

Master Thesis

Adapting Future Trends into Organisational Culture and Innovation

A framework and business model designed to aid SMEs to adapt future trends into their
organisational culture and innovation strategies.

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the aspects of how organisations, especially the small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) can smartly transform the future trends towards their organisational culture and the innovation strategies. Building on the qualitative research material, such as interviewing of leaders and employees representing various important sectors this study reveals the key position of leadership, cross-cultural adjustment, and lifelong learning in effective trend integration. The study identifies major obstacles like the lack of resources, change reluctance, and traditional approaches of working models and acknowledges the value of shared innovation practices as a transformative factor. The thesis elaborates on these insights and comes up with a practice framework that aims at taking organisations through the process of environmental scanning, readiness assessment, culture alignment, capability building in innovation, consistent feedback and iterative change management. It is further backed by a business model that is SME specific to show how specific change management services can close the gap between strategy and implementation. Finally, this paper presents practical steps to leaders and practising professionals to support the implementation of proactive, inclusive, and design-led solutions to guarantee organisational resiliency and competitiveness in the fast-changing business environment.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Background and Context.....	1
1.2. Research Gap.....	5
1.3. Aims and Objectives.....	8
1.4. Research Questions.....	8
1.5. Significance of the Study.....	9
1.6. Scope and Delimitations.....	10
2. Literature Review.....	12
2.1. Introduction of the Review	12
2.2. Theoretical Foundations	14
2.3. Exploration of Future Trends	27
2.4. Organisational Culture and its Flexibility.....	29
2.5. Innovation as a Response to Change.....	34
2.6. Integration and Alignment.....	36
2.7. Gaps and Critical Analysis.....	38
2.8. Design Thinking as a Catalyst for Cultural Change	42
2.9. Conclusion and Implications.....	45
3. Methodology	47
3.1. Introduction	47
3.2. Research Paradigm and Rationale	47
3.3. Research Design.....	48
3.4. Data Collection Methods	49
3.5. Data Analysis Procedures	50
3.6. Justification of Methodological Choices	52
3.7. Ethical Considerations	53
3.8. Limitations	54
3.9 Interview Questionnaire for SME Leadership	55

4. Findings/Results	58
4.1. Introduction	58
4.2. Government Sector: Digital Transformation and Cultural Evolution	59
4.3. IT/Sales SME in Pune: Demographics, Diversity, and Cultural Transition	61
4.4. Consulting Sector: Tradition, Pressure, and Gradual Adaptation	64
4.5. Cross-Case Themes and Synthesis	67
4.6. Integrating Insights from Leading Podcasts	71
4.7. Synthesis: Podcasts and Interview Findings	78
5. Discussion	80
5.1. Summary of Key Findings	80
5.2. Interpretation in Context	82
5.3. Alignment with Literature	86
5.4. Implications for Theory and Practice	89
5.5. Study Limitations	91
5.6. Basis for Framework Development	92
6. Framework Development	95
6.1. Introduction to the Framework	95
6.2. Framework Design Rationale	96
6.3. Framework Components Explained	97
6.4. Visual Model of the Framework	102
6.5. Application and Implementation Strategy:.....	103
6.6. Strengths and Limitations of the Framework.....	105
7. The Essential Role of Specialised Change Management and Trend Adaptation	107
7.1. The Urgent Need for Professional Change Support in SMEs	107
7.2. Why SMEs Struggle with Change and Trend Adaptation.....	108
7.3. The Business Opportunity: Dedicated Change Management and Trend Adaptation Services	109
7.4. How the Dedicated Business Would Operate.....	112
7.5. The Business Value: Why SMEs Need Dedicated Change Management Support.....	112

7.6. Why This Business Idea Is Essential Now	113
8. Business Model Design	115
8.1. Business Model Canvas Figure	123
9. Conclusion	124
10. Sources	126

List of figures

<i>Figure 1. Schein's Model of Organisational Culture (Edgar Schein, 2010).....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Figure 2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Geert Hofstede; 1980, 2001).....</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Figure 3. Competing Values Framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2011).....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Figure 4. Disruptive Innovation (Clayton Christensen, 1997).....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Figure 5. Open Innovation (Chesbrough, 2003).....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Figure 6. The eight-step model, (Kotter, 1996).....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Figure 7. unfreeze-change-refreeze model, (Lewin, 1951).....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Figure 8. Strategic Foresight, (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018).....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Figure 9. PESTLE Analysis (Francis J. Aguilar, 1967).....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Figure 10. Trend Adaptation Framework.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Figure 11. Business model canvas.....</i>	<i>123</i>

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and context

The current world with an extremely rapid technology-centred economy has had businesses changing at an unequaled pace. Rapidly rising technological waves, emerging consumer trends, geopolitical climate and emerging environmental issues have been and are continuously breaking, shaping and reshaping markets and industries and keep on redrawing the competitive map across industries. In this kind of a set up, the capability of business organisations to incorporate the existing new trends and being ready to learn and adapt future trends into its culture and innovation management strategies has risen to become the most important, relevant and crucial factor in keeping up with the competition and survival to remain relevant. Likewise the individual capacity of professionals to build the awareness of new trends and their flexibility has now become very important to carry on and further grow in their respective professions. Creation of classical models of organisational management that have been focusing on efficiency, stability and the use of small steps towards improvement has been faced with a lot of challenge as it is demanded that this new market should be more agile and resilient and proactive in their innovation.

The artificial intelligence, which has grown and has started gaining momentum recently, and the climate crisis, which is being currently experienced in so many

areas, the COVID-19 pandemic of the past, and the adoption of new working models, including remote and hybrid ones have shown how flexibly and spontaneously the external environment may change, and transfer previously developed strategies and cultures into the realm of complete outdated and old-fashioned reality practically within a moment. Brought about by such an unpredictable environment, business and organisations are not only pushed into a cycle of responding to such changes but now have to include adaptability and foresight as part of their own cultures and innovation processes. This competence of including the future trends; whether they be technological, social or environmental into the organisational culture one can identify this aspect as a good contributor to the future operational sustainability and relevance. Although nowadays the vast majority of people give credit to this fact and to the necessity to adjust to new trends and tendencies, many organisations have not been able to incorporate this ability into their organisational cultures correctly and in a systematic way. Therefore they were not able to in the process of marketing integrate this aspect into their patterns of innovation and organising. What is lacking is not really the awareness but how it can be defined and how the intent can be converted into a reality.

What do business organisations need to do in order to transcend their own tested methods and formulate their own strongly, design-oriented structures to promote lasting and meaningful absorption of future trends into their organisational culture?

This question is one of the central issues of modern innovation design management and this is the theme of this thesis.

1.1.1. The Critical Role of Organisational Culture in Adapting to Future Trends

The culture of organisations is openly taken into consideration as the intangible but a very powerful force that mostly defines the way organisations react to both internal and external challenges. It takes into consideration and ensures that some common values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours that dictate significant decisions, cooperation and openness to changes (Schein, 2010). The cultural factor is an enabler and barrier when organisations encounter the necessity to jump to the future trends. Agility, learning and experiments are spread through culture and when it comes to adoption of new ideas and technology, the fast change is predetermined by agile culture that is less resistant to changes and does not suppress innovation and safe-playing above and beyond that culture act as a barrier to any changes and cut-down innovation (Denison & Mishra, 1995).

The issue is found in the fact that culture is hard seated and grows at a slow rate that it is usually left behind by the rate of external change (Kotter, 1996). Such disconnectedness causes stagnation in the organisation where old thinkings and practices hinder a chance to utilise the emerging trends. As an example, companies that adhere to legacy processes or top-down decision-making models are most likely to have a problem with integrating agility in the process of innovation or anticipate a digital transformation. The figures provided reflect only the non-cigarette tobacco (Westerman et al., 2014). Future trend adaptation therefore has a

high dependency on planned cultural interventions that are values, behaviours and structures compliant combined with an open and progressive attitude of mind.

1.1.2. Innovation as a Strategic Imperative for Trend Adaptation

The concept of innovation as delineating any new idea that is translated into product-, process-, and service-related value creation (in its broad meaning), is the locomotive which can be used by the organisations to transform their awareness of trends into competitive advantage (Tidd & Bessant, 2018). On-going innovation also allows organisations to be proactive with regard to market changes, technological changes and the needs of customers. Innovation is however not an entity, but rather a continuum that starts with minor iterations and works its way up to massive inventions that have the capability to turn industries upside down (Christensen, 1997).

Regarding adaptation of future trends, innovation should be part of organisational core and it should not be seen as a special activity. It should be integrated with a convergence of innovation tactics and cultural (Birkinshaw et al., 2016) strategies within its operation, where new ideas not only get brainstormed and generated but also applied and expanded (Birkinshaw et al., 2016). Additionally, organisations need to meet the competing demands of exploration of new opportunities against exploitation of current possibilities which driving force is the focus of continuous long-on-going innovation performance (March, 1991).

1.1.3. Innovation Design Management and the Birth of Design Thinking

Design thinking in the recent years has become a highly effective way to tackle complex, difficult and uncertain problems owing to its ability to foster empathy, creativity and the iterative problem solving process (Brown, 2009). In contrast to old-fashioned linear models of management design thinking encourages organisations to spend time with users, prototype quickly, and thrive on uncertainty and volatility as a driver of innovation. This kind of attitude is especially suitable to the challenge of future-trend adaptation, which primarily revolves around operating under uncertain conditions and incorporating a variety of views.

Interdisciplinary approaches interpenetrating design principles, innovation, and management such as innovation design management can be useful where frameworks and tools of incorporating trend adaptation within organisational culture and the flow of innovations are concerned (Verganti, 2009). Organisations can adopt more human-centred, agile and systematic strategies by exploiting ideals of design-led approaches that complement these changing realities in the market place. This thesis is part of this emerging paradigm and moving forward it aims to give back to the field and theory by creating frameworks which operationalise these changes in trends into design discourse.

1.2. Research Gap

The issue of organisational culture and innovation has assumed as important practices in the realisations of performance, flexibility and differentiation (Schein, 2010). Nevertheless, there seems to be continual discontinuity between identification of external trends and the reality of their practical implementation and

effective operation in organisational culture and systems (Birkinshaw et al., 2016). Most organisations have a penchant to making guesses on the trends and budgeting towards the same but most of these projects remain unattached to the reality of organisational behaviour and decision-making. The opportunity to change is therefore often not realised and firms tend to end up in the quagmire of the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

Further, this rapid change and the increasing intricacy of the outside environment require novel methods to organisation design and management. Conservative hierarchy and strict cultural code may be an impediment to adaptability and creativity that are needed to face new trends emerging in the market (Denning, 2018). It is increasingly understood that a design-led method, such as has been associated with empathy, iteration and systems thinking, provide a set of valuable tools in breaching the divide that exists between trend awareness and organisational transfer (Liedtka, 2015).

Although we understand this, we lack overarching frameworks that organisational leaders can use to identify how they can systematically incorporate the future trends in their cultures and in the processes of innovation. Current models lean toward the single discipline direction of either trend forecasting or cultural change failing to address the importance of the interactions between the two as well as offering practical advice on how they can be integrated (Rohrbeck & Schwarz, 2013). The thesis aims to fill this gap by arriving at a design framework (or a set of frameworks) which would facilitate organisation in adopting the trend adaptation into their culture and innovation practice.

1.2.1. Emerging Challenges and Opportunities

Although it is self-explanatory that organisations have to adapt future trends, there are a number of challenges in successfully translating the need into practice. These are the following:

Information Deluge and Trend Fatigue: The inundation of new trends and signs is so high that it overwhelms decision-makers so much that one cannot filter out the most significant and responsive trends (Rohrbeck & Schwarz, 2013).

Short-term vs Long-term Foresight: the desire to get a quick payoff may interfere with the interests of exploring long-term trends and transforming the culture (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2016).

Stability versus Change: Organisations need to be efficient in the course of their operations, yet be flexible enough to change and innovate (O'Reilly & Tushman, 1996).

Cultural Resistance: Cultural behaviours and institutions had been ingrained and rigid norms and power structures may bar use of new thinking and behaviour demanded in order to embrace a trend (Kotter, 1996).

On visa versa, this challenges also comes with a lot of opportunities in terms of businesses and organisations who are able to master the art of adaptive innovation. Engaging a mindset of ongoing learning and experimentation, using design thinking to make sense of complexity, developing methodological means to integrate trends, organisations can harness their resilience and build their futures in advance.

1.3. Aims and Objectives

The final goal of this thesis is to establish a design driven, resilient framework that can provide a guideline to businesses and organisations on how future trends can be integrated into organisational culture and innovation system. This goal is supported by the following particular points:

- It is to evaluate the literature in reference to organisational culture, innovation and trend adaptation, including its major theories, models and gaps.
- In an effort to research the manner in which top organisations in various industries discover, analyse and incorporate emerging trends into their culture.
- In order to examine the obstacles and facilitating factors to effective trend adaptation at both cultural and systemic levels in organisations.
- To combine both empirical knowledge and theory views into an all-inclusive design structure standing out how to inculcate trend adjustment into organisational culture and innovation.
- To propose recommendations and guidelines to the practitioners interested in making their organisations more adaptable and capable of innovation.

1.4. Research Questions

In an effort to achieve the above stipulated aims and objectives, the following research questions guide the thesis:

- What is the process through which organisations today discern and make sense of future trends that are applicable to their industries?

- What do we regard as key obstacles and facilitators of the process of incorporating the future trends into organisational culture and innovation processes?
- What can design-led methods do to work systematically by adding the adaptation of trends to organisational culture?
- Which frameworks will be successfully used when guiding organisations to transforming future trends into the organisations culture/ innovation systems?
- What are the implications of these frameworks on managing innovation design to organisations of varying context and how can they be adapted to various organisational situations.

1.5. Significance of the Study

There are several implications of the study. Firstly, it addresses a pressing need in the scholarly and practitioner community to identify practical, design-based models that can bridge the divide between knowledge of trends and organisational change. What used to be the optional proactive adaptation has become one of the drivers of survival and growth in the face of rising technological disruption and the shifting consumer needs, post-pandemic uncertainties, and a variety of other challenges organisations currently face today (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018).

Second, it is through the experiences of innovation management, organisational culture and design thinking where this thesis will expand the interdisciplinary outlook of innovation design management. It operates on the theoretical plane in that it explores the dance between the external set of trends and the internal one of

cultural processes and it offers the practice section to demonstrate how organisations can be built into more resilient and nimble.

Thirdly, the study can be directly applied to leaders, managers, and professionals who have the responsibility to steer their organisations through times of changes. The construction of a specific model of adaptation of the trends will give the research the map of how to make foresight, creativity and adaptability generate a part of the organisational culture. In so doing, it enables the development of organisations that due their responsiveness to change can also shape the future.

Finally, the thesis also contributes to the broader social debate on how organisations can address a complex issue such as the climate change, social inequality and technological disruption in our society. Guiding organisations better to face the forthcoming tendencies in a more intelligent way and be able to create more eco-friendly, inviting and innovative business environments, the research assists in their facilitation.

1.6. Scope and Delimitations

The study has a number of implications. To begin with, it responds to an acute concern shared by scholars and practitioners in the community to identify practicable, design-oriented models that may help to mend the chasm between awareness of trends and organisational transformation. The once optional proactive adaptation now reigns as one of the thrusts of survival and growth, in the wake of the increased technological disruption and changing needs of the consumers, post-

pandemic uncertainties and numerous other challenges organisations currently have to deal with (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018).

Second is on the experiences of innovation management, organisational culture and design thinking at which this thesis shall contribute to the inter disciplinary perspective of innovation design management. It works on the theoretical scale by referring to the dance between the external arena of trends and the internal arena of cultural processes and providing the practice section to show how organisations may be constructed into stronger and more agile versions.

Thirdly, leaders, managers and professionals can directly use the study because they are the persons tasked to guide the organisations through turbulent times. The foresight, creativity and adaptability in form of a subsection of the organisational culture will be generated by giving the research the map to build on a certain model of the adaptation of the trends. Through this, it facilitates the establishment of organisations that owing to their sensitivity to change among other things, are also able to influence the future.

Lastly, the thesis also belongs to the general social discourse by making the contribution into how organisations can overcome a quite sophisticated issue like the climate change, social inequality and technological disruption in our society. Helping organisations to approach the emerging tendencies in a yet cleverer manner and be capable of building more environmentally friendly, welcoming and progressive business landscapes, the research helps them to do it.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction of the Review

International business in the 21st century is characterised by increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), resulting in the speed of technological change, changing social priorities, and the pandemic such as COVID-19. In this respect, the capacity of organisations to forecast, decode, and incorporate future trends in their culture and innovation strategies has turned out to be one of the key aspects of long-term competitiveness and resilience (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). The failure to adapt leads to the obsolescence of the organisation and the success of the company to be more proactive and ready to change can potentially realise new opportunities, foster engagement with employees that can be used as a path to develop sustainable value (Teece, Peteraf, & Leih, 2016).

Future Trends: general, frequently worldwide, changes in technology, society, environment, and economy that are estimated to influence the business environment in the future. Among them are but are not confined to artificial intelligence (AI), digital transformation, sustainability, remote work, and demographic changes (Marr, 2023).

Organisational Culture: Values, beliefs, assumptions and practises that define behaviour and decision-making in the organisation (Schein, 2010). Culture is a point of stability, as well as a possibility to produce change.

Innovation: The capability to change ideas into new or enhanced products, services and processes that add a value to the stakeholders. The concept of innovation may be either incremental or discontinuous and more often viewed as an organisational or company-wide competency (Tidd & Bessant, 2020).

