

The three levels of organizational change to build future potential organizations

Three levels of organizational change

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to answer the question of what characterizes organizations with future-potential, and with the help of a model introduced in this study, the authors propose what interventions can be identified and which improvements need to be made in traditional organizations so that they meet the requirements of future-potentiality.

Design/methodology/approach – A systematic literature review was conducted to identify management interventions. Citation and co-word analyses were also performed. Content analysis of 311 journal articles from the past five years was performed taking into account relevant keywords, and disciplinary narrowing was also applied. These articles were used to identify knowledge that could be used to suggest micro-, meso- and macro-level changes.

Findings – To develop the future potential of organizations, three organizational levels must be separated. The first is the micro level of relations between leaders and employees, where equity is a key value for future potentiality. It should be emphasized that not all employees' organizational commitment is equally important for organizations with future potential, and leaders should strengthen their commitment according to individual needs and opportunities. The second is the meso level, where the decisive value is organizational moderation, and this suggests that a careful and restrained development is needed both in satisfying consumer needs and in innovation. The third is the macro level, where the defining value is responsibility and sustainability, which are necessary for achieving a state where the active development of national culture becomes possible.

Originality/value – Contrary to the authors' expectations, it has been found that there are only a few studies dealing with change management for the purpose of achieving a future potential mode of organizational operation; thus, the results can be considered new and will contribute to the development of a cross-section of change management and future studies.

Keywords Organizational change, Paradigm change, Organizations with future-potential, Commitment, Innovation, Culture

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

The background of this study is constituted by the research project of the Social Futuring Center, which developed a normative framework (Csák, 2018), an analytical conceptual framework with pillars as well as variables of a futuring model (Szántó, 2018) and a

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discursive-conceptual framework (Aczél, 2018) for a holistic and multidisciplinary approach (Szanto and Mueller, 2022) to the futuring of nations. The Social Futuring Index was also operationalized based on the theoretical futuring model (Szántó *et al.*, 2020). As a continuation of this research, the Future Potentials Observatory aims to develop a concept and model of organizations with future potential (FPO) based on the national level framework of future potentiality, and intends to place this concept and model in the context of known theoretical approaches.

Therefore, in this study, we seek to find what requirements those organizations need to meet whose primary concern is successful long-term survival as far as their operations are concerned. Organizations that are able to meet these requirements are called organizations with future potential. A common feature of organizations with future potential is that they do not follow the traditional organizational life cycle models, as they consciously strive to develop their internal operating model in line with their national cultures and social environments in such a way that the phases of “Fall” and “Death” (Adizes, 1979) will not appear at all. It follows from this that even during the conscious management of organizational development, actually even before aging, those principles must be observed that contribute to extended long-term survival and to the prolongation or nonappearance of the period of aging. Rohrbeck (2010) defines this as Organizational Future Orientation and distinguishes five areas of intervention: Information Usage; Method Sophistication; People and Networks; Organization; and Culture. In this article, we deal with the latter two dimensions more in depth, and therefore focus on what needs to be done at different levels of organizational management and in terms of organizational culture for an organization to become future-proof.

Management literature has explored the tools of this challenge from the organizational development perspective in relative details. For example, Yoon *et al.* (2021) identified nine OD values that are jointly necessary to provide successful OD practices for organizations in the future. These are values most of which can ideally be found in most organizations (e.g. continuous learning and innovation, diversity, collaboration, commitment, client growth and development, etc.), and the new approach to successful OD is that a combination of these values are pinpointed and highlighted as strategically important factors. Successful organizational development is inconceivable without systematically managing organizational culture and various resources (Flamholtz and Hua, 2002; Schraeder and Self, 2003).

