability to fully generalize the findings to the entire population of public sector employees. Another limitation lies in the fact that the study focused on participants' perceptions and subjective experiences rather than on objective indicators of change process effectiveness. Therefore, the results should be interpreted as a reflection of the perceived reception of change rather than a direct measure of implementation success. Finally, the study employed a cross-sectional design based on data collected at a single point in time. This limits the ability to capture the dynamics of change and to track the evolution of attitudes and organizational processes over a longer period.

6. Conclusion

The conducted research enabled a multidimensional analysis of change management processes in public organizations from the perspective of integrating continuous and episodic approaches. The findings, including the analysis of Spearman's rank correlation coefficients, indicate the coexistence of both change logics within the surveyed organizations. On the one hand, mechanisms characteristic of continuous change are evident, such as the communication of stable organizational elements, teamwork, and the building of trust and collaboration. On the other hand, symptoms of episodic change also emerge – such as the reversal of radical decisions, the recurrence of unsuccessful initiatives, and the experience of change fatigue.

At the same time, the negative correlations between the recurrence of change initiatives and both trust and collaboration highlight the risks associated with the predominance of episodic change – particularly when successive initiatives fail to deliver the expected outcomes. Based on the research findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Change management in public organizations requires the integration of continuous and episodic approaches, with an emphasis on their complementarity rather than mutual exclusivity.
2. Building trust and collaboration through transparent communication, teamwork, and the emphasis on stable organizational elements enhances the organization's adaptive capacity and increases acceptance of change.
3. The recurrence of unsuccessful initiatives and the reversal of implemented changes undermine trust in leadership and collaborative relationships; therefore, it is essential to avoid illusory or symbolic changes that do not translate into tangible outcomes.

In conclusion, the study reveals that public organizations operate within a complex landscape of change, where the effectiveness of transformational efforts depends on the ability to balance stabilizing and dynamic actions while simultaneously investing in social capital, trust, and collaboration. The findings offer valuable insights for change management practitioners, highlighting the need for a multidimensional and integrated approach to organizational transformation.

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