The purpose of this literature review is to synthesise the available knowledge on the way organisations attune to the future trends and incorporating them in its organisational culture and innovation practices. It will:

- The analysis of most relevant theoretical frameworks and models.
- Study key trends in the future and implications of the future trends to organisations.
- Investigate cultural influences in the aspects of innovation and change.
- Determine gaps which are both practical and theoretical, emphasising on areas where further research should be conducted.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations

2.2.1. Theories of Organisational Culture

2.2.1.1. Schein's Model of Organisational Culture

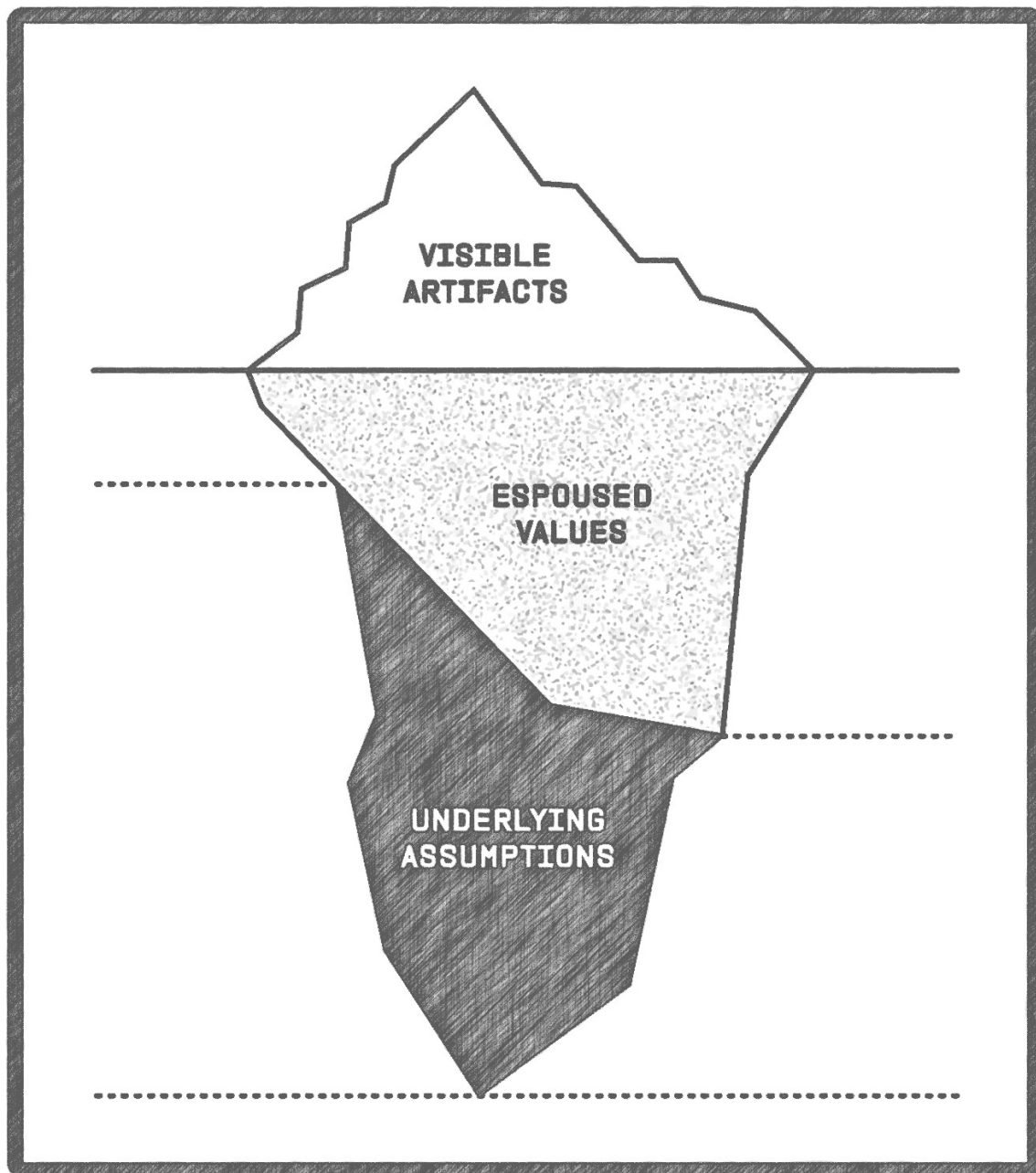


Figure 1. Schein's Model of Organisational Culture (Edgar Schein, 2010)

The three-level model of Edgar Schein (2010) can be viewed as one of the frameworks used in the comprehension of the organisational culture with the basic difference between artefacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions. The things such as office layout, dress code and rituals that provide the surface level view into the culture of a company are called artefacts. Stated values (also called as espoused values) are postulated values and objectives expressed by the organisation, which are generally embodied in mission statements or in official correspondence. Nevertheless, the most powerful of the layers is that of basic underlying assumptions: implicit, unspoken, and taken-for-granted beliefs that actually define behaviour.

The model proposed by Schein emphasises how challenging cultural change is, considering that such fundamental assumptions can be unnoticed and extremely difficult to change. Whereas artefacts and espoused values are adjustable over a relatively short period of time the basic assumptions are imbedded in years of common experience and are seldom challenged. This layer has an overriding influence on the fact as to how the organisations distinguish trends as well as react to the exterior trends. On the one hand, an organisation that unconsciously believes in steady state and aversion to risk taking may be found in difficulties when trying to be innovative, despite the current professed values. Therefore a long-term cultural change must involve bringing out and questioning these deep-rooted assumptions and this cannot be done without a powerful leadership and open communication. The model by Schein has been critical in the diagnostic of culture and explaining why change efforts usually fail deep down.

2.2.1.2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

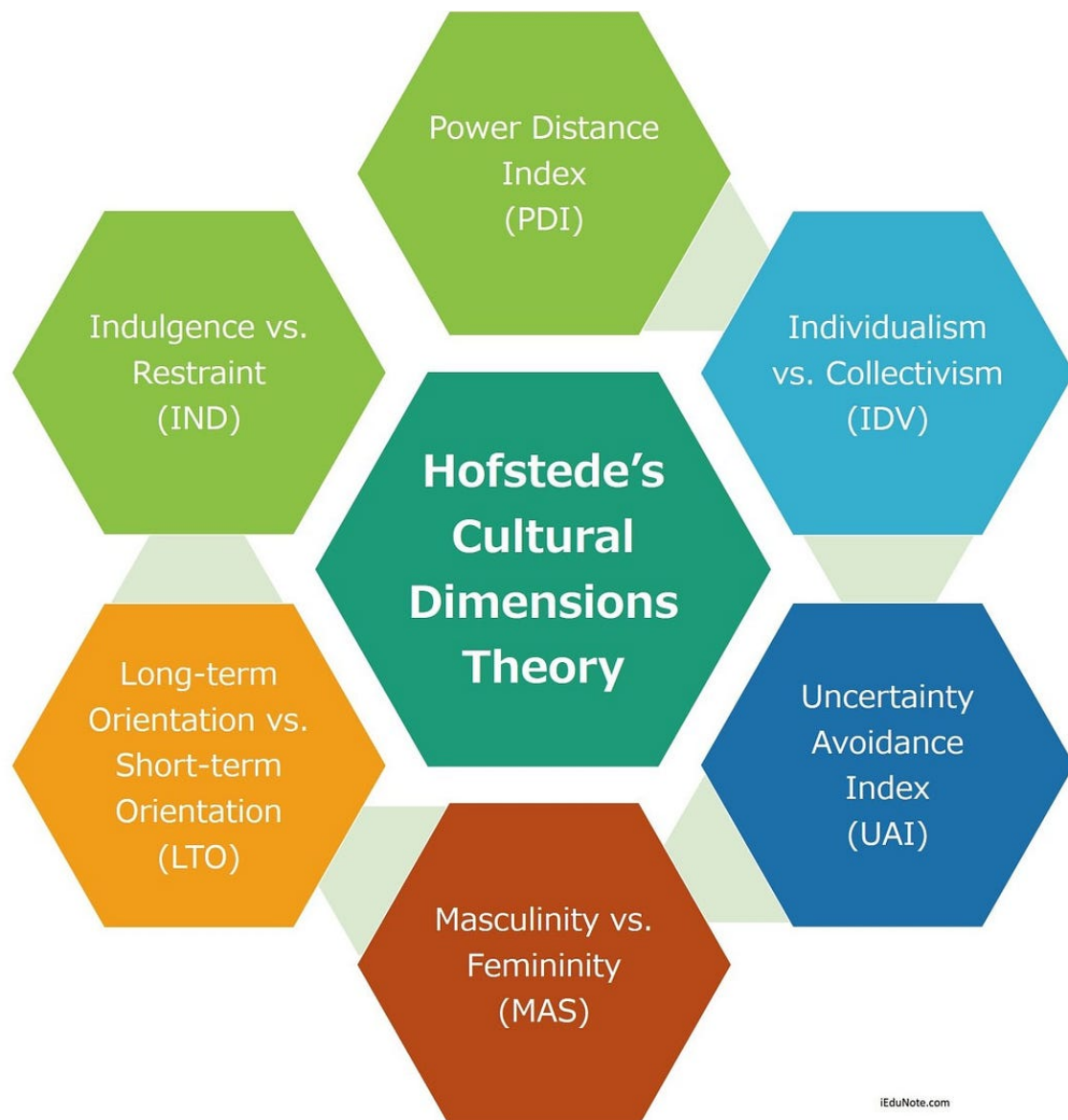


Figure 2. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Geert Hofstede; 1980, 2001)

The culture dimensions created by Geert Hofstede (1980, 2001) are useful to examine the impact of the national as well as the organisational cultures on the reaction toward change and innovation. Important dimensions are the power distance (the acceptance of unequal power distribution), the individualism versus

collectivism (the focus on individual achievements versus group harmony) and the uncertainty avoidance (the tolerance of uncertainty and risk).

More frequently, for example, highly uncertainty avoiding cultures are attracted to rules and stability and are therefore more apt to resist disruptive innovation or radical change. Comparatively, low uncertainty cultures tend to be more accepting of experimenting and innovations. Another factor without which it is impossible to imagine entrepreneurial behaviour is creative problem-solving is expected to be observed most of the time in individualistic cultures, where personal initiative and self-direction take priority. Although the group belonging to the collectivist culture has close ties, collectivists may be less willing to challenge the status quo or engage in innovative practices that are risky.

The model of Hofstede therefore assists in understanding why change efforts and innovation processes are successfully undertaken in one cultural setting and fail in the other. It indicates the necessity of customisation of change management and innovation strategies in accordance with the cultural values and norms that underlie both the organisation and the national environment in which it is located.

2.2.1.3. Competing Values Framework

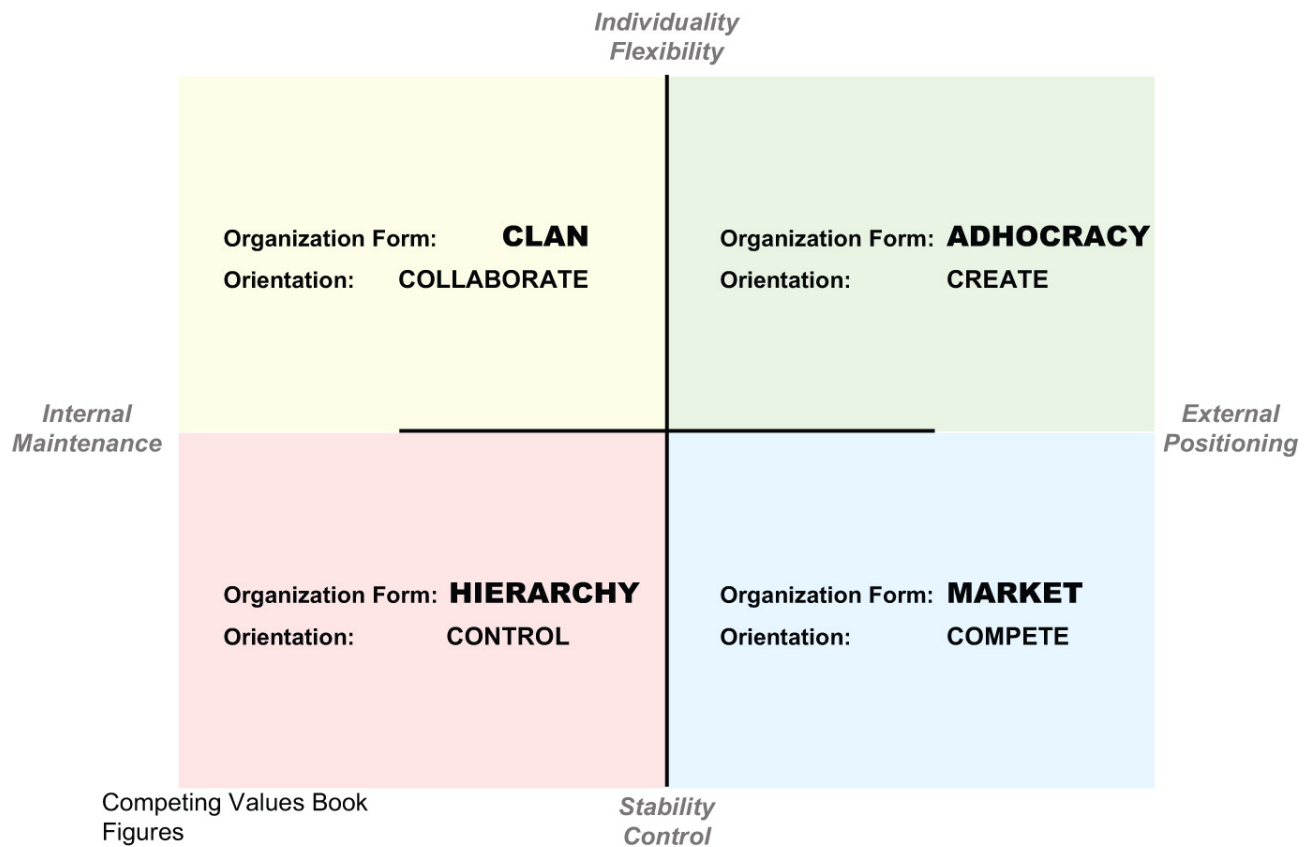


Figure 3. Competing Values Framework (Cameron and Quinn, 2011)

The Competing Values Framework by Cameron and Quinn (2011) refers to four kinds of organisational cultures: clan, adhocracy, market and hierarchy. The cultures of Clan are characterised by mutual cooperation, family-like environment, whereas market ones are aimed at satisfying the aim of competition, setting of quantitative goals. Hierarchical cultures put emphasis on order, stability and control using formal process and definite chain of authority.

The culture of adhocracy in contrast is one that is flexible, creative with a high degree of innovation orientation and risk taking. Adhocracy levels of culture in

organisation cause an organisation to embrace experimentation, entrepreneurship thinking and flexibility which are key attributes to reacting to emerging trends and swift change. Consequently, such organisations are usually more flexible, with the ability of looking ahead and incorporating new advancements.

Hierarchical cultures, focusing on order and anchored routines, on the contrary, might not be able to adapt to new demands and disruptive trends in time. The Competing Values Framework therefore makes the point about ensuring cultural congruence with strategic initiatives, which in turn implies that cultivating features that define adhocracy may help an organisation increase its innovation speediness and preparedness, particularly in a hurried and chaotic context.

2.2.2. Theories of innovation

2.2.2.1. Disruptive Innovation

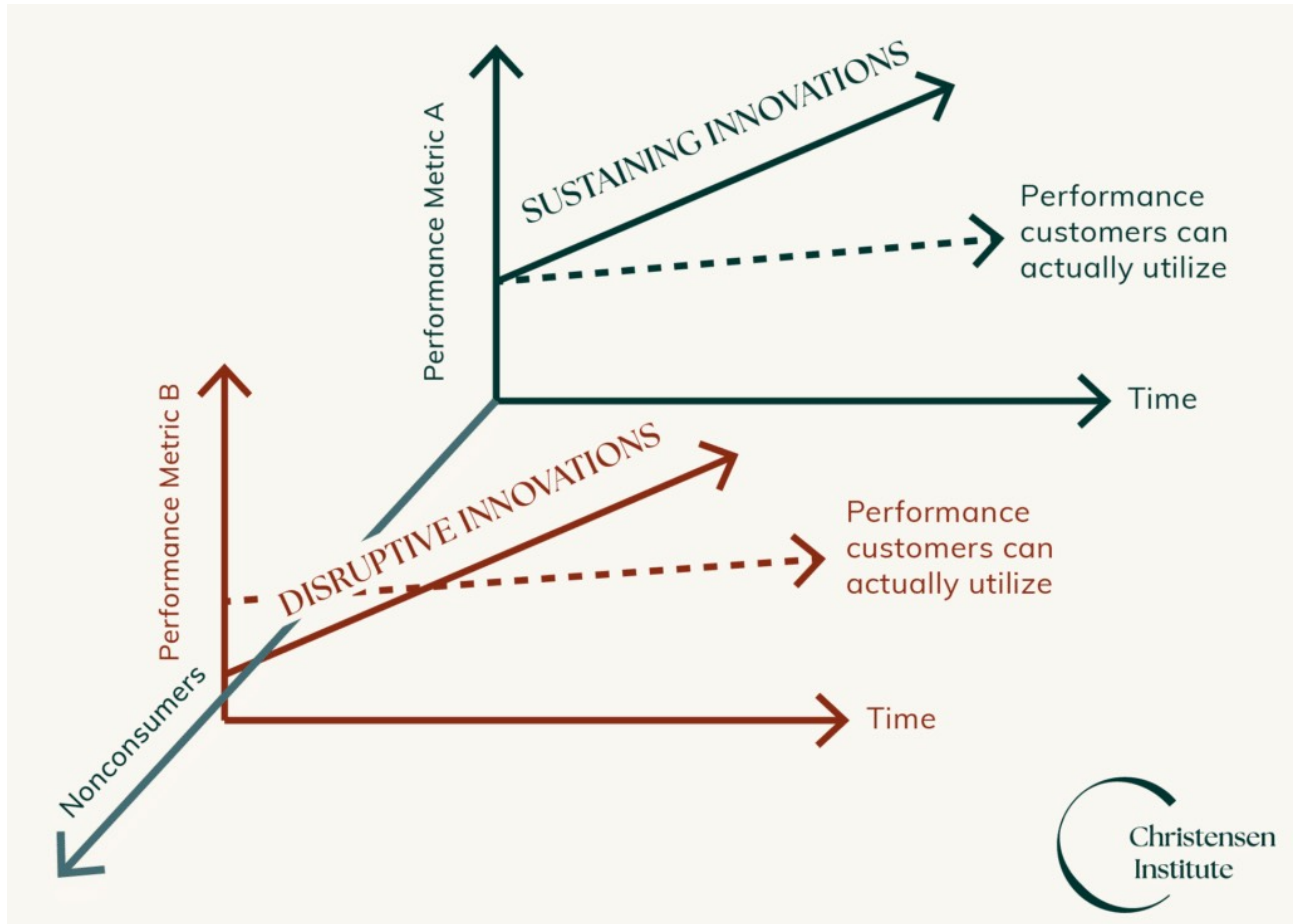


Figure 4. Disruptive Innovation (Clayton Christensen, 1997)

The disruptive innovation theory developed by Clayton Christensen (1997) shows why new entrants can disrupt the incumbents and replace it with new simpler and cheaper solutions that first target neglected or cost-sensitive groups. Meanwhile, these innovations become better and attract mass customers usually ousting the established companies who concentrate on maintaining their current products and attend to their most lucrative customers. This dynamic brings out the danger of

complacency that can befall mature organisations being so concentrated on making small gains without being able to see the changing trends in the market.