The way human resources are managed is also a key issue from the point of view of organizational functioning. According to Jabbour and Santos (2008), the common characteristic of *sustainable organizations* is that HRM plays a central role and contributes to economic, social and environmental performance. This approach argues for creating the conditions for HRM to work in harmony with innovation, environmental management and diversity management. At the same time, these are in fact dimensions concerning which successful practice to be followed is not necessarily clear. For instance, in the context of diversity management it is often argued that diversity of employees with respect to personality (Herbert *et al.*, 2023), culture (Pieterse *et al.*, 2013), education (Bell *et al.*, 2011), ethnicity (Cunningham, 2009), etc., is beneficial for the organization as it allows a variety of perspectives to be concurrently present in the group or organization (Horwitz and Horwitz, 2007). At the same time, such diversity in groups where creativity is not necessary (e.g. in a sports team) is more of a disadvantage in terms of performance (Timmerman, 2000). In addition to OD, in the case of multinational companies, a cultural issue that seems to be of a technical nature but is nevertheless decisive from the point of view of future potential, is how to manage this diversity and what kind of management practices should be developed based on such diversity. Notable in this regard is the research of Liang *et al.* (2018), who argue that differences in mother tongue associated with diverse origins and family

backgrounds also imply differences in thinking, and that language specificities are a fundamental determinant of one's ability to plan the future. Achieving future potentials is only possible if team performance and standards can be maintained at the expected level, even in the very long-term, concerning highly creative innovation tasks, so a supportive organizational culture should be a priority.

However, an analysis of the critical points of intervention concerning which management really needs to think in new paradigms, and where principles must be laid down in a way that necessarily contradicts the theoretical and practical dogmas of the past are in fact lacking. Such an analysis is necessary precisely because we are looking for operating mechanisms that are radically different from existing organizational practices, and which do not involve life cycles and death, but only very long-term survival. These new approaches also mean that a change of approach is needed in terms of organizational development and change management if the organization is to be future-proof. [Worren et al. \(1999\)](#) suggested that the practice of organizational development should involve interdisciplinary teams that contribute to ensuring that individual professional background and practical experience in organizational development do not cause imbalances in organizational development. As a result of their research, [Worren et al. \(1999\)](#) recommend that the toolkit of organizational change management unite the roles of the Strategists (basically dealing with environment and organizational structure planning), Organizational Developers (dealing with internal cultural features and people management) and Technologists (dealing with processes, technologies, information systems development), as this is how holistic and organizational change covering all aspects of organizational functioning can be realized. This approach is in line with [Hardy's \(1994\)](#) dimensions of change (types of change), which distinguishes between behavioral change (which focuses on tasks and cost-effectiveness), attitudinal change (focus on employees and processes) and cultural change (which focuses on values). The use of such integrated models is not only complex – due to the multiple points of intervention, diverse consequences and resource requirements – but is also risky as lack of coordination can make the project unsuccessful ([Appelbaum, 1997](#)). These methods are to remedy existing problems or to prepare for mergers and fusions, but these models pay surprisingly little attention to future challenges that management needs to prepare for. In management, there are relatively many technical methods for transitioning to adaptive operation, but the results of future research are hardly used in practice ([van der Steen et al., 2011](#)).

Constructing the foundations of future potential oriented organizational functioning is necessary for thinking differently about organizational change itself, and a change in paradigm must be implemented at several levels of organizational functioning. According to [Ybema \(2004\)](#), organizational development projects are also often permeated by stories of the past, which evoke old memories of a paradisiac state, which can be counterbalanced by conscious idealization of the future. A future-oriented mindset is also important as voluntary employee turnover is increased by lack of information about organizational development and resistance to change ([Srivastava and Agrawal, 2020](#); [Van den Heuvel et al., 2017](#)) also examined interactions between individuals and found that honest change leadership, information sharing and commitment to change reduce turnover intentions. The true antidote to general resistance to change is a perceived charismatic leader and his or her credible communication about the new circumstances, which is necessary for successful change implementation ([Men et al., 2020](#)). However, it is common that the positive consequences of change are not segmented, and that the widely praised benefits are uniformly encouraged to be accepted even if the leader-employee relationship in the past does not justify such an approach. On the one hand, those organizations are the best prepared for the future which exhibit the highest acceptance of the

results of organizational change, and in the case of which, on the other hand, there is both a sense of employee role identity and a high level of trust in the leader (Iverson, 1996).

Employees' organizational behavior at the workplace improves if they participate in consciously changing workplace culture, as this is the most secure way to ensure that the new organizational culture is in line with the concerned individuals' values (Sadri and Lees, 2001). And the ideal organizational culture should exhibit the practice of authentic leadership (Yadav and Dixit, 2017), i.e. authenticity is one of the key attributes of leaders in a positive culture that organizational members should create. It is important to emphasize, following Endrissat *et al.* (2007), that authentic leadership does not coincide with the notion of moral or ethical leadership. For example, workplace inequalities based on gender or ethnicity are not only unethical practices (Warren *et al.*, 2019) but also reduce company productivity (Pérotin and Robinson, 2000). However, a leader can be authentic if, in line with the LMX model, his or her differentiated leader–employee relationships (LMX differentiation) (Martin *et al.*, 2018) are also perceived by employees as objectively based: that is, if employees have the ability to evaluate their leaders' efforts to motivate, retain, satisfy, etc., their crew in line with such employees' own contribution in terms of work performance, attitude, skills, etc. This is based on the fact that workers' perceived legitimacy of the practice of particularism has a positive effect on perceived distributive justice (Hudson *et al.*, 2019; Dessler, 1999) also argues that supporting the needs of employees and increasing their commitment contribute to an increased level of perceived organizational justice. However, when examining the relationship between LMX, authentic leadership and organizational justice the following question may arise: in what way differences between employees – whether such differences are the result of their personality, the nature of their work or their personal expectations – affect this complex phenomenon. In other words, it is worth examining whether, in a truly future-oriented organization, the needs of internal customers are being met to the extent that they themselves expect this from the organization. In future-oriented organizations, the aim is not to maximize overall job satisfaction but to satisfy the needs of stakeholders and customers (Eklöf and Westlund, 2002). This is supported by Giacomelli *et al.* (2013), who argue that it is worth striving for “satisfaction” rather than maximization in organizational contexts, and that uniform motivation and reward systems used for employees can be counterproductive as claimed by the equity theory (Kollmann *et al.*, 2020): i.e. over-fulfilling the perceived needs of employees and thus maximizing the relationship between organizational and individual variables (e.g. job satisfaction, organizational commitment, well-being, etc.) is not only expensive but also nonbeneficial beyond an optimal level even for the organization concerned, and the same is true to the employees.

According to Aust *et al.* (2020), sustainable development requires such a new approach in HRM that is no longer based on the short-term maximization of business success, but on participative models of leadership that treat employees with dignity and equity. Shaping sustainable HRM systems is also important because these new foundational practices will determine the future economic, social and environmental performance of organizations (Macke and Genari, 2019):

- RQ1. What paradigm change is needed at the micro level (in the organization–employee relationship) to achieve organizations with future potential?
- RQ1A. How to optimize employee commitment to contribute to the long-term survival of the organization while concurrently providing the highest economic return for the organization and meeting employees' expectations and motivations?

Leadership is the link between the micro and meso levels of the organization, and the driver of leadership change is the change in the organization's environment (Chambers *et al.*, 2010). This is

why it is also important to examine what new phenomena at the meso level require what kind of managerial decision-making mechanisms for an organization to be able to respond to future challenges in new ways. These new mechanisms are triggered by changing environmental conditions.