The theory highlights the significance of organisational ambidexterity the ability to exploit simultaneously the existing strengths and seek new opportunities (O and Tushman, 2013). The ambidextrous organisations get in a better position to counter the disruptive threat as long as they balance between efficient running of existing operations and the ability to be flexible in terms of innovation and adaption to the future trends. Such balance is the key to long-term survival in the environments marked by a high rate of technological change and changing customer expectations.

2.2.2.2. Open Innovation

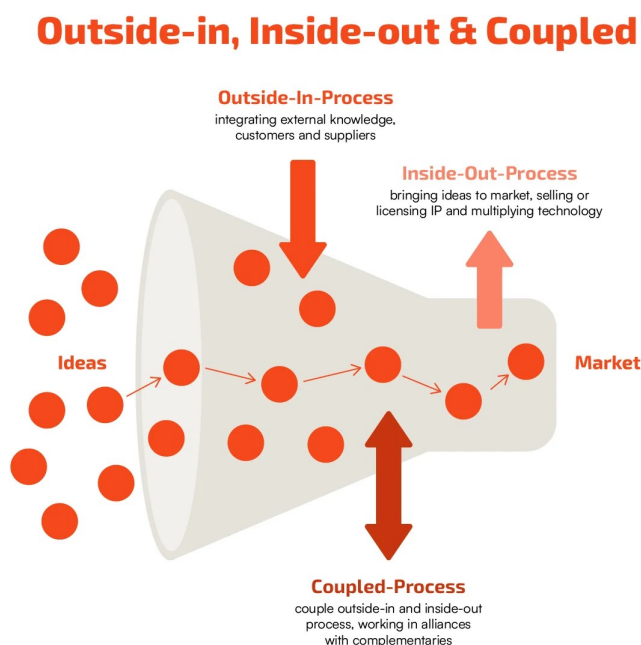


Figure 5. Open Innovation (Chesbrough, 2003)

The open innovation paradigm developed by Chesbrough (2003) contends that organisations ought to build on the ideas both within and outside the organisation and the various routes to market in order to increase the level of innovation. This strategy is a change of the old fashioned pattern closed models where the innovation is generated within the company itself and penetrated to others instead a more networked and co-working approach with partners, customers, suppliers and even competitors.

Open innovation should be achieved through the culture of openness, trust, and teamwork, backed by the functioning system of useful knowledge sharing and co-creation. Organisations need to put in place some structures like collaborative platforms, joint ventures or innovation ecosystems that will assist in the sharing of information and ideas across boundaries. Such a cultural and structural openness is vital when it comes to harvesting different perspectives and speeding up the innovation process.

2.2.2.3. Dynamic Capabilities

Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) have made the first introduction of the dynamic capabilities understanding; the capacity of an organisation to integrate, construct and reconfigure internal and external competencies to respond to highly dynamic environments. Dynamic capabilities are some of the capabilities closely associated with innovation and culture

2.2.3. Change Management

2.2.3.1. Change Management Theories

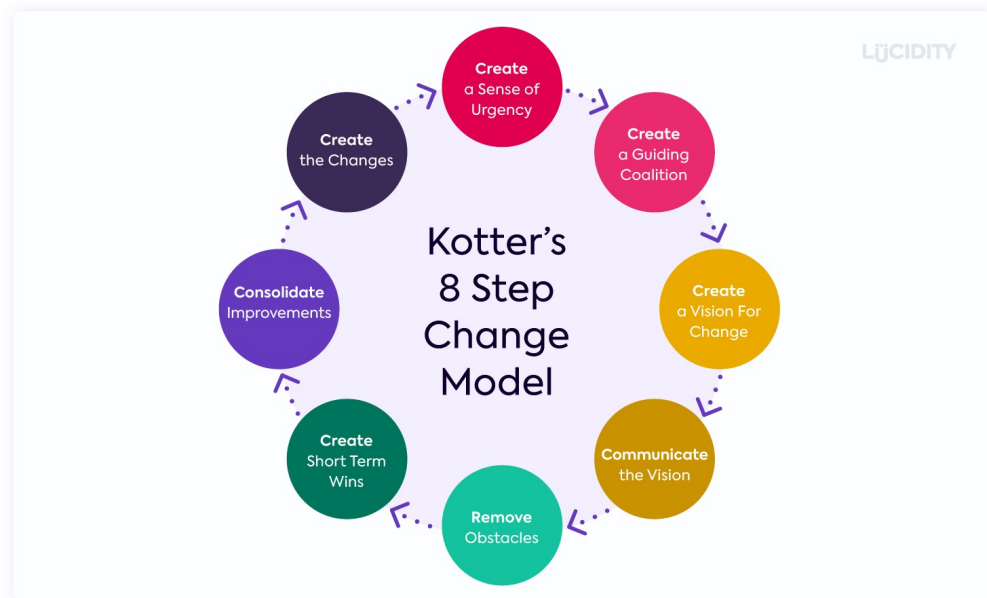


Figure 6. The eight-step model, (Kotter, 1996)

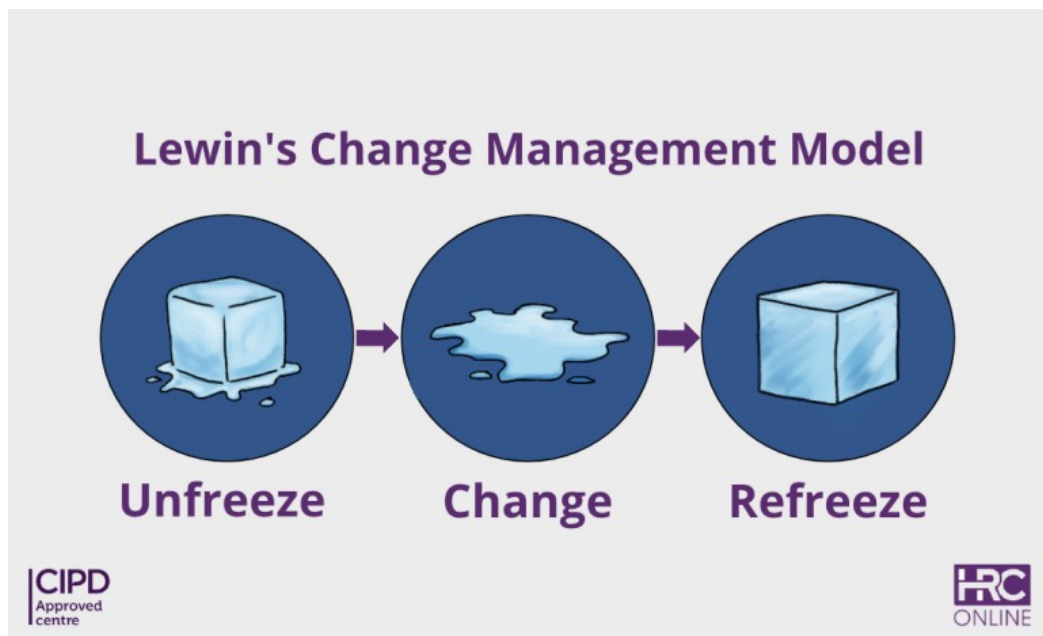


Figure 7. unfreeze-change-refreeze model, (Lewin, 1951)

The eight-step model described by Kotter (1996) and the unfreeze-change- refreeze model mentioned by Lewin (1951) are still models on which change management is based. The two of them have highlighted the roles of leadership, communication, and the employee participation in successful change efforts. The model developed by Kotter is more systematic and staged, starting with the creation of necessity and ending with creating a new habit, whereas the model proposed by Lewin emphasises the psychological side of the picture, the transition of the old manners to new standards. These models also emphasise on the importance of clear vision, continued support as well as reinforcement of desired behaviours in order to achieve permanent change. Organisations can maximise chances of institutionalising changes in their culture and operations by involving employees in all phases of the change process and dealing with resistance in advance.

2.2.3.2. Strategic Foresight

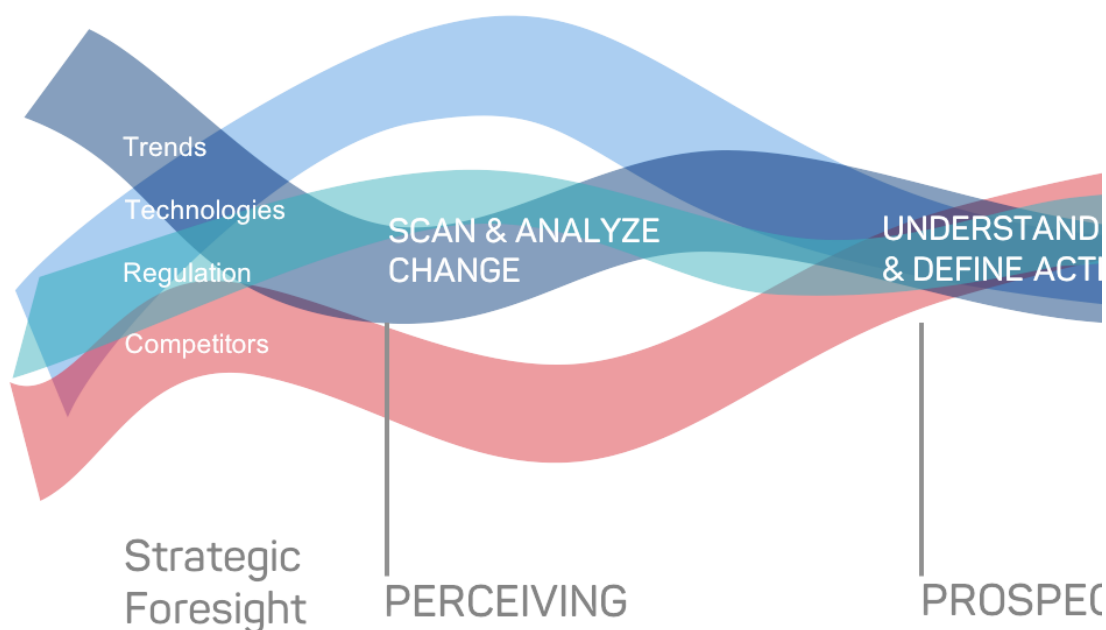


Figure 8. Strategic Foresight, (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018)

Strategic foresight refers to the systematic exploration of possible futures to inform present-day decision-making (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018). It involves tools such as scenario planning, Delphi studies, and horizon scanning. Foresight capabilities are increasingly recognised as critical for innovation and long-term survival (Vecchiato, 2015).

2.2.4. Frameworks for Trend Analysis

2.2.4.1. PESTLE Analysis



Figure 9. PESTLE Analysis (Francis J. Aguilar, 1967)

PESTLE Analysis is a management tool which studies Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental forces that influences the external environment of an organisation. Through the systematic evaluation of these macro-environmental factors, a company is able to determine the risks and opportunities, foresee the regulatory or market changes, and download their plans accordingly to the external realities. Factors such as alteration of government policy, development of technology and changes in social trends may also have major influences on organisational priorities and innovation.

2.2.4.2. Futures Thinking

Futures Thinking helps organisations to consider more than just short-term issues and to envisage a variety of plausible futures and to stretch assumptions and widen the horizons of strategic thinking. The method includes trend scanning, horizon scanning and investigation of alternative outcomes, which helps organisations to build stronger and more resilient strategies when dealing with uncertainty. When futures thinking is incorporated in strategic planning, businesses must appreciate that their activities will be proactive to disruptive changes, identify open opportunities, and to act swiftly when subjected to complex environments.

2.2.4.3. Scenario Planning

Scenario Planning is a process of creating in-depth stories about the alternative futures in order to challenge organisational preparedness and resilience. Instead of forecasting just one future, scenario planning is the ability to explore a spectrum of possibilities due to various assumptions and forces. More generally, the process assists organisations in stress testing strategies, prepare back-up plans and create

the Heft to expand to take account of events or disturbances that may come along to further aid long-term sustainability and well-informed choice.

2.3. Exploration of Future Trends

2.3.1. Artificial Intelligence and Automation

AI and automation are revolutionising the industries through being more efficient, facilitating the data-driven decision making, and generating new business models (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). Nevertheless, they also present an ethical issue and would also demand the high degree of cultural adaptation, in particular, in workforce re-skilling and faith in algorithms.

2.3.2. Sustainability and the Circular Economy

Sustainability has already ceased to be a marginal topic but has become a central strand (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). Organisations are also pursuing the principles of a circular economy, they are incorporating environmental, social, and governance (ESG), and are responding to the demands of stakeholders by being more transparent and accountable.

2.3.3. Remote and Hybrid Work

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a faster transition to remote work and the hybrid model, which questioned the past notions of productivity, collaboration, and concept of belonging to an organisation (Kniffin et al., 2021). Flexible work demands new kinds of leadership, IT infrastructure as well as versatile culture.

2.3.4. Demographic and Generational Shifts

The workforce is diversifying itself too, as the millennials and Gen Z expect something different regarding the purpose, autonomy, and technology (Schroth, 2019). The issues of creating the multigenerational teams to manage and using diversity as the source of innovation are acute ones.

2.3.5. Digital Transformation

Digital transformation is a process through which businesses and customers undergo radical change as a result of implementing digital technology (Westerman, Bonnet, & McAfee, 2014). Technology is not the only success factor, cultural alignment and change management is also essential.

2.3.6. Other Emerging Trends

The trends can also be categorised as globalisation and de-globalisation, geopolitical instability, health and well-being and platform-based business models (Bughin et al., 2019).

2.3.7. Organisational Implications

These trends impose on organisations the demands to:

- Cultivate new features and attitudes.
- Restructure and reengineer in agility.
- Promote innovative and ever-learning cultures.

2.4. Organisational Culture and its Flexibility

2.4.1. Adaptive vs. Rigid Cultures

Studies have also repeatedly shown that adaptive organisational cultures characterised by openness, empowerment and commitment towards continuous learning are much more capable of managing change and uncertainty (Denison & Mishra, 1995). Adaptive cultures provoke employees to exchange ideas, take risks and be proactive to new trends or issues that arise. Such agility allows organisations to be creative, adaptive, and they are able to compete within any environment.

On the contrary, the rigid cultures are characterised by rigid ranking, supervision to the traditional folklores, and the poor reception of fresh ideas or INPUTS. These cultures in many cases conceal creative freedom and they do not allow taking of risks which bring about organisational stagnation. In the long run, such resistance to change may result into missed opportunities, deteriorating performance and even a decline in an organisation (Hannan & Freeman, 1984). The described difference between adaptive and rigid cultures demonstrates the necessity of allowing the development of an organisational environment characterised by the appreciation of agility, open communication, and learning within the framework of organisations that have to deal with more complex and quick-evolving external impacts.

2.4.2 Cultural transformation

2.4.2.1. Drivers of Cultural Change

External shocks In many cases, cultural change is brought about by external shocks, i.e. by technology disruption or by a shift in regulation, or by an internal crisis like a decrease in performance. Transformations are not already achieved to be very successful without intensive leadership commitment, a clear vision of the organisation to evolve as well as the involvement of the employees to guide and sustain the significant change (Kotter, 1996).

2.4.2.2. Leadership's Role

Leaders are in a central position in moulding and changing the company culture. And leading transformational leaders, in a specific, can be effective in those ways that they make inspiring visions, that they live the behaviours they want others to emulate, and that they provide psychological safety. This kind of environment will inspire employees to take risks by experimenting, passing knowledge/experience and making necessary changes without fear of being adversely affected (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

2.4.2.3. Change Agility

The capability of preparing, adjusting, and making the most of change (change agility) is becoming an acknowledged primary organisational ability (Joiner & Josephs, 2007). The structure of an agile organisation is decentralised in the sense that it gives decision-making authority to teams all rounded. They also encourage cross-functional working and adopt iterative learning, so they can respond rapidly to

the new trends and challenges. Such nimbleness not only boosts innovation but also makes quick changes in fast-changing landscapes

2.4.3 Barriers to Cultural Change

Common barriers include:

Resistance to Change: Fear of the unknown, loss of status, or disruption of routines (Oreg, 2006).

Structural Inertia: Deeply embedded processes and systems that hinder adaptation (Hannan & Freeman, 1984).

Cultural Misalignment: Disconnect between espoused values and actual behaviours (Schein, 2010).

Lack of Psychological Safety: Employees may fear punishment for failure or dissent, stifling innovation (Edmondson, 2019).

All these obstacles weaken the capacity of an organisation to be adaptive and innovative to changing environments. In case of high levels of resistance to change, employees are likely to idle down or even resist efforts of getting new initiatives by slowing down the processes of transformation. Structural inertia also implies that the status quo is strengthened, which hinders the introduction of new processes, technologies even being forced by some external factors to change. Mismatch in cultures also makes change difficult, since employees believe there is a difference between what leaders say and what goes on, thus becoming cynical and not trusting. Most importantly of all, psychological safety will not exist and as such individuals will be left unable to share ideas, raise concerns and learn off of committing mistakes which are all crucial to the creativity and constant improvement. Leadership must take the initiative to remove these hurdles by

practicing open communication, observable investment in experimentation, and other strategies to implement structures and rewards to target valued cultural traits. It is the only way through which organisations can create a culture that is actually sensitive to future trends and innovation.

2.4.4. Case Examples

Microsoft's Cultural Transformation: The successful cultural transformation that Satya Nadella led in Microsoft is one of the brightest examples of how a leader can rejuvenate an old organisation. In 2014, when Nadella took up the role of CEO, Microsoft was a stiff company with a culture of intense competition characterised by being a know it all, that discouraged teamwork and taking risks. It was the vision of Nadella, who wanted to develop a culture of a learn-it-all based on curiosity, empathy and continuing learning influenced by an idea of growth mindset offered by Carol Dweck. He played the role of an evangelical in terms of openness, permitting employees to take risks and learn through failure, and ensuring silo busting so that cross-functional teamwork could take place. Such cultural change was backed by changes on performance reviews so as to reward individual contribution as well as contribution to team success. The change allowed Microsoft to adopt the clouds, artificial intelligence, and open-source development, which prompted the innovation of products like the Azure and Microsoft Teams. Satisfaction among employees jumped by the multiples and the market capitalisation of the company increased by 223 to 300 billion in 2014 to more than 2.3 trillion in 2022. The humanistic, empowering approach of the leadership of Nadella, as well as his emphasis on

being agile, did not only increase morale and innovation in the company, but also restored Microsoft as the head of global technology.