In the context of the consequences of the COVID-19 epidemic, [Antonacopoulou and Georgiadou \(2021\)](#) argue that future organizations will need to develop leadership practices that embody the contribution of the leader to the common good as a new role. This also means that the short-term utilitarian management and general organizational modes of operation that have characterized companies up to now will necessarily disappear and will be replaced by management principles that do not deny utilitarian thinking in economic terms but will aim at such utilitarian goals over a much longer time horizon and accept that for very long-term success it may be appropriate to give up some of the immediate benefits. To do this, leaders need the capacity of foresight, which – in the optimal case of sustainable leadership – is complemented by values such as self-mastery and awareness, while the leader continuously monitors the sustainable integration of social and environmental needs in his or her actions ([O'Brien and Robertson, 2009](#)). Companies with a long-term orientation and a focus on stakeholder needs are also financially more efficient and can be considered high sustainability companies, as these outperform other companies in the long term ([Eccles et al., 2014](#)). Indeed, management that prioritizes long-term goals may appear to forego some immediate gains, but it does so in a way that prioritizes and focalizes its own interests. The development of this culture calls for a leader who is ethical and selfless, which, on the one hand, is a consequence of consciously restrained profit maximization at the level of corporate strategy, and which, on the other hand, can also be beneficial at the micro level in the organization–employee relationship, as leaders' selflessness is strongly linked to employees' organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) ([Cavazotte et al., 2021](#)). And, very often in fact, the managerial drive to maximize profits is incompatible with ethical leadership ([Alexander, 2007](#)). This is confirmed by the research of [Doorasamy and Baldavaloo \(2016\)](#), who argue that ethical corporate practices are needed for setting visionary and sustainable corporate goals. Indeed, ethical corporate governance has the potential to offset the cost of equity through lower business risks and higher profitability in the case of companies that prioritize sustainability ([Zouari-Hadiji and Chouaibi, 2021](#)):

RQ2. What kind of paradigm shift is needed at the meso level to develop organizations with future potential?

RQ2A. How can moderation be prioritized over profit maximization in management decision-making?

Both employees' attitudes at work (including their commitment) and the leaders' own management practices and efforts to implement corporate strategy (including an equitable and moderated management approach) are determined by the macro level of corporate functioning. In this, the influence of national culture on the organization plays a fundamental role (see e.g. [Erthal and Marques, 2018](#); [Siddique, 2017](#); [Watson et al., 2019](#)). However, there is an even firmer understanding that the impact of culture is not unidirectional, and from this perspective, it is worth looking at leadership and corporate functioning in a broader context. [Burns et al. \(2014\)](#) concluded that in addition to organizational culture, the selection and training of leaders should also consider the ways such prospective leaders will be able to fit in with the national culture. And it follows from this that differences between national and organizational cultures result in a kind of internal dynamic in which elements of culture, values, and/or attitudes of employees and leaders change. Why do we suppose that organizations with future potential cannot consciously apply this phenomenon to their advantage? It is likely that cultural fit is the

key to long-term organizational survival, and if this is the case, the question arises as to whether organizations with a truly long-term vision are able to shape national culture. Ultimately, the national culture of a country is made up of a set of organizations and people, and if national culture includes organizations that have existed for a long time due to their future potential, then these can have a strong impact on the national culture in question. On the other hand, equity as a value requires the organization to meet the needs not only of its direct stakeholders but also of its social environment. If the organization shapes and develops its own organizational culture to serve the needs of the society through providing the highest quality and performance, then why could it not do the same when meeting the needs of the society? Moreover, according to e.g. Gerhart (2009), national culture has less extensive impact on organizational culture than we previously thought, which can be explained by the fact that today's global organizations export their own values across different national cultures (Kattman, 2014), thus national cultural differences are becoming less and less intense. Organizational culture therefore has an impact on national culture (Knein *et al.*, 2020), which can be shaped by organizations with future potential. This is supported by Peschl and Fundneider (2017), who argue that organizations with future potential operate in a hyper-complex world, where management and control are replaced by planning and innovation. And this way at the macro level, we come to the analogy of challenges at the meso level of organizations, where it seems reasonable for organizations to consciously form national cultures in their own interest and thereby make their own macro-level operating environment more predictable, while concurrently enhancing societal needs and well-being:

RQ3. What paradigm change is needed at the macro level to develop organizations with future potential?