Zappos and Holacracy: The self-management and distributed authority experiment at Zappos by means of Holacracy present an interesting case study of opportunities and potential difficulties of radical culture change. In putting in place Holacracy, Zappos aimed at doing away with convention hierarchies, but instead giving employees the power to work organised in self-governing teams or in circles which took charge of decisions and duties. This strategy was done to increase the flexibilities, innovations and employee ownership developing a speed of adaptation and entrepreneurial thinking.

Nonetheless, the transition was not that easy without serious challenges. Most of the workers had a hard time with the new system since it was complicated and vague and some felt lost in the system where there was no clear managerial hierarchy. Resulting changes brought about the resistance, reduced job satisfaction among certain employees and a remarkable departure as approximately 18 per cent of personnel took the severance terms without adapting to holacracy. With time, Zappos has ditched holacracy, re-established the presence of a few managerial positions but kept the aspects of decentralisation and independence. As demonstrated in this case, distributed authority has the potential to energise, empower the workforce, and promote innovation but it is accompanied by its share of adjustment and requires highly developed self-management abilities and lifelong learning.

2.5. Innovation as a Response to Change

2.5.1. The Role of Innovation in Organisational Adaptation

Change is a reaction and an impulse to innovation. Innovative organisations are in a better position to capture the new opportunities and eliminate threats (Tidd & Bessant, 2020).

2.5.2. Culture-Innovation Link

2.5.2.1. Innovation-Friendly Cultures

It has been found that risk-open cultures, experimentation, and failure learning cultures are those which are most likely to come up with breakthrough innovations (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Creative problem-solving is additionally increased via psychological safety, diversity, and inclusion (Edmondson, 2019).

2.5.2.2. Barriers to Innovation

The obstacles are the bureaucracy hardness, risk-aversion, and shortsightedness. Unreasonably hierarchical cultures can lay suppressing any dissent or innovative ideas (Hamel, 2007).

2.5.3. Types of Innovation

Incremental Innovation: Making tiny regular enhancements that bring improvement to the existing products or processes.

Disruptive Innovation: This is radical innovation resulting into the development of new markets or value networks (Christensen, 1997).

Business Model Innovation: A redefined manner of creating, delivering and capturing value (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010).

2.5.4. Organisational Structures for Innovation

Ambidextrous Organisations: Balance exploitation of existing capabilities with exploration of new opportunities (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013).

Cross-Functional Teams: Bring together diverse skills and perspectives to drive innovation.

Open Innovation Ecosystems: Collaborate with external partners, including startups, universities, and customers (Chesbrough, 2003).

2.5.5. Case Studies

Google: Google has also become famous because of its 20% time policy, where employees can spend some work hours each week on their own ventures and experimentation. This project has resulted in the development of innovative products like Google+, Gmail and AdSense, which are evidence of the company insistence on innovation through intrinsic motivation and autonomy. The culture of psychological safety, the feeling that Google employees are safe to jump in and make risky decisions when they have unconventional ideas and can experiment and fail is central to the continued innovation at Google. Another unique practice adopted by Google is cross-functional cooperation where different teams are combined to find unique solutions to challenging problems and spur creativity. By creating a culture of experimentation, open communication, and collaboration, Google has managed to spawn innovative solutions and sustain its competitive

advantage on a constant basis. LEGO: Subsidised its near-bankruptcy condition by adopting open innovation and customer-driven co-creation (Robertson & Breen, 2013).

Shopify: Shopify is well accustomed to remote working as it became a digital by default company in May 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the workers shifted into full-time remote work schedules, with offices redesigned as non-obligatory teamwork facilities instead of the places of work. A strong culture with a flexible, change-embracing environment and powerful digital tools have made this transfer possible and had teams continue to perform in terms of productivity, communication, and innovation despite being physically apart. Adaptability and long-term-oriented leadership helped employees within the new routine and promoted their further development. The example of Shopify shows that an elastic organisational culture along with the digital infrastructure can provide innovation and resilience in the face of disruptive change.

2.6. Integration and Alignment

2.6.1. Aligning Future-Oriented Thinking with Culture and Innovation

2.6.1.1. Organisational Readiness

The terms organisational readiness refers to the level of psychological and structural preparedness of an organisation to embark on change (Weiner, 2009). Readiness will involve mutual commitment, provision of enough resources and open communication that will together allow the easy adaptation of new programs. A well prepared organisation is able to be more dynamic and efficient in the process of

terminating the future trends as the employees are more interested, more willing and more self-assured to accept the changes that are needed.

2.6.1.2. Strategic Foresight as a Tool for Alignment

The processes of foresight help organisations to foresee possible disruption, discover new opportunities, pursue their innovation strategies to meet their long-term goals (Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018). Through the stepwise incorporation into strategic planning, organisations develop a culture of proactivity, which is prepared to deal with uncertainty. Such progressive thinking promotes to scan the external environment at all times and also assists in taking timely and informed decisions helping in avoiding being collared by such swift changes.

2.6.1.3. Cross-Functional Collaboration

Cutting of silos and encouraging cross-function and cross-level collaboration is key in combining different views in an organisation and speeds up the innovation (Gratton & Erickson, 2007). Cross-functional teamwork unites people with different backgrounds, which allows sharing the views and experience to solve the problems more creatively and efficiently. Companies which deliberately eliminate boundaries between organisational units are in a better situation to rapidly react to market forces, take advantage of group intelligence and sustain new creative solutions. Not only does this make processes more agile, but it also increases employee engagement and performance in organisations since there is an assurance that solutions will be based on diverse relations and experiences.

2.6.1.4. Continuous Learning

Regular training, positive feedback, and active knowledge sharing are some of the best practices that can make organisations have a culture of continual improvement with regard to learning, thus effectively catching up with the changes in the environment and ensuring the long term innovation (Garvin, 1993).

2.6.2. Frameworks for Integration

Three Horizons Framework: It balances the current operations (Horizon 1), new opportunities (Horizon 2) and the possibilities of the future (Horizon 3) (Curry & Hodgson, 2008).

Balanced Scorecard: Smoothes out the performance measure of strategy, culture, and innovation (Kaplan & Norton, 1996).

2.6.3. Leadership and Governance

To work successfully, integration should have good leaders, have clear governance, and align incentives with the long-term goals (Teece et al., 2016).

2.7. Gaps and Critical Analysis

2.7.1. Contradictions and Limitations in Existing Research

Another major gap in the literature is oversight on this notion that the literature concentrates on large corporate organisations where the majority of the literature papers have been reported to target multinational businesses most of the time without considering the challenges and opportunities adopted by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Studies of SMEs emphasise that their innovation

impediments, cultural performances and resources are conspicuously diverse to those of big companies and discoveries in a single arrangement may not be viable in the other.

The other significant problem is Western-centric thinking of organisational studies. Most studies are based on Western (and especially Anglo-American) experience, which takes the universality of theories and ignores the role of cultural differences in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This bias reduces the global applicability of findings and makes there is need to have wider and cross-cultural research frameworks.

The short-term versus the long-term orientation is still not settled. Although researchers have claimed that long-term orientation helps steer innovation by being persistent and learning, others believe that short orientation supports a quick reaction to market dynamics. This controversy shows a distinct lack of more contextualised types of analysis.

Lastly, there is a problem of measurement. The methodological complexity in accurately evaluating organisational culture, innovation and the presence of foresight capabilities is omnipresent and has been inconsistently defined and characterised with different indicators such as providing different results and lack of comparability amongst the studies. Such inconsistencies point to the necessity of further heterogeneous, context-sensitive, and methodologically sound research in the area.

2.7.2. Under-explored Areas

SME Adaptability: The small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) have special disadvantages in forecasting and incorporating the future trends since they lack resources and size. Nevertheless, in many cases, they strive to optimise the efficiency of operations and customer interaction using agility, digital technologies such as cloud computing, AI, and collaboration services (InovaDigital, 2024; SEEBa, 2024). To survive in a competitive environment related to dynamic markets, SMEs use omni-channel strategies and personalised customer experience that manage to maintain a balance between the usage of technologies and a human approach.

Cross-Cultural Differences: The relations between national and organisational cultures are complex and there is interaction between the two cultures to influence the response to the global trends. Cultural intelligence, awareness, and cultural translation of organisational values allow successful adaptation and should be applied in the context of multiple cultural perspectives (Paijo, 2017). The mismatch may cause friction, but on the contrary cultural synergy will promote innovation and successful teamwork (Vorecol, 2024; Tim Review, 2005).

Industry-Based Solutions: Various industries react in different ways to such trends as AI and sustainability. Specifically, AI is used in healthcare to treat patients and manage operational efficiency, and in manufacturing, the focus is on predictive support and smart factories (Mitel, 2024; Open Medscience, 2025; Gembah, 2025). The trends are affected by sectoral peculiarities on the way of their integration into culture and innovation.

Long-Term Impact of Remote Work: A persistent remote and hybrid work culture changes organisational culture, collaboration and innovation. Although remote working allows more flexibility and work-life balance, it is likely to decrease spontaneous conversations important to creativity and undermine weak ties that promote diverse ideas generation (LinkedIn, 2024; Emerald Insight, 2024). Digital tools and adaptive management are necessary to be able to cohere and innovate.

The Middle Management: Middle managers are either contributing or not to cultural change and innovation. They make sense of strategic vision, involve staff, organise implementation; and counterbalance competing interests (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Odgers, 2024; Aaron Hall, 2023). Motivated middle managers can fuel experimentation and eliminate resistance, and can be a driver to long-term innovation and culture change.

2.7.3. Critical Reflections

Although the literature on the importance of culture and innovation in adaptation in organisations is greatly stressed, it tends to portray these notions as positive without mentioning the negative aspects. Practically, not every innovation turns out successful, a lot of them fail to bring the desired results, and some of them cannot even break an existing strength and waste the resources and strategic position that was gained (Hamel & Välikangas, 2003). On the same note, most of the changes that are associated with cultural change occur at large costs, and some of them include; employee resistance, loss of organisational identity, and low organisational morale during changes. Changing values and behaviour is often a long drawn and destabilising process, especially when not carefully handled. Moreover, the perfect mix of structure and flexibility or centralisation and decentralisation is very

situational. One thing that works in a certain organisational or cultural environment may not work so well in another. This complexity points at the necessity of fine-tuned, situation-specific management strategies of culture and innovation, instead of believing in their universality and universally beneficial effects.

2.8. Design Thinking as a Catalyst for Cultural Change

As organisations work to be ahead of the trends and incorporate them in the future, the significance of a design and creative thinking has gained its place not only in academic writing but also in business operations. Besides being identified as methods of product or service development, these approaches have been known to play a vital role in enhancing organisational flexibility, cultural change, and continual innovation (Brown, 2008; Liedtka, 2018).

Design thinking is a human centred, cyclical process that focuses on empathy, ideation, prototyping and testing (Brown, 2008). The following are of ways that its adoption can shift organisational culture fundamentally:

Fostering Collaboration: Design thinking fosters transversal collaboration that demystifies old-fashioned silos and support collective responsibility over the result (Carlgren, Rauth, & Elmquist, 2016). This teamwork spirit encourages the creation of more receptive and accommodative cultures.

Promoting Psychological Safety: By valuing diverse perspectives and encouraging open dialogue, design thinking helps create an environment where employees feel safe to experiment, share ideas, and learn from failure (Edmondson, 2019).

Embedding Continuous Improvement: The iterative nature of design thinking instills a culture of ongoing learning and adaptation, which is essential for responding effectively to emerging trends (Liedtka, 2018).

2.8.1. Creative Thinking as a Driver of Adaptability and Innovation

The process of thinking, which allows one to innovate and come up with purposeful ideas is an essential element of assisting organisations to work their way through complexities in the environment and uncertainty (Amabile & Pratt, 2016):

Building Resilience: Through creative thinking, organisations are able to redefine problems and develop non-traditional solutions and thus become more susceptible to changes brought about by disruptive trends (Puccio, Mance, & Murdock, 2011).

Unlocking Opportunities: Encouraging curiosity and challenging assumptions helps organisations identify new growth opportunities and transform potential threats into competitive advantages (Sawyer, 2012).

Enhancing Problem-Solving: The innovative teams are better at the development of various solutions, which makes decision-making more healthy and breakthrough innovative (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

2.8.2. Design and Creative Thinking in Change Management and Trend

Integration

Human-Centred Change: Design thinking invites stakeholders to the process frequently, and early enough, to make change initiatives co-created and in-line with the actual needs, which enhances buy-in and minimises resistance (Liedtka, 2018).

Aligning Values and Structures: Organisations will have a better chance to match their espoused values with the real ones when they involve their employees in designing new processes and new offerings, putting into the very fibre of the organisation ideas and thinking of the future (Brown, 2008).

Rapid Prototyping and Scaling: Design thinking enables organisations to pilot small-scale innovations, gather feedback, and scale successful initiatives, reducing the risk of large-scale failures (Carlgren et al., 2016).

2.8.3. Practical Strategies and Cultural Shifts

Cultivating Curiosity and Experimentation: Experimentation and failure learning require the leadership to support the practice of creative thinking and make it a central part of the everyday process (Edmondson, 2019).

Encouraging Diverse Perspectives: Cross-functional teamwork guarantees a broader spread of ideas as well as experience that determine strategy making, which leads to creation of organisational agility (Gratton & Erickson, 2007).

Embedding Creativity in Daily Practice: Regular brainstorming, feedback forums, and iterative project cycles help make creativity a routine aspect of organisational life (Sawyer, 2012).

2.8.4. Impact on Organisational Performance

It has been found through empirical studies that design-led organisations carry out better in innovation performance, employee interest and financial performance than their counterparts (Design Management Institute, 2015). Organisations, by imbuing their corporate culture with design and creative thinking, tend to develop an environment where innovation thrives, where risks are addressed in a positive way, and where constant adaptation is the rule.

To conclude, the techniques of design and creative thinking are not just strategies of innovation but instead they are the core components of establishing cultures that are adaptive or resilient and able to internalise future trends. The focus on the empathy, teamwork, and iterative education make their organisations be better equipped to succeed in a period of uncertainty and change.

2.9. Conclusion and Implications

2.9.1. Summary of Key Findings

The literature reviewed can confirm that incorporating future trends into organisational culture and innovation approaches is the key to success in a VUCA world in the long-term. Key enablers are adaptive cultures, empowered leadership and ordered foresight processes. Culture is transformed by innovation and innovation is created through culture and cross-functional collaboration and learning as working mechanisms are critical.

2.9.2. Research Gaps and Justification for Further Study

The gaps are substantial, especially on the issue of SME adaptability, multi-cultural dynamics, industry approach, and the long-term implication of working remotely. Further diverse, longitudinal and contextually sensitive research to inform theory and practice is required.

2.9.3. Implications for Practice

Organisations should:

- Make a commitment to investments in foresight and scenario planning capacity.
- Cultivate a psychology safety, experimentation, and learning cultures.
- Match the structures, rewards, and leadership development with objectives toward the future.
- Learn to embrace diversity and cross functional teamwork aimed at innovation.

2.9.4. Research Focus

The thesis is going to address the mentioned gap by discussing how SMEs operating in various cultural and sectoral contexts foresee and incorporate future trends into their culture and innovation plans. With a comparative multi-case study strategy, the study will address the problem to produce practical results to be used by academic researchers and practitioners.

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This methodology chapter outlines the research design, data collection, analysis procedures and ethical considerations that surround this thesis, based on the findings established in the literature review, which formulated the critical relationship that exists between organisational culture, innovation, and involving the future trends in its adaption. It is designed to enable the relevant research gaps to be filled especially by the previously under-researched adaptability of SMEs, sectoral and cross-cultural variations and the fine balance played by middle management when it comes to the embedding of future-oriented thinking within the context of organisation culture and organisational level innovations.

3.2. Research Paradigm and Rationale

In view of complexity and context specificity of organisational culture and innovation, the qualitative, interpretivist paradigm will be used in the study. Interpretivist approach fits the exploration of meanings, processes and experience very well as opposed to statistically generalising the findings. This can be compared to demands expressed through the literature to perform more refined, context-dependent studies (Binns et al., 2014; Meyer & Peng, 2016), particularly in contexts where limited research has been conducted namely SMEs and non-Western contexts.

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. Multiple Case Study Approach

The study design used was a multiple case study since it permitted an in-depth, comparative case study across different organisational settings. It is especially useful to study the questions of how/ why social phenomena are complicated (Edwards et al., 2001; Waimiri, 2018). It allows investigating similarities and differences, in the way that organisations monitor and organise future developments, and the way culture and innovation relate in practice.

This purposive sampling ensures the study addresses the literature's call for more cross-sectoral and cross-cultural insights and a deeper understanding of SME dynamics.

3.3.2. Research Questions

It is based on the following research questions that will be answered via the methodology:

1. What are the ways through which organisations foresee and understand emerging trends in the future that are applicable to their industry and setting?
2. How do we fit these trends in the organisational culture and strategies of innovation?
3. Which are the enablers and inhibitors of culture and innovation thinking in regards to the future?

4. What are the differences between these processes in terms of organisations size, industry sector and culture?

5. What part does middle-level management play in easing or resisting these changes?

3.4. Data Collection Methods

3.4.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

As a primary data collection centre, semi-structured interviews with the key organisational actors will be used. This form of investigation enables one to pursue pre-identified and emerging themes and leads to flexibility and depth (Johansen, 2020; Shafie Khah, 2023).

Participant Selection:

Senior Leaders: For strategic perspective on trend anticipation and integration.

Middle Managers: To explore their role as change agents or barriers (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997).

Frontline Employees: To capture lived experiences of cultural and innovation change.

Interview Guide

The interview guide is informed by the literature for clarity. Key themes include:

- Perceptions of major future trends (e.g., digital transformation, sustainability, remote work).

- Organisational processes for trend scanning and foresight.
- Experiences of cultural change and innovation initiatives.
- Enablers and barriers to change (e.g., leadership, psychological safety, resources).
- The role of middle management and cross-functional teams.
- Sector- and culture-specific challenges and opportunities.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

3.5.1. Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be used to analyse data because it is a flexible instrument, and can be used to identify, analyse and report patterns in a qualitative data. Such a methodology is adequate to investigate the interconnection of culture, innovation, and trend adaptation in the literature (Johansen, 2020; Shafie Khah, 2023).

Coding Process

Familiarisation: Transcripts and docs reading and re-reading.

Initial Coding: creating codes on the basis of the literature-driven themes such as leadership, psychological safety, decentralisation and emergent information.

Developing a theme: Combining the codes to collectively form larger themes, including enablers of innovation, barriers to adaptation of trends or the role of the middle-management.

Comparison: Comparing against themes among and between cases to find out trends and variances related to size, sector and culture.

3.5.2. Ensuring Rigour

To enhance credibility and trustworthiness:

Triangulation: Combining interview, documentary, and observational data.

Member Checking: Sharing preliminary findings with participants for feedback and validation.

Peer Debriefing: Discussing coding and themes with academic peers to challenge interpretations.

Audit Trail: Maintaining detailed records of data collection, coding, and analytic decisions.

3.5.3. Reflexivity

Considering the interpretivist position, the investigator will keep a reflexive journal to record his or her assumptions, possible biases, and development of his or her knowledge during the research activity.

3.6. Justification of Methodological Choices

3.6.1. Qualitative, Case-Based Approach

The applicability of the qualitative and multiple case study method is explained by the necessity to understand how and why complex phenomena depend on contexts (Yin, 2018; Edwards et al., 2001). Although hypothesis testing or measurement of relationships are useful, quantitative methods would not show the depth and richness necessary to understand the lived experience of cultural and innovation change, in particular and in SMEs and other sectors.

3.6.2. Addressing Literature Gaps

The identified gaps in the literature review can be addressed by this methodological approach:

SMEs: The inclusion of the SMEs in the cases of focal points answers the oversampling of the large businesses in the extant research (Binns et al., 2014).

Cross-Cultural and Sectoral Variation: The application of purposeful sampling across the geography and industries permits investigation on the degree to which the national and organisational cultures intersect to influence the development of innovation and change (Meyer & Peng, 2016).

Middle Management: Specific interviews with middle management provide insight into the role that middle managers may often play as bridges to cultural change or as destroyers (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997).

Qualitative Depth: This method of using interviews and case studies enables one to inquire about tacit knowledge, values, and assumptions crucial to the model of Schein (2010) and otherwise overlooked in surveys.

3.6.3. Alignment with Theoretical Frameworks

The methodology is grounded in established frameworks from the literature:

Schein's Three-Level Model: Guides observation and analysis of artefacts, espoused values, and underlying assumptions.

Competing Values Framework (Cameron & Quinn, 2011): Informs questions on cultural type and adaptability.

Disruptive and Open Innovation Theories (Christensen, 1997; Chesbrough, 2003): Shape inquiry into innovation processes and external collaboration.

Change Management and Foresight (Kotter, 1996; Rohrbeck & Kum, 2018): Frame questions on organisational readiness and strategic alignment.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

3.7.1. Informed Consent

Every subject will be informed in detail about the purpose of the study, how it is conducted, and his/her rights as a participant such as the right to participate, and the ability to withdraw consent anytime. The consent of participants will be ascertained through a written informed consent before the collection of data.

3.7.2. Confidentiality and Anonymity

To safeguard the privacy of organisation and individual:

- All organisations and participants involved in reporting will be given pseudonyms.
- The stored data will be well secured and can only be read by the researcher.
- Confidential information will be anonymised or not included whereby necessary.

3.7.3. Minimising Harm

Participants will be interviewed at a time that is convenient to them and in a way that will not make them be left in an awkward situation. The potentially distressing subjects (e.g., abandoned change projects) will be handled delicately.

3.8. Limitations

3.8.1. Generalisability

No statistical generalisability of the findings will be made, as is expected in all qualitative case studies. Nevertheless, the objective is to give deep transferable lessons that can guide theory and practice in prospective similar situations.

3.8.2. Access and Bias

It could be difficult to access organisations, more so when access to organisation working in another country or sector is required. Interviews are also subject to the risk of self-reports bias, which will be addressed with the help of triangulation and an examination of documents.

3.8.3. Researcher Subjectivity

The interpretivist approach acknowledges the researcher's influence on data interpretation. Reflexivity and peer debriefing will be employed to minimise bias.

3.8.4. Time and Resource Constraints

The richness of the case study research takes a lot of time to collect and analyze data. The sample size is hence small, though this has been compensated by the depth and richness of data.

This chapter of methodology has re-presented the qualitative and multiple case study research strategy that aims to investigate how the organisations, and especially SMEs, in different industries and cultural environments foresee, perceive, and include future trends into their cultural and innovation policies. The proposed research will produce rich context-sensitive data by utilising semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, and observational notes, as well as anchoring an analysis to well-known theoretical frameworks to fill the gaps in the literature. The respects of ethics and methodological constraints have been taken into consideration to make things rigorous and transparent. The results of the given research will help to better comprehend the processes and complexities of introducing future-wise thinking into organisational culture and innovation that can be applied in practice by both leaders and policymakers, as well as in the research field.

3.9 Interview Questionnaire for SME Leadership

I sincerely thank you to join this interview. What this discussion will achieve is to know how your organisation predicts the future and reacts to the same and how you

incorporate the future into your organisational culture and innovation. Your perceptions will be useful to research needs of organisational adaptability and innovation in SMEs. All the answers will remain confidential and anonymised.

Section 1: Background and Context

1. What are your responsibilities in the organisation in brief?
2. What do you describe as the main values and culture of your organisation?
3. What do you consider your organisation potentials and weaknesses in the present business environment?

Section 2: Anticipating and Interpreting Future Trends

4. Which broad trends (e.g. technological, market, regulatory, social) do you think will affect your organisation in the coming 3-5 years?
5. Does your organisation subscribe to emerging trends and changes in your market or industry through scanning and monitoring?
6. Do you have an instance when your organisation had to change with a new trend or disruption that occurred recently? In what way did you recognise it?

Section 3: Integrating Trends into Culture and Innovation

7. What do you do to see to it that the culture of your organisation favours adaptability and innovation?
8. Are there any concrete activities or even transformations that have been implemented as to promote innovation or even address future trends?
9. What is being done to make employees share ideas, experiment or engage in innovation processes?

10. How does leadership influence the response of organisation to change and innovation?

Section 4: Enablers and Barriers

11. What are the reasons that have assisted your organisation to successfully cope with change or innovate?

12. What obstacles or problems have you faced in the effort to introduce new ideas and be able to respond to external trends?

13. Do you solve problem with resistance to change in your organisation?

Section 5: Organisational Readiness and Learning

14. To what extent are you convinced that your organisation is ready to deal with future opportunities or challenges?

15. How do you go about developing the skills, knowledge or change readiness of your employees?

16. What are some of the ways through which your organisation learns of the successes and failures of innovation or change?

Section 6: Middle Management and Cross-Functional Collaboration

17. How do middle manager/team leader facilitate and drive innovation and cultural change?

18. What are the ways in which your organisation fosters team work between teams or departments?

Section 7: Sectoral and Cultural Considerations

19. Are there any industry-specific or cultural factors that influence how your organisation approaches change and innovation?
20. How do you balance short-term operational needs with long-term innovation and trend adaptation?

Section 8: Reflections and Future Outlook

21. Looking ahead, what do you see as the biggest opportunities and risks for your organisation?
22. If you could change one thing about your organisation's approach to culture or innovation, what would it be and why?
23. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with organisational change, culture, or innovation?

Closing:

I would like to appreciate your time and knowledge. Your involvement will be much welcome and will be useful to increase the knowledge of how SMEs can successfully adapt to the future trends.

4. Findings/Results

4.1. Introduction

The current chapter provides a detailed study of the five semi-structured interviews, carried out in various organisational contexts in India a government official, the CEO and Marketing Manager of a small IT/ Sales company in Pune, a young consultant at one of the big consulting companies and a senior consultant at the same

consulting company. Results are given in themes, with sectoral and cross-sectoral appreciation of what the organisations expect, perceive and incorporate into their organisational culture and innovations strategies. This has particularly focused on the demographic, tradition, and leadership impact and the way the traditional work modules are changing to become more flexible and innovative.

4.2. Government Sector: Digital Transformation and Cultural Evolution

4.2.1. Vision for Digital Public Infrastructure

The live interview with an official of central home ministry demonstrated a blanket strategic plan of using digital public infrastructure (DPI) as a driver of innovation in the country. The official spoke of how India went from digitising individual services to creating inter-operable digital building blocks, like Aadhaar, UPI and DigiLocker, out of which new user needs can be created in a re-combinant process.

“We do not only want to digitise what has always existed, but create modular infrastructure others should use and enable them to innovate. These digital building blocks can be re-arranged to generate new solutions when new societal needs or new technology is generated and could form the basis of generating solutions very fast.”

This vision cannot be called merely technological as it is also cultural: the government aims at developing an attitude of openness, experimentation, and continuous improvement in the state sector.

4.2.2. Leadership, Respect, and Employee Wellbeing

The official reiterated that an optimal government culture is based on respect, integrity, ethical treatment, stability and employee wellbeing. The leadership is regarded as central in embodiment of the values and as tone-setter on innovation and inclusion. The official remarked:

“Leadership should show respect to employees at any level, support ethical behaviour and ensure everyone feels free to experiment and learn.”

4.2.3. Barriers and Enablers

Though the successes were emerging, the official noted that major obstacles remained, namely, legacy bureaucratic structures, skills shortage, as well as the failure to balance innovation, accountability, and the trust of the people.

Nevertheless, the top management support, shared governance, and inter-sectoral collaboration have allowed the government to establish new precedents on inclusion, effective performance, and flexibility.

4.2.4. Impact and Lessons Learned

The DPI initiatives are not only changing the service delivery but they are also doing the same with a bigger culture of innovation in government. It is true that the official reflected:

“It is not a matter of option to be innovative in government, but a matter of necessity. Our mission is to better ourselves, be current and develop citizenship value to the whole population.”

It is evident that the cutting edge experience of the government shows the power of merging digital infrastructure with culture of team work, learning and respect.

4.3. IT/Sales SME in Pune: Demographics, Diversity, and Cultural Transition

4.3.1. CEO Perspective: Navigating Diversity and Resistance

The CEO of a small IT/Sales company in Pune has talked about demographically diverse as well as fragmented workforce. The business uses fresh and new graduates that have been educated in various parts of India coupled with senior employees who are well established in the local tradition. The CEO noticed:

“Younger employees and staff who work with us are more willing to learn new technologies and use them in their practice, whereas older people adhere to the former traditions and are not very ready to use new tools, not rarely opposing to the change in workflow.”

This is additional to the regional, linguistic or gender diversity (which are a source of creative thinking, but it also causes problems of communication and collaboration).

4.3.2. Adapting to Future Trends

The CEO pointed out some of the initiatives designed to help the company create a more flexible, innovative atmosphere:

- Consistent learning about the new digital tools and platforms.
- The mentoring of cross-generational to fill the gap between knowledge and experience.
- Free discussion over operations and any problems not to suppress any employee, but provide them with voice.

In spite of this activity, gradual development has been achieved. CEO acknowledged that not all employees even those in 40s and 50s are eager to come out of their comfort zone, which causes a conflict and an inefficient execution of innovations occasionally.

“Still we are getting ahead, slowly. All of this seems to be difficult since people have always been doing things a specific way over the years.”

4.3.3. Marketing Manager Perspective: The Challenge of Inclusion

In her late 30s, the Marketing Manager, who is a woman, supported the CEO's insights with the fact that workplace environment is also about gender and regional diversity. She explained how the young and urban workers feel more relaxed with flexibility and digitalisation of work and communication, which some of them like to do in real life and at the definite office.

“On other occasions, a few voices get under way during our brainstorming sessions and encouraging everyone to be involved is not easy. We are trying to be more inclusive in these sessions, though we are still trying to improve on that.”

She observed that although diversity can be a basis of creativity, it needs to be managed explicitly to prevent miscommunication and the fact that all views should be respected. Encouraged by the industry best practices in the IT industry, the company is slowly introducing more systematic diversity and inclusion policies.

4.3.4. Impact of Traditional Work Modules

The two leaders agreed that traditional practices in the company, like pay-grade hierarchies, top-down decision-making processes, and preference of a long working hours have not completely enabled adoption of agile, innovative working practices. Nevertheless, they have also conveyed that there has been some improvement as a larger number of employees have become open to mixed work, digital collaboration, and constant learning.

“We are beginning to get this openness towards change especially with younger employees bearing up leadership positions. It is not a very sudden process and nevertheless the culture is changing.”

4.4. Consulting Sector: Tradition, Pressure, and Gradual Adaptation

4.4.1. Young Employee Perspective: Navigating Work Culture and Change

The consultant (25 years old, 2-year experience in a big consulting firm in India) mentioned a highly demanding work experience in terms of high level of stress, long working hours, and more traditional demands, such as loyalty and sacrificing. The worker remembered:

“When I came, it seemed that you had to forget about your own life in order to become successful. The pressure to work late was huge and there was a tendency to stay longer than everybody just to be noticed at all occasionally which was no longer acceptable in the modern society.”

Senior managers and leaders (some of which had decades of experience in the industry) promoted and upheld this so called hustle culture and their experience included a top down, top-to-bottom management style. The worker has also mentioned that the HR was considered ineffective many times when talking of complaints in terms of workload and management behaviour pitting the revenue-generating managers against all other.

4.4.2. Gradual Adaptation and Positive Change

Within the last year, however, the company has started to adopt changes as per the response received in the form of employee suggestions and industry changes.

These include:

- More open and accommodating work-schedules, such as the option of working remotely and time processing.
- Awareness programs and institutions of mental health, which include workshops and confidential counselling.
- Frequent reviews between the work and top management, to ensure free communication and issues brought out at early stage.

The young consultant studied that, despite the number of older employees who still do not believe in such changes, younger workers are becoming more articulate on their demands and even causing a form of cultural change over time.

“It is difficult still but there is some airing out now. People discuss work-life balance and the company is trying to hear them. It is not ideal, yet it is improved in comparison to the past one.”

4.4.3. Senior Employee Perspective: The Weight of Tradition

A retired and high-aged manager of more than 35 years experience gave a counter opinion. He admitted that compulsory work modules, working long hours, face-time culture and submissiveness towards authority has been ingrained deeply in company DNA. Although such practices had previously been essential in making the firm have a reputation of reliability and client service, they can no longer allow sustainable practices since the expectations have changed.

“Older workers have a feeling that this is the way we did things. I do however see younger generation making a counter-argument and the management is beginning to adjust. Changing culture always is a slow process.”

The manager commented that the change is not smooth as some of the teams have been adopting the new practices faster than others. He stressed on the need of leadership commitment, open communication and constant dialogue so that the transition towards a more innovative and inclusive culture is maintained.

4.3.4. Impact of Traditional Work Modules

The two consultants pointed out the invariability of traditional modules of work on the employee attitudes, productivity, and wellbeing. The young employee cited the high turnover among junior employees as a result of experiencing burn out due to expectation of long work hours and accessible availability. The senior consultant admitted the fact that these practices which used to install discipline and commitment to work beginning to alienate some of the talented young workers of the firm and even destroyed its potential to attract and maintain the best talent.

“Those who do not change will lose the best. Things are not the way it used to be and we must change with them.”

4.5. Cross-Case Themes and Synthesis

4.5.1. The Role of Leadership and Vision

In all the interviews, leadership commitment was raised out as a key facilitator of cultural and innovation change. Leaders with a clear vision that were open and practised experimentation were more successful to produce adaptableness and resilience, regardless of the industry, whether government, IT/Sales, or consulting.

Government: The public sector has successfully adopted digital innovation because of the leadership commitment to respect, wellbeing, and experimentation that allows breaking new grounds in terms of service delivery.

IT/Sales SME: Investments in training and mentoring as well as open forums have enabled the CEO to close the generation gaps and develop a more pliable culture.

Consulting: Both top-down leadership and pressure by younger employees have contributed towards the gradual change to more flexible, employee-centric practice.

4.5.2. Diversity, Demographics, and Inclusion

Demographic factors in terms of age, gender, region and experience posed a challenge as well as strength. Generational conflicts made cooperation more complicated to organise in the IT/Sales company, though generational distinctions also stimulated innovation in problem-solving. In consultancy, junior members of staff are urging human working conditions and this has started to change old ways of doing things.

Age: The younger workforce is more open to cloud applications, remote working, and lifelong learning, whereas the aged employees may want to work within the routine and have a mainstream working way.

Gender and Region: The presence of diverse genders and regional background in the work place is enriching, but needs to be managed intentionally to keep everyone in the loop and prevent a case of miscommunication.

4.5.3. Tradition vs. Transformation

The results indicate the conflict between the old-established modules of work and innovation demands. The traditional practices like inflexible hierarchies and long working hours are rather persuasive; however, they are brought into question by the new generation of workers. Changing the culture towards more adaptive, inclusive, and innovative requires time, and needs to be done constantly with the support of the leaders.

Government: Transformation of bureaucratic fixity to modular, collaborative innovation is a process, and it is an idea reinforced by the vision of leadership.

IT/Sales SME: The structural shift between narrow, hierarchical long- hours of values to more flexible inclusive cultures is slow but gaining momentum.

Consulting: The slow rate of transition in work practices indicates pressures to the inside and outside to change.

4.5.4. Sectoral Differences and Commonalities

Government:

Strengths: Strategic vision, digital infrastructure, leadership commitment, and participatory governance.

Challenges: Legacy systems, skills gaps, balancing innovation with accountability.

IT/Sales SME:

Strengths: Demographic diversity, willingness to experiment, investment in training and mentoring.

Challenges: Resistance to change, communication barriers, slow cultural shift.

Consulting:

Strengths: Reputation for reliability, strong client service, emerging openness to flexibility and wellbeing.

Challenges: Legacy work culture, burnout, uneven adoption of new practices

4.5.5. The Impact of Digital Transformation

The effect of digital transformation was emphasised by all interviewees as an accelerating process. DPI has allowed services to scale quickly in government as well as creating a spirit of creativity. In IT/Sales, digital tools are slowly transforming the working process and collaborations. Digital communication and remote work are increasingly acceptable in the field of consulting despite more traditional employees.

4.5.6. Employee Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance

The theme of employee wellbeing and work-life balance became one of the cross-cutting themes. Both government and some of private sector leaders have

recognised that the long discourse of long hours and always being there are getting to be more and more unsustainable. Measures to increase mental hygiene, flexibility, and openness are becoming popular, yet painfully gradually.

4.5.7. Learning and Adaptation

Future readiness is perceived to rely on a culture of active learning and adapting. The leaders of the Government and IT/Sales stressed the quality of training, mentoring and knowledge dump. Younger employees in the consulting field are leading to the process of more open feedback kind of learning environments.

This set of interviews helps understand that although the Indian organisations in all sectors had quite specific challenges in adjusting to the trends of the future, still, there are several themes that become visible: the prominence of leadership, the intricacy of diversity and tradition, and the gradual but consistent pace of transition to new, more flexible, innovative, and inclusive cultures. The experience of the government in terms of digital public infrastructure is used as the example of systematic innovation, and the examples of the firms of the private sector demonstrate how the cultural changes happen every day. In conclusion, long-term success is based on a vision of a leader, participation of employees, ability to challenge old assumptions and ideas.

4.6. Integrating Insights from Leading Podcasts

In order to better contextualise and develop the primary data gathered on our interviews, analysis of five top-ranking podcasts was conducted. These podcasts include international thought leaders, practitioners and sector experts sharing live experiences and real-life approaches to embedding innovation and future-readiness into organisation culture in a variety of contexts spanning SMEs, financial services, and public sector. Their views offer a healthy comparative picture not only referring to general principles but to local differences too that appeal to the experiences of Indian organisations.

4.6.1. Transforming Your Company's Culture | Tony Robbins Podcast

Key Themes:

- Constructive crafting of organisational culture
- Leadership towards cultural change
- Usable methods to develop and maintain an effective, dynamic culture

Analysis:

In his interview with Marissa Levin, Tony Robbins re-emphasises the importance of leadership in establishing and enforcing a culture, which was found out during the interview with the government and also in the interviews with the private sector.

Levin points out that culture cannot be a stagnant thing, so during a period of fast-paced change or crisis, there should be an active design and development of the culture. This is consistent with the argument by the Indian government official that the leaders should exemplify respect, ethical conduct, and ability to be open to experiments in order to spur innovation within the government sector.

The lesson on values clarity, communication transparency, and the necessity of leaders to walk the talk is brought up by Robbins and Levin, and those sentiments are reflected in the words of IT/Sales CEO and a high-level employee of the consultancy company, who both emphasised the fact that things are changing slowly but surely towards the practices of open, inclusive, and culture-learning. It has been mentioned in the podcast that there is a problem of resistance to change, where resisting changes is possible due to the threat an old system of working operates in the face of new ways to work, which is evident to see in both Pune SME and consultancy firm interviews.

Practical Strategies:

- Regular culture audits and feedback loops
- Leadership development and role modelling
- Recognition and celebration of desired behaviours
- Transparent communication about the “why” behind change

The approaches outlined by the IT/Sales firm (training, mentoring, open forums) and the consultant organisation (check-ins, mental health initiatives) are a reflection of one another, supporting the importance of the long-term, visible commitment of the leadership and active employee participation in the cultural change process.

4.6.2. 2024 Business Trends You Shouldn't Overlook | The Frustrated CEO

Podcast

Key Themes:

- Foresight and response to macro trend (generational shifts, digital transformation, AI)
- The overlap of the technology, workforce population and organisational manoeuvrability
- Constant vision and tactical flexibility required The need to continually look into the future and be tactically fluid

Analysis:

The futurist point of view given by Ben Pring in his podcast makes this global vision of trends named after Indian interviewees who appeared in these discussions: the digital transformation, the AI, the rising expectations of customers, and work-remote. Pring draws our attention to the fact that organisations need to build strong foresight abilities not only to survive but to excel in the uncertain world. The implication of this is echoed by the foregrounding of modularised, scalable DPIs on the governmental side of the official representative, as well as of training and scanning trends regularly on the IT/Sales CEO front.

It also discusses the problems introduced by the diversity of generations, mentioning that a younger workforce can become the engine of digitalisation, and they require higher flexibility, whereas the older audience can refuse or be marginalised by the unnaturally fast pace of evolution. This shows the same population trend that was outlined in the Pune SME and the consulting firm due to generation gaps in attitudes towards innovation and work-life balance.

Practical Strategies:

- Invest in digital literacy and up skilling of all workers
- Building multi-generational units in which knowledge is encouraged to circulate
- Scenario planning and frequent examination of the external trends
- Advocating a test and learn attitude

These solutions underpin the value of lifelong learning and intergenerational partnership, which can be observed through mentoring and training programs of the IT/Sales company and gradual shift to less rigid and employee-oriented processes exhibited by the consulting firm.

4.6.3. Innovating Government for a Better Future | Local Government Insights

Key Themes:

- The unique challenges and opportunities of public sector innovation
- Building trust, transparency, and citizen-centricity
- The importance of safe experimentation and learning from failure

Analysis:

The example of DPI in the Indian government is similar to the article by Adrian Brown that talks about innovation in the sector of the public. Brown also makes it clear that it is not just the technological tools that are needed to introduce innovation to the government, but a complete transformation of culture behind it: a culture of risk-aversion, bureaucratic inertia, refusal to make mistakes and learn based on that refusal have to change into a culture of openness, collaboration, and embracing mistakes so that one might learn something out of them. This resembles

the applications of the Indian authorities, which stress on the importance of respect, wellbeing and ethical leadership as the source of innovation.

The podcast emphasises the necessity of participatory governance, work across sectors and open dialog with the citizens, which have helped scaling up the DPI initiatives in India to grow at large and diverse scale. Brown adds to this that innovation in the public sector can prepare a foundation in the ecosystem which is changed extensively, a point also reiterated by the Indian official who also considers DPI as a platform to support innovation in the private sector and the civil society.

Practical Strategies:

- Leadership development focused on adaptive skills
- Pilot projects and “safe to fail” experiments
- Mechanisms for citizen feedback and co-creation
- Institutionalising learning from both successes and failures

These strategies are reflected in the participatory model of governance put in place in the Indian government and the focus on endless improvement, which supports the general conclusion that innovation is not only about technology but rather about culture and mindset.

4.6.4. The Future Of Work with AI: AI For Business Strategy and Leadership |

SME Strategy Podcast

Key Themes:

- The integration of AI into business strategy and daily operations

- The role of leadership in demystifying and democratising AI
- Fostering a culture of curiosity, experimentation, and joy at work

Analysis:

The ideas expressed by Kevin Surace regarding adoption of AI are quite relevant to the IT/Sales SME and the consulting firm considering that both of them are faced with the challenges and opportunities of digital transformation. Surace states that technical expertise is only part of what it takes to appropriately integrate AI; one must also foster a culture that values curiosity, experimentation and psychological safety. This is in line with the trend of the CEO of the IT/Sales organisation to develop a more receptive, learning culture, and the consulting firm to become more open, flexible.

The other issue mentioned in the podcast is the anxiety and resistance as a side effect of technological change particularly on those employees who fear to use obsolete or feel that they are not digitally confident. According to Surace, to counter these fears, leaders have to take active engagement with those fears, offer clear communication on the advantages and constraints of AI, and in upskilling and support.

Practical Strategies:

- Inclusive AI training and workshops for all employees
- Cross-functional teams to explore AI use cases
- Regular communication about AI's role and impact

- Recognition of experimentation and learning, not just outcomes

These solutions underline the values of psychological safety and lifelong learning, which is manifested through the training and mentoring programs in the IT/Sales organisation, and the gradual change of management conduct in the consulting firm to lean more on a paternalistic style of management.

4.6.5. Building a Culture of Innovation — Thoughtworks Technology Podcast

Key Themes:

- The intentional design of innovation culture
- The role of cross-functional collaboration and breaking down silos
- Embedding experimentation and feedback into daily practice

Analysis:

Thoughtworks Podcast has a rich information system that focuses on how to develop and continue a culture of innovation and, without fail, has case studies of technology and other industries. The hosts make it clear that innovation does not occur through individual actions; instead, it is a system-based practice where talents and their organisations embrace engagement, experimentation, and quick learning.

The latter point of view is quite akin to what the IT/Sales SME as well as consulting firm endeavour to establish or reinforce by collapsing top-down-level spheres and enabling a more integrated, cross-functional approach. The podcast talk of safe

spaces to experiment and the worth in having tight feedback loops reminds that of the check-ins, mentoring, and open forums as described by interviewees.

Practical Strategies:

- Creating cross-functional innovation teams
- Regular “innovation sprints” or hackathons
- Feedback mechanisms that value learning as much as results
- Leadership support for risk-taking and learning from failure

Such practices are reflected in the process of gradual improvement exhibited by the IT/Sales company and the consulting firm which demonstrates that the general conclusion that the culture of innovation should be carefully planned and actively promoted at every tier can be observed.

4.7. Synthesis: Podcasts and Interview Findings

4.7.1. Universal Principles

The podcasts echo some of the general principles, which occurred during the interviews:

- Leadership plays a big role in creating culture, bringing innovations and change management.
- In order to adapt future trends, continuous learning and psychological safety are necessary.
- Age, gender, regional, and experience diversity and inclusion are the sources of innovation because they are beneficial but they need to be managed intentionally.

- The concept of cross-functional work and the elimination of silos increases the pace of innovation and flexibility.
- Transparent communication enables trust and therefore removes resistance to change.

4.7.2. Sector-Specific Nuances

- Public Sector: The podcasts, as well as the one on the government, emphasise the importance of participatory governance, experimental safety, and citizen-focused.
- SMEs/Private Sector: Both podcasts and interviews emphasise the need to be agile, involve employees and have well-established innovation practices, but they recognise the difficulty presented by the lack of resources and the presence of employees who are long-term employees.
- Consulting/Professional Services: The importance of combining tradition with change, promotion of employee wellbeing, and facilitating an open dialogue is a theme that repeatedly appeared.

4.7.3. Practical Implications

It is a combination of the insights that indicates that one should be able to adapt to the trends in the future by:

- Intentional sustaining investment in leadership growth and culture formation.
- Feedback, learning and experimental mechanisms.
- Routine strategic foresight/planning and scenario planning.
- Multi-generational workgroups and cross- sectoral coalitions.

This findings chapter is a detailed, multi-faceted explanation of how organisations in India are changing their cultures and innovation strategies to prepare to embrace and blend in with new future trends by combining proficient views available on leading podcasts and in-depth, contextual data using the interviews. The strategies and lessons posted in this segment provide guidance to organisations that need to negotiate their way through the twists and turns that come with demographic shifts, digital change and the power of the past to influence the current world.

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary of Key Findings

The study investigated future trend anticipation, interpretation and incorporation into the organisational culture and innovation strategies in Indian organisations of different nature such as government organisations, IT/Sales SMEs and consulting organisations. There were a number of important tendencies:

The leader is also the most reliable element of success adaptation. The more leaders communicate a clear vision, they embrace openness and promote experimentation, the more organisational agility and resilience ensued.

Demographic diversity by age, gender, region and experience has both a positive

and a negative effect; creativity and innovation processes performed within a diverse organisation are augmented, however, in the cooperation, communication and reaching of any agreement, the result is a challenge. Such divides as between generations, in particular, influence the opinions on technology, work-life balance and readiness of changes.

Conventional working patterns, strict hierarchies, extensive working hours and respect to authority are also among the traditional work modules-they still have a hold of the more senior employees but are getting challenged by the young employees as well as the changing leaders. Coupled with the leadership based on various levels of engagement, change towards more agile, innovative and employee-cent distances cultures is not fast and usually controversial.

The digital change is a change driver everywhere. Every company, irrespective of the field, is aware of the necessity to invest in digital skills, technologies, and the base. Nevertheless, the speed and level of digitalisation differ, depending on the industry focus, resources, and culture preparedness.

Digital public infrastructure (DPI) journey of the government is an example of the how the modular and scalable technology, participatory governance, and culture of openness has systemic potential. However, in contrast, the day-to-day observances of cultural change are highlighted through examples given in private sector companies especially SMEs in terms of the necessity of employee engagement, ongoing, and learning as well as cross-functional cooperation.

The wellbeing of the employees and the necessity of softer working conditions are becoming more and more salient even among younger workers. Projects to enforce mental health and flexibility, as well as inclusiveness, are being introduced in the sectors, although inconsistently.

All of these findings create the picture of the complexity of transforming future trends into organisational culture and innovation and show both general principles and local specifics.

5.2. Interpretation in Context

5.2.1. Organisational Responses to Future Trends

Indian organisations are going through a transformational world. The DPI programs proposed by the government have become a fine example of strategic foresight, modularity, and ecosystem involvement. The government has developed a platform of fast and large scale innovation via development of interoperable digital building blocks, not only in the public sector, but also in the economy at large (PIB, 2022). This practice illustrates how visionary governance, together with participatory governance and a culture of experimentation can facilitate systemic change.

At the level of the private sector, change is more gradual and it is defined by the limitations of resources, historic approaches, and personnel situations. SMEs, especially, have the challenge of balancing between operations requirements on one side and requirements of innovation on the other. As an example there is IT/Sales business in Pune that is in a slow process of leaving top-down, long-hours

culture towards more agile, inclusive cultures. But the change is not going very fast and there is still obstruction and this is more so when the employee is aged where he/she is more used to customary circumstances.

Even the consulting firms, which are customarily characterised by the hectic work conditions are not an exception. Employees in their twenties are campaigning to have a balance between work and life, holiday mental health, and portability of work. Although the older employees might be resistant to these changes at first, it has become natural that to attract and retain talent means keeping up with the competition.

5.2.2. The Role of Culture in Enabling or Resisting Innovation

Organisational culture is an accelerator and a limiting factor. When respect, psychological safety, and inclusion are valued, the employees are more likely to experiment, share ideas, and accept new technologies in such an environment (Edmondson, 2019). This has been witnessed in the DPI initiatives of the government where leadership has been committed towards wellbeing and ethical behaviour that has provided a safe zone of innovation.

On the other hand, innovation is stifled by cultures that are characterised by strict hierarchies, fear of failure, and change resistance. The experience of the IT/Sales SME in dealing with generational and regional diversity points to the fact that the ingrained norms and expectations may cause friction, despite serving as the basis of creative problem-solving.

The relationship between tradition and transformation is especially relevant in India where traditions have been followed since ancient times, but the process of digitalisation and changes in employee demands are swift. There is little that is linear in cultural change, which is iterative, uneven, and frequently contested. However, even a gradual change can lead to significant results in the sphere of morale, engagement, and innovation rates.

5.2.3. Adaptive Practices Across Sectors and Leadership Styles

The rate and manner of adaptation depends on sectoral differences. The scale and mandate of the governmental sector indicate the strength of the top-down vision and participatory governance. The IT/Sales SME identifies the problems and opportunities of demographic diversity, and the consulting firm is an example of the gradual obsolescence of traditional work modules under the pressure of the generational change.

A major differentiator is the leadership style. Cultural and innovation change is catalysed by transformational leaders- those who inspire, empower and model the behaviours that are desired (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transactional or authoritarian leaders, on the other hand, are weaker in the context that requires agility and creativity. The focus on respect, integrity and constant improvement by the government official is transformational leadership as it is the investment in training, mentoring, and open forums by the IT/Sales CEO.

5.2.5. Nuances, Contradictions, and Context-Specific Insights

An important detail is that the resistance to change is not only dependent on age or tenure, but also on the history of the organisation, industry standards, and risk perception. As an example, younger employees in consulting can internalise conventional expectations in case they are perceived to be avenues to career growth. In much the same way, accountability versus innovation is a balance that needs to be considered in government.

There are also contradictions. Although digital transformation is popular and most people are adopting it, not every employee feels ready or even willing to change. The drive to inclusion and wellbeing is real, but uneven and at times viewed sceptically, especially by those who are used to older versions of success.

This interpretation is also enhanced by the incorporation of ideas of the most popular podcasts. The thoughtworks podcast on innovation culture and the Tony Robbins podcast on culture transformation share the same idea of intentional and continuous culture-building as the results of the Pune SME and consulting firm. The generational change and trend anticipation that the Frustrated CEO podcast is focused on is relevant to the problems of organisations that are trying to reconcile tradition and innovation.

These results enhance our knowledge on organisational adaptability by emphasising the role of context, interaction of various variables, and the necessity of long-term, multi-level intervention. They also highlight the importance of cross-sectoral

learning since public and private organisations can learn through the experience of the other in managing change.

5.3. Alignment with Literature

5.3.1 Confirmation of Existing Theories

The results are a very strong support to the model of organisational culture developed by Schein (2010) which states that the most tough to alter are the fundamental underlying assumptions, which are usually unseen and hidden deep. The slow, conflictual process of cultural change witnessed in the interviews is reminiscent of Schein who stresses that the real thing is to bring these assumptions to the surface and to challenge them.

The data also reflects the dimensions of Hofstede (1980, 2001) with regard to the effects of power distance and uncertainty avoidance on the attitude towards hierarchy, risk and innovation. The multicultural nature of the IT/Sales SME and consulting firm based on generational and regional differences confirm the thesis of Hofstede that national and organisational cultures are in interaction to generate distinctive responses to change.

The Competing Values Framework advanced by Cameron and Quinn (2011) can be observed in the transition of hierarchical to more adhocracy-based cultures, as seen in DPI programs of the government and in the transition to agility and inclusion of the IT/Sales company.

The government and the private sector examples of psychological safety and employee voice, discussed by Edmondson (2019), show the value of psychological safety and employee voice, as open communication and encouragement of experimentation are associated with adaptability and innovation.

5.3.2. Contradictions and Extensions

Although most of the literature praises the advantages of innovation culture, the findings suggest the costs and dangers of change as indicated by Hamel & Valkangas (2003). Innovations are not always successful, and the cultural change may imply a lot of opposition, pressure, and even turnover, particularly in case of the employees who feel alienated by new norms.

The literature is also expanded by the research as it gives empirical data within the Indian setting, filling the research gap specified by Meyer & Peng (2016) that speaks of the Western-centric bias in the research of organisational studies. The subtle interdependence between tradition and change within Indian organisations presents fresh knowledge on the role of cultural and sectoral contexts in mediating the uptake of emerging trends in future.

These points are reinforced in the podcasts that are analysed. To take one example, the Local Government Insights podcast on innovation in the public sector repeats the messages of participatory governance and safe experimentation by the government official. The SME Strategy podcast about AI adoption also highlights the importance of inclusive training and psychological safety, which was the case with the IT/Sales company.

Closing the Loopholes and Adding Fresh Insights

This paper covers some of the unexplored issues:

- **SME Adaptability:** The extensive examination of an IT/Sales SME is a unique opportunity to observe the way the small firms with less resources deal with the diversity of the demographics and gradual change.
- **Government Interview:** The government interview shows how a mass, systemic innovation can be implemented using modular technology and community-based governance.
- **Employee Voice and Wellbeing:** Younger and older employees in consulting show the changing expectations regarding work-life balance, inclusion and psychological safety.

The discussion also combines academic and practitioner views, which makes it easier to understand the necessity of leadership, lifelong learning, and purposeful culture-building by incorporating podcast knowledge.

5.3.3. Challenging and Extending Theory

The results question the notion that cultural change is necessarily good or beneficial to all people. Change is indeed disruptive and may be expensive as Hamel & Välikangas (2003) contend that change is not managed inclusively. The study also recommends that the current models of organisational culture and innovation be enlarged to capture the dynamic interaction between tradition and transformation particularly in non-Western settings.

5.4. Implications for Theory and Practice

5.4.1. Theoretical Implications

The study proposes a number of useful changes and additions to the existing models:

- **Interplay between tradition and change:** The results demonstrate the necessity of models that consider the co-existence of old practices and emerging innovations. It is important that models acknowledge the fragmented, contested and dynamic nature of culture instead of treating it as monolithic (Schein, 2010; Hamel & Välikangas, 2003).
- **Demographic Diversity as a Catalyst:** Demographic diversity is not only a variable that is to be dealt with, but also a dynamic that can lead to conflict, as well as creativity. The organisational culture and innovation theories must clearly state the role of the age, gender, region, and experience on the adaptation processes (Hofstede, 2001; Edmondson, 2019).
- **Psychological Safety and Employee Voice:** The importance of psychological safety and employee voice in facilitating innovation is supported. They should be incorporated into models as essential elements of the models, as they contribute to experimentation, learning, and resilience (Edmondson, 2019).
- **Recurring, Multi-Level Change:** The evidence confirms the perception that cultural change is iterative and multi-level where the leadership vision, employee engagement, and structural support have to be aligned (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

5.4.2. Practical Implications

For leaders and organisations, the findings offer actionable recommendations:

- **Leadership Development:** Invest in development of transformational leadership to implement cultural and innovation change. The leaders must be trained to serve as a good example, share vision and encourage experimentation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).
- **Foster Continuous Learning:** Future-ready capabilities are built through regular training, mentoring and sharing knowledge. The organisations ought to institutionalise learning systems that promote feedback and adaptation.
- **Enhance Inclusion and Psychological Security:** Taking active steps to include different perspectives, overcome resistance and provide psychological safety to take risks will increase flexibility. They ought to create policies of inclusion that match with the local demographics and culture of the organisation.
- **Use Digital Tools:** The digital transformation ought to be augmented by assistance in upskilling as well as open discussion of the advantages and downsides of transformation. Technology must be viewed as a facilitator and catalyst of the culture change.
- **Embrace Tradition and Innovation:** Be mindful of the worth of established ways of doing things yet challenge established methods that are not progressive. Organisations are advised to maintain positive elements of tradition and embrace the idea of new thoughts.

The steps are practical and favour the creation of a frame to incorporate future trends into organisational culture and innovation with a focus on leadership, learning, inclusion, and adaptability.

5.4.3. Sector-Specific Recommendations

Government: Keep on investing in modular scalable digital infrastructure and participatory governance. Employ a culture of experimentation and constant innovation.

SMEs: Employ the demographic diversity as a source of innovation. Make or invest cross-generational mentoring and open idea sharing forums.

Consulting: Change old work practices by encouraging work-life, mental well-being, and flexible work. Involve the top management and the junior members in the change process.

5.5. Study Limitations

While this research provides rich, context-specific insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- **Sample Size and scope:** The research will be done using five in-depth interviews selected sectors in India. Although the qualitative method can be more detailed, the results are not statistically applicable to other organisations, or even to other regions.
- **Geographical and sectoral bias:** The study of Indian organisations aims at fulfilling the gap in the literature but it may restrict the generalisability of the results to other contexts in terms of culture or country.

- **Potential Bias:** There is potential of selection and response bias as with any qualitative research. Members might have painted their organisations in better colours, or the interpretations that were made by the researcher might have been subjective.
- **Data Access:** There was limited access in some cases to internal documents and to wider employee views and this could have restricted the richness of analysis.
- **Time Limitations:** The speed at which digital transformation is occurring as well as the organisational culture is rapidly evolving, and therefore such findings can be outdated as new trends and practices arise.

Such limitations could be overcome in future studies by increasing the size of the sample and introducing quantitative measurements and research into other sectors or even countries. The significant role of longitudinal studies to offer information on the manner of unfolding of cultural transformation with time may also be realised.

5.6. Basis for Framework Development

The discussion above lays a clear foundation for the development of a framework for integrating future trends into organisational culture and innovation. Several insights are foundational:

- **The key is leadership:** The successful adaptation requires the leaders who are able to demonstrate openness, to communicate the vision, and to encourage experimentation.

- **Culture is an obstacle as well as an opportunity:** Effective models have to take into consideration the past practices and the demand of creating psychological safety and inclusion.
- **Constant learning and flexibility:** Ability to up-skill, mentor and feedback loops must be embedded into organisations so as to create future-ready organisations.
- **Cross-functional and cross-generational teamwork:** Innovation and resilience come faster when silos are broken and different voices can be heard.
- **Digital transformation as a driving force:** Technology does not only act as a tool; it also plays an active role in the transformation of culture and organisation.

These insights translate into the core components of a practical framework:

- **Visionary Leadership:** Communicate and set a good example of the intended culture and innovation strategy.
- **Inclusive Culture:** Promote the psychological safety, diversity and employee voice.
- **Learning Systems:** Train, mentor, and feedback should be institutionalised.
- **Collaborative Structures:** Facilitate cross-functional and cross generation teamwork.
- **Digital Enablement:** Combine technology and up-skilling and adaptation.
- **Iterative Change Processes:** Understand that change is not a one off process, but one that needs to be reviewed constantly and adapted.

5.6.1. Pathway to Framework Development

Based on these elements, in the following chapter a synthesised, implementable model will be developed that organisations can use to incorporate future trends into

their culture and innovation practices. The model will be theoretically substantiated and practically focused with a leadership and practitioner application that will help to work through the changes in organisation, which are in a fast-changing environment.

6. Framework Development

6.1. Introduction to the Framework

The current environment within which organisations operate is characterised by a high rate of technological advancement, changing demographics of the workforces and vagaries of global changes. As shown in the above findings and discussion, it is very difficult to always anticipate, interpret and incorporate future trends in organisational culture and innovation strategy by many organisations. Coming up with a traditional model usually does not help solve the dynamic relationship between the legacies work practices, digital transformation, and the requirement of the inclusive and adaptive cultures.

It is based on this framework that deals with these challenges. It acts as a guide to enable the leaders, HR professionals and innovation strategists to integrate future trends into their organisational genetics in a systematic way. It is aimed at mediating the disconnect between macro-strategic aim and the micro-operational reality and, most importantly, it is supposed to make organisations not only resilient but also proactive to new opportunities.

The intended users are:

- Executives and leaders wanting to future-proof their organisations.
- Culture and change management units that belong to HR and organisational development.
- The cross-functional teams and innovation managers assigned the job of transformation and continuous improvement.

The framework offers a structured evidence-based way of doing it, with the purpose of allowing organisations of all sizes and sectors and, especially those traversing demographic diversity, digital disruption, and cultural inertia, the ability to build cultures that are innovative and future-ready.

6.2. Framework Design Rationale

The structure of the framework is based on the empirical data and the known organisational theories. Among the salient lessons of the research there are some arrangements of the studies:

- **Leadership and Vision:** As would be expected based on the change model proposed by Kotter (1996) the study has established that successful adaptation commences with a strong sense of urgency and a powerful vision as promoted by eager leaders.
- **Cultural Alignment:** According to the model of organisational culture presented by Schein (2010), a permanent change could only be achieved by taking into account both the visible and the invisible areas of the culture: artefacts, espoused values and assumptions.
- **Openness and Innovation:** Open innovation (Chesbrough, 2003) and SME innovation capability literature underlines the significance of outside cooperation, knowledge exchange, and a culture that is unconcerned with uncertainty and experimentation.

- **Continuous Feedback Loops:** One lesson that is emphasised in both literature on the findings and innovation is the importance of integrating mechanisms of feedback in order to engage in an iterative process of learning and adjustment.
- **Environmental Scanning:** To effectively anticipate future trends, it is important that systematic environmental scanning and scenario planning be undertaken in both the academic and practitioner formats.

These themes are synthesised into a unified process based on: Kotters 8-step change model (structured change), three-level culture model proposed by Schein (far reaching cultural alignment), and open innovation (external engagement), and continuing improvement cycles (feedback and learning).

Notably, the framework is made up in such a way that it is cyclic and modular thereby enabling organisations to redo and redesign various modules as their environment changes. The dynamic nature makes it relevant and resilient and avoids the argument that programs based on static frameworks are mostly unable to adapt to change.

6.3. Framework Components Explained

It consists of six interrelated elements, which represent a significant step or pillar within the process of incorporating the future trends into organisational culture and innovation:

6.3.1. Environmental Scanning & Trend Analysis

Definition:

A methodical procedure in recognising, tracking and analysing exterior and interior trends that have the ability to influence the organisation.

Function:

- Uses PESTLE, SWOT, scenario planning and other tools to pick up political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental signals.
- Interviews, workshops with internal stakeholders, and industry reports, networks are used.

6.3.2. Organisational Readiness Assessment

Definition:

Assessment of the psychological and structural readiness of the organisation towards change, such as its leadership capability, cultural maturity and technological infrastructure.

Function:

- Evaluates change preparedness through survey, maturity models, and historical analysis of previous change.
- Determines the strengths, gaps and possible points of resistance.

6.3.3. Cultural Alignment Strategies

Definition:

Intentional efforts to make organisational culture consistent with strategic objectives and trends of the future, both in terms of observable practices and assumptions.

Function:

- Integrates core values in everyday practices, communication and decision making.
- Promotes leadership growth, employee participation and open communication.
- Corrects discrepancies between the espoused values and the basic assumptions.

6.3.4. Innovation Capacity Building

Definition:

Developing the skills, structures, and networks needed to foster ongoing innovation and adaptation.

Function:

- Invest in training, mentoring and cross-functional teamwork.
- Promotes open innovation through the development of external relationships (with startups, universities, customers).
- Creates innovation teams, idea platforms and pilot projects.

6.3.5. Continuous Feedback & Foresight Loops

Definition:

Mechanisms for ongoing learning, feedback, and scenario-based planning to ensure agility and responsiveness.

Function:

- Includes routine feedback of employees, customers and partners.
- Employs data analytics, after-action reviews, and foresight workshops to improve strategies.
- Integrates repetitive processes of trial and error, learning, and revision.

6.3.6. Iterative Change Management

Definition:

A structured, phased approach to implementing and sustaining change, drawing on models like Kotter's 8-step process.

Function:

- Creates a sense of urgency, forms guiding coalitions, and creates a common vision.
- Creates immediate success and makes change part of the culture.
- Rewards previous steps when necessary, since change is cyclical, not linear.

Interaction of Components:

The model is iterative readiness assessment is based on environmental scanning, which is used to inform cultural alignment and innovation capacity building. The

constant feedback loops keep the strategies up-to-date and the iterative change management keeps the change on the move and incorporated into the organisational fabric.

6.4. Visual Model of the Framework

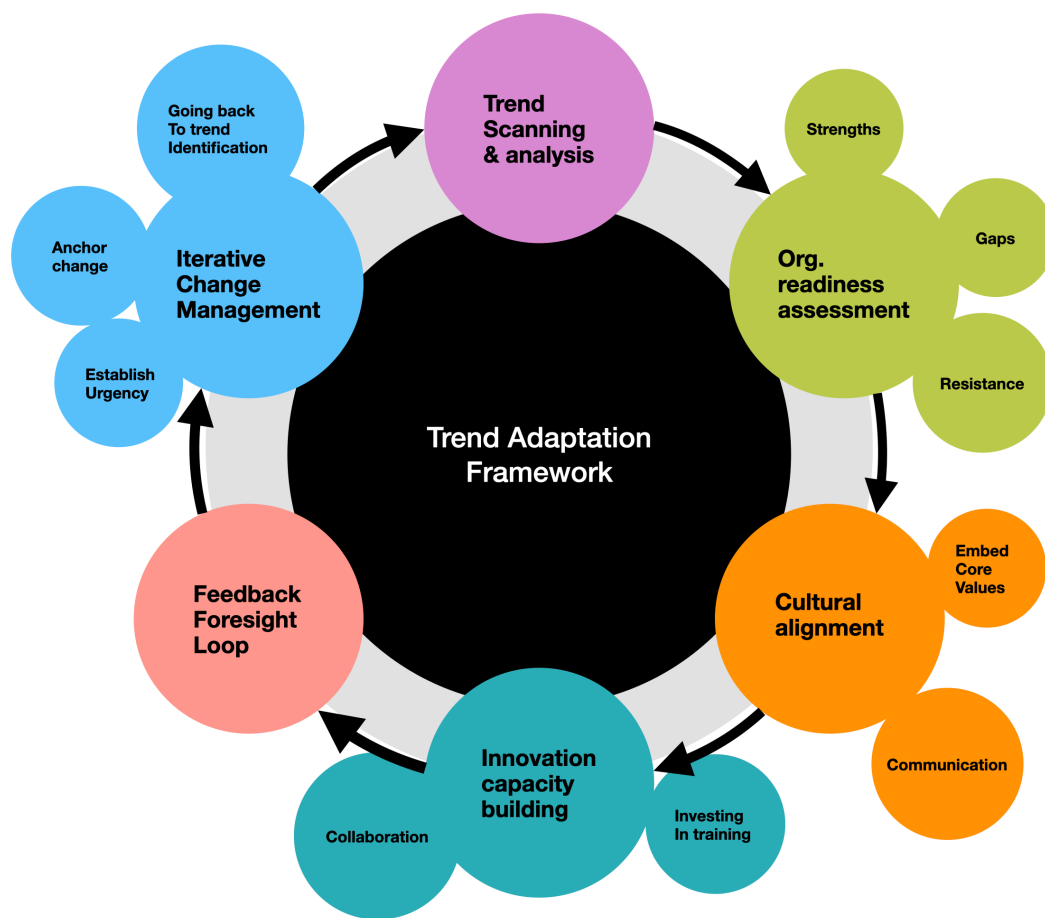


Figure 10. Trend Adaptation Framework

6.5. Application and Implementation Strategy:

6.5.1. Step-by-Step Application:

1. Initiate Environmental Scanning:

- Organise a cross-functional team to spearhead scanning.
- Key trends should be identified using PESTLE, SWOT and scenario planning tools.
- Use internal and external stakeholders to get a variety of views.

2. Assess Organisational Readiness:

- Carry out surveys, interviews and maturity tests.
- Determine the gaps in readiness, resistance, and capacity requirements.
- Disclose results openly to the management and employees.

3. Develop Cultural Alignment Strategies:

- Make clear and share core values associated with the future trends.
- Initiate leadership training, employee engagement forums and recognition programmes.
- Correct misalignments with specific interventions (e.g., policy revisions, ritual update).

4. Build Innovation Capacity:

- Make investments in training, mentoring and collaborative structures.
- Form alliances with third party innovators.

- Establish areas (physical or virtual) where experimentation and sharing of ideas can be done.

5. Embed Continuous Feedback & Foresight Loops:

- Organise periodic feed back meetings and foresight workshops.
- Utilise data analytics to monitor and feed on decisions.
- Promote build-meet-learn and iterative learning, rapid prototyping.

6. Implement Iterative Change Management:

- Use a 8-step model as Kotter suggested and generate an urgency, form coalitions, create a vision, communicate, empower, deliver some wins, consolidate, and anchor the change.
- Follow up, mark achievements and refine course of action.
- Repeat previous steps depending on comments and developments.

6.5.2. Timeline and Roles

- **Initial rollout:** 3–6 months for scanning, readiness assessment, and strategy development.
- **Capacity building and feedback loops:** Ongoing, with quarterly reviews.
- **Key roles:** Senior leadership, HR/OD teams, innovation managers, cross-functional teams, and external partners.

6.5.3. Success Criteria and Tools

- **KPIs:** Employee engagement, innovation output, readiness scores, adoption rates of new practices, customer satisfaction.

- **Tools:** Digital collaboration platforms, feedback apps, analytics dashboards, scenario planning software.

6.5.4. Support and Conditions for Success

- Leadership action and investment that can be seen.
- Certain communication and openness.
- Proficiency to improve and evolve based on failures.

6.6. Strengths and Limitations of the Framework

Strengths

- **Flexibility:** The modular, cyclical structure enables the organisations to adjust the framework to fit their specific environment as well as reassess their components when the necessity emerges.
- **Practicality:** Step-by-step instructions, real examples, and evident KPIs allow making the framework practical to practitioners.
- **Theoretical Grounding:** Combines the existing models (Kotter, Schein, open innovation) and empirical evidence of various sectors.
- **Inclusivity:** Places an emphasis on employee voice, cross-functional collaboration and diversity.
- **Resilience:** There are perpetual feedback and foresight loops to guarantee perseverance and adaptability to the change.

Limitations

- **Sector-Specific Assumptions:** The same assumptions can be applied generally, but may need modification in very regulated or resource-constrained industries.
- **Resource Intensity:** very small organisations that lack the specific change or innovation teams might find it difficult to implement it fully.
- **Validation Needs:** The framework needs to be refined/generalised by the means of empirical testing in additional organisations and realities.
- **Change Fatigue:** This can lead to employee burnout due to constant repetitive change without careful control and the correct communication.

Future Refinement

- Implement an increased number of digital and automation tools on feedback and analytics.
- The creation of sector specific play books and case studies.
- Analysis and improvement of the framework on longitudinal studies and expanding the scope of the stakeholders.

The model is an effective, evidence-based guide to the roadmap of organisations that want to incorporate the trends of the future into their culture and innovation plans. It offers an effective, flexible procedure of long term change in a life changing world by integrating environmental scan, readiness, culture fit, innovation capacity building, constant feedback, and spiral change management.

7. The Essential Role of Specialised Change Management and Trend Adaptation

7.1. The Urgent Need for Professional Change Support in SMEs

The small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) form the mainstay of most economies, which are renowned by being nimble-footed, entrepreneurial, and having tight-knit cultures. The same strengths, however, are also at risk of mutating into weakness by the time SMEs need to deal with disruptive trends, whether it is technological change, changing customer expectations, regulatory shock, or economic shock. Most SMEs do not have the comfort of having their own change management officers or innovation strategists, as is the case with large companies. Change in most cases is handled informally where leaders and employees roll up their sleeves and cross their fingers.

This is progressively not affordable. The nature and rapidity of change in the present era implies that ad hoc reactions to change are no longer sufficient. Unsuccessful change programmes may cause resource wastage, worker demotivation and even business shutdown. The answer: a committed company that provides professional service of change management and trend adaptation, specialised to SME. This business will help give SMEs what they need to compete in the quickly-changing environment: the structure, the skills, and the support that the gap between strategy and execution brings.

7.2. Why SMEs Struggle with Change and Trend Adaptation

7.2.1. The Scale and Resource Challenge

SMEs are lean organisations and have tight resources. All employees are essential and redundancy is minimal otherwise there is much room for error. Change combined with daily work can stress staff, develop resistance and burnout. SMEs do not have the luxury of trying a risky initiative or spending on failed initiatives compared to big enterprises.

7.2.2. Lack of Specialised Change Management Skills

Change management is a vocation having its body of knowledge and techniques, as well as best practices. Majority of the leaders and workers in SMEs are specialists in their fields and not structural change. In the absence of specific training, chances of going wrong are very high-leading to irregular communication, more resistance, and decreased chances of change durability.

7.2.3. The Strategy-Execution Gap

A lot of the SMEs have big dreams of expansion or revolution, however they are not able to turn them into doable strategies. Strategic frameworks are usually very much farfetched and there is no much advice on how the strategies should be applied practically. This strategy to execution disconnect is the important impediment to making change and innovation pay.

7.2.4. The Human Factor

Each person is important in SMEs. Change may involve personal issues such as employment, self, and work life relationships. The resistance may arise at quarters one would not expect and the impacts of any transformation spread far and wide within the organisation about faster than one would think. At times even a well intentioned initiative can fail in the absence of dedicated support.

7.3. The Business Opportunity: Dedicated Change Management and Trend Adaptation Services

7.3.1. Change Management as a Profession, Not a Side Job

A dedicated change management business brings professional expertise to the SME sector. Change managers are trained to:

- Evaluate change readiness
- Write organisational communication strategies Find ways to create scheduled communication programs
- Trace and solve opposition
- Measure performance and make changes
- Make sure change is entrenched and lasting

This form of professional practice promotes high adoption rates, minimises the risk, and makes sure that change initiatives bring their inherent value.

7.3.2. Trend Adaptation and Environmental Scanning

The business provides SMEs with tools and processes for ongoing trend analysis:

- Conducting PESTLE and SWOT analyses
- Facilitating scenario planning and market research
- Identifying emerging opportunities and threats

This proactive approach ensures that SMEs are not blindsided by disruption and can position themselves to seize new opportunities.

7.3.3. Translating Strategy into Actionable Roadmaps

The change management professionals fill the gap between the strategy and the implementation by:

- Breaking down frameworks into manageable phases
- Defining clear milestones, timelines, and responsibilities
- Customising implementation plans to the SME's unique context

This ensures that strategies do not remain on paper but are effectively implemented, with measurable progress at every stage.

7.3.4. Building Innovation Capacity and Partnerships

The business helps SMEs foster a culture of innovation by:

- Promoting cross functional team and idea management systems
- Implementing the idea of Lean Startup, Agile, or Design Thinking

- Linking SMEs to outside collaboration, including tech providers, universities, or research institutes, to allow access to new capabilities and resources

The presence of strategic partnerships can enable SMEs to get the technology, capital, and skills, which they would not otherwise be able to afford.

7.3.5. Continuous Feedback, Learning, and Adaptation

Change management services ensure that feedback loops are built into every initiative:

- Establishing the feedback mechanism of the employees and customers
- Helping with retrospectives and after action reviews
- Digital tools to collect and analyse data in real time

This allows SMEs to continually learn, adapt and improve so as they become more resilient to future shocks.

7.3.6. People-Centric Change Management

Recognising that employees are at the heart of every SME, dedicated services focus on:

- Reducing resistance and addressing the issues of employees
- Training and support through transitions
- Building morale and involvement during change process

This human approach to change guarantees that change is not only entrenched, but also adopted.

7.4. How the Dedicated Business Would Operate

SME change management process will have an initial consultation and discussion with the management to learn about its objectives, challenges, and the situation where change is required. To collect data about preparedness to change, the professionals carry out readiness evaluation through changes, interviews, and workshops. Resting on these conclusions, a personalised plan is elaborated, which includes specific goals, step-by-step plan with milestones, and the identification of key stakeholders. In the implementation process, the business helps to ensure that there is correspondence between the leadership and staff, offering training on new tools and methodologies and measuring results in the process to make changes in the strategies whenever necessary. Once put into effect there is constant monitoring, feedback and modification of strategies thus ensuring that changes become part of the organisational culture and that SMEs will be able to stay agile and adaptable to changes in the future.

7.5. The Business Value: Why SMEs Need Dedicated Change Management

Support

Dedicated change management significantly reduces risks for SMEs by identifying and addressing resistance early, ensuring smoother implementation with minimal disruption. It enhances collaboration and employee engagement by aligning team goals with organisational changes and fostering ownership. This expert guidance accelerates the adoption of new processes and technologies, leading to faster, sustainable growth through market expansion and operational efficiency. Moreover,

it cultivates a culture of creativity and continuous learning, helping SMEs maintain a competitive edge in dynamic markets. Finally, SMEs gain access to external expertise, market intelligence, technology partners, and funding opportunities that would otherwise be inaccessible, further supporting their innovation and growth.

7.6. Why This Business Idea Is Essential Now

The Competitive Imperative

This is because in the current economically difficult, hyper competitive and rapidly changing world, SMEs can ill afford to be left behind in terms of change management or setting fashion. The ones who do not adapt will become obsolete or even fail. Change as a threat becomes a competitive advantage when handled by a dedicated business that offers such services.

The Agility Advantage

SMEs have a way of being able to be agile but unless one plans change support structures, this agility might go to waste, or worse chaos. Professional change management builds on the strengths of SMEs, e.g. speed, flexibility, intimate leadership-staff relationships, as well as their structure and expertise to bring about enduring changes.

The Human Element

It is all about people when it comes to change. A committed business makes sure that the concerns of the employees are considered, resistance is dealt with and

participation is incorporated at every stage of the journey. Such a people-oriented strategy is particularly crucial to SMEs where each of them matters.

The Bridge to Sustainable Growth

With an inbuilt change management and adaptation of trends, SMEs can create a platform of long-term sustainability, resilience and growth. It is more than a business idea to manage risk it is an opportunity unlocker and future-proofing of the SME sector.

Change Management as a Necessity, Not a Luxury

In summary, a dedicated business providing change management and trend adaptation services is not a luxury for SMEs—it is a necessity. Such a business enables SMEs to:

- Move through disruption and capture new opportunities
- Put strategy into practice and make things happen
- Create an innovation and continuous improvement culture
- Involve and engage employees at all levels of change
- Be sustainable and resilient in a volatile world

SMEs need to invest in professional change management now. When SMEs join forces with a committed business that is familiar with their individual requirements and capabilities, they can transform their size into the real competitive advantage rather than a perceived disadvantage and succeed no matter what the future holds.

8. Business Model Design:

Enabling SME Change Management and Trend Adaptation

This business model is designed to enable small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to easily adjust to the trends in the future as their organisations learn to incorporate change management and innovation within their organisational culture.

By tapping into the six, component framework which includes: Environmental Scanning & Trend Analysis, Organisational Readiness Assessment, Cultural Alignment Strategies, Innovation Capacity Building, Continuous Feedback & Foresight Loops, and Iterative Change Management this model provides an organised, low cost and scaling solution unique to the requirements and limitations of SMEs.

Value Proposition

We enable SMEs to future-proof their businesses by providing expert, end-to-end change management and trend adaptation services, using a proven, evidence-based framework.

For SMEs: Access to professional change management and innovation support without the need for internal specialist teams.

For Stakeholders: Increased organisational resilience, employee engagement, and sustainable growth.

For the Market: A scalable, replicable service model that fills a critical gap in SME support ecosystems.

Target Customers

- Small and medium-sized enterprises (10–500 employees) across sectors (manufacturing, IT, retail, services, etc.)
- Owners, founders, or senior managers seeking to drive change, digital transformation, or innovation
- HR and operations managers responsible for culture and process improvement

Key Business Model Components (Aligned with the Framework)

Environmental Scanning & Trend Analysis

Service Offering:

- Conduct regular market, technology, and regulatory scans for clients.
- Provide sector-specific PESTLE/SWOT reports and scenario planning workshops.
- Offer subscription-based trend monitoring dashboards and quarterly briefings.

Revenue Model:

- One-off consulting fees for initial scans.
- Subscription packages for ongoing trend analysis and updates.

Organisational Readiness Assessment

Service Offering:

- Deploy readiness surveys, interviews, and maturity assessments.

- Facilitate workshops to identify strengths, gaps, and resistance points.
- Deliver actionable readiness reports with prioritised recommendations.

Revenue Model:

- Fixed-fee assessment packages.
- Bundled with other services for a discounted rate.

Cultural Alignment Strategies

Service Offering:

- Design and facilitate leadership workshops, employee engagement forums, and communication campaigns.
- Develop custom cultural alignment plans (values, behaviours, rituals).
- Support policy and process updates to reflect new cultural priorities.

Revenue Model:

- Project-based fees for cultural transformation programs.
- Retainer models for ongoing culture coaching and support.

Innovation Capacity Building

Service Offering:

- Deliver training on innovation methodologies (Agile, Design Thinking, Lean Startup).
- Set up cross-functional innovation teams and idea management systems.
- Broker partnerships with universities, startups, and technology vendors.

Revenue Model:

- Per-workshop or per-training session fees.
- Success-based fees for innovation outcomes (e.g., new product launches).

Continuous Feedback & Foresight Loops**Service Offering:**

- Implement digital feedback tools (employee/customer surveys, suggestion platforms).
- Facilitate after-action reviews, retrospectives, and foresight workshops.
- Provide analytics dashboards for real-time monitoring.

Revenue Model:

- SaaS-style subscription for digital feedback platforms.
- Monthly/quarterly facilitation retainers.

Iterative Change Management**Service Offering:**

- Project-manage phased change initiatives using Kotter's 8-step model.
- Provide ongoing coaching, troubleshooting, and stakeholder engagement.
- Develop and track KPIs, success metrics, and change adoption rates.

Revenue Model:

- Monthly retainer for ongoing change management.
- Performance-based bonuses tied to achievement of key milestones.

Key Activities

- Client onboarding and needs assessment
- Framework-based service delivery (diagnostics, workshops, project management)
- Partnership development (tech providers, industry bodies, HR platforms)
- Continuous improvement and knowledge sharing (case studies, best practices)
- Marketing and SME outreach (webinars, industry events)

Key Resources

- Change management and innovation consultants (core team and network)
- Digital tools for assessment, feedback, and analytics
- Content and training modules (customisable for SMEs)
- Strategic partnerships (technology, HR, finance, legal)

Channels

- Direct sales (BD team outreach to SMEs)
- Digital marketing (website, content, webinars, social media)
- Partnerships with SME associations, chambers of commerce, and local incubators
- Referral programs with satisfied clients and ecosystem partners

Customer Relationships

- High-touch, consultative onboarding and support
- Regular check-ins, progress reviews, and feedback loops
- Community-building (client forums, peer learning groups)
- Dedicated account managers for ongoing clients

Cost Structure

- Consultant salaries and training
- Technology platform development and maintenance
- Marketing and business development expenses
- Partnership fees and referral commissions
- Content development and IP protection

Revenue Streams

- Consulting and assessment fees (one-time and recurring)
- Subscription packages (trend monitoring, feedback tools)
- Training and workshop fees
- Retainer and performance-based contracts
- Innovation outcome-based bonuses

Key Partners

- Technology vendors (for digital tools and platforms)
- Universities and research institutes (for innovation capacity)
- HR and training providers
- SME support organisations and government agencies

- Industry associations and networks

Implementation Roadmap

1. Pilot Phase:

- Select 3–5 SMEs for pilot projects across different sectors.
- Deliver the full framework as a bundled service.
- Collect feedback, refine offerings, and develop case studies.

2. Scale-Up:

- Launch targeted marketing campaigns and partnership programs.
- Expand consultant network and digital tool offerings.
- Develop sector-specific modules and playbooks.

3. Continuous Improvement:

- Use feedback loops to iterate on service offerings.
- Invest in technology and analytics for scalable delivery.
- Build a client community for peer learning and referrals.

Impact and Success Metrics

- Client retention and satisfaction rates
- Measurable improvements in client KPIs (innovation output, employee engagement, change adoption)
- Number of SMEs served and sectors covered
- Revenue growth and profitability
- Case studies and testimonials demonstrating real-world impact

Competitive Advantage

- First-mover advantage in offering an integrated, framework-based change management solution for SMEs
- Deep sector expertise and practical, actionable methodology
- Flexible, modular service design that scales with client needs
- Strong network of partners for end-to-end support

Risks and Mitigation

- **Adoption risk:** Addressed through high-touch onboarding and customisation.
- **Resource constraints:** Mitigated by leveraging digital tools and a flexible consultant network.
- **Market education:** Overcome with thought leadership, content marketing, and success stories.

This type of business uses a strong evidence-based model to provide a customised change management and trend adaptation services to the SMEs. The business enables SMEs to create resilient and innovative organisational cultures and take advantage of new opportunities in the future, by offering affordable, scalable, and structured support, no matter how developed and capable the business is when it begins.

8.1. Business Model Canvas Figure

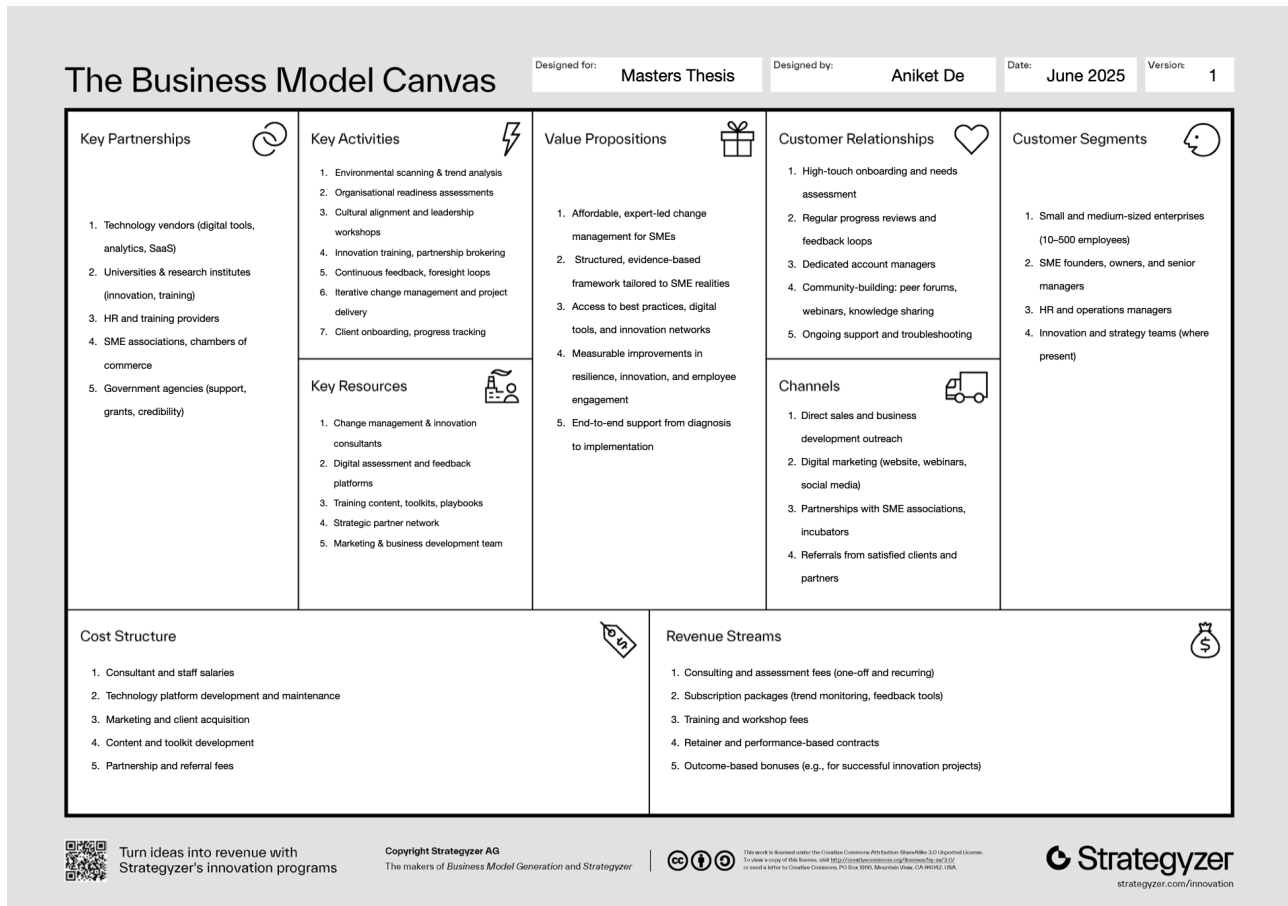


Figure 11. Business model canvas

9. Conclusion

Amidst a wave of fast-paced technological changes, change in societal values and the growing uncertainty of the world, the ability of organisations to read, interpret and incorporate future trends into the culture and innovation strategy has become the distinguishing factor to stay relevant and competitive over time. This thesis has explored this inter-relationship between organisational culture, innovation and trend adaptation currently presented in a complex manner with special concern to challenges and opportunities that SMEs and organisations that operate in different cultural and sectoral settings have.

The results indicate that there is a wide awareness of the necessity to adapt, but the systematisation of the translation of this desire into reality becomes the actual challenge in most organisations. Organisational culture, which is sometimes barely visible but always a strong force, may be either an aid or an obstacle to change. Open, empowered, and learning cultures, which are characterised as adaptive, get in a better position to adopt new trends and become innovative, and rigid, hierarchical cultures do not embrace change and thrive at the risk of becoming extinct (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Schein, 2010). Leadership is always depicted to be the key element of effective cultural change and innovation, where transformational leaders exhibit desirable behaviours, present appealing visions, and establish psychological security to risk-taking (Kotter, 1996; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Otherwise, the research emphasises how design thinking and strategic foresight could be applied to organisational practice, allowing organisations to become

proactive in terms of coping with complexity and uncertainty. To establish the trend adaptation in the organisational DNA, cross-functional cooperation, daily learning, and the conscious establishment of values and behaviours are necessary.

Nevertheless, there are still some serious obstacles (such as the lack of resources, especially when it comes to SMEs, cultural inertia, resistance to changes and the issue of long-term innovation-short term operation needs).

This thesis makes a theoretical contribution as well as a practical one by creating a workable framework to innovation design management. The framework offers practical insights to leaders and practitioners on how to incorporate future trends in the culture and innovation, to enable organisations gain resiliency, agility and preparedness to the future. After all, adaptability is not just a competitive gain but rather a survival and progress of organisations and the society itself. This study highlights the necessity that organisations can no longer afford to be blindly aware and well-meaning, but strategically purposeful with their design-led cultural and innovation change transformation in the world where the only constant is change.

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