RQ3A. What principles should a company follow to successfully influence national culture?

2. Method: systematic literature review

The problem statement presented in the introduction has helped us to narrow down the areas of intervention that need to be addressed when trying to turn a traditional organization into an organization with future potential. Accordingly, there are three levels of change: the micro level, the meso level and the macro level. To answer the research questions outlined above, a systematic literature review was conducted. According to Zupic and Čater (2015), there are several forms of systematic bibliography research which can serve different purposes but can also complement each other. Of the five basic methods they defined, two are used in parallel in this study: citation and co-word. The advantage of the *citation analysis* method is that it provides a quick overview of the articles that have a higher impact, in which case the date of publication can have a distorting effect. In this sense, it can be stated that the number of citations received by published articles is a guide to the importance of the topic covered and the scientific usefulness of the results. Concerning the studies filtered by this method in the scope of our research, we defined the permissive condition that each publication must have received at least five citations per year in the Scopus database since its publication. The *co-word analysis* method was also necessary to check whether we were really researching the most relevant problems and to understand what conclusions we could draw from these results to answer our research questions. *Co-word analysis* is in fact a content analysis method that estimates the importance of a topic based on the co-occurrence of word combinations in the text or title of a document (Wu *et al.*, 2021). In both cases, we focused on journal articles for ensuring uniform

accessibility and higher reliability of sources. The source of the processed journal articles was Scopus. For each search, the following filter criteria were applied:

- For working with information that is relevant over time, only articles from the past five years (2018–2023) were considered.
- In the fields of *Article title*, *Abstract* and *Keywords* of the Scopus search engine, keywords have been entered in a form that avoids possible errors resulting from the use of multi-number formulas.
- Only *article* and *review* types of studies were considered.
- We have applied a discipline-type narrowing and only included articles that fall within these disciplines: *Social Sciences; Business, Management and Accounting; Psychology; Economics, Econometrics and Finance; Decision Sciences*.

Three levels of
organizational
change

First, we examined change management tools used by organizations with future potential, or by organizations aspiring to become organizations with future potential, as well as the levels of change, and the management methods used. The phrases “change* AND management*” and “future” were used, and also “organizational AND change” and “future” were used in another search, both under the following conditions: [(TITLE (change* AND management) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (future) AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “BUSI”) OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “DECI”) OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “ECON”) OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “PSYC”) OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “SOCI”) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”) OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “re”))] and [(TITLE-ABS-KEY (sustainable AND organizational AND change) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (future) AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “BUSI”) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, “ar”))]. These complex searches resulted in a total of 311 journal article hits. The results were further narrowed down by involving keyword filtering of “must contain” terms (e.g. change management; organizational change; sustainable development; leadership, etc.) and by filtering out articles that were not relevant to us (typically studies on agroecomics and environmental science). In the end, 22 articles remained: the content of these studies has been processed in detail (Table 1).

3. Results

Table 1 summarizes the results of the systematic literature analysis. The data of the 22 scientific journal articles related to our narrow topic are summarized in Table 1. It can be seen that 7(+1 in part) of these offer relevant knowledge for implementing the micro level approach to change management concerning organizations with future potential, 6(+1 in part) provides information for the meso level approach, while the rest offer relevant knowledge for modelling the macro level approach. The following is a summary of the content analysis of these studies and the conclusions that can be drawn from them regarding possible methods of implementation.

Olafsen *et al.* (2021) point out that the basis of future potentiality is the capacity for continuous change, the success of which depends on the employees’ commitment to change. And for a high level of commitment to change, it is more important that the organizational culture should be strong, while the type of organizational culture is of secondary importance. In other words, merely being prepared for change essentially requires the presence of leaders in whom employees have trust and who consistently do their jobs, as these are the features of a strong culture. However, the research of Olafsen *et al.* (2021) treats all employees uniformly, but not all employees are necessarily equally valuable to the organization, as attested by job position based compensation systems. Hermelingmeier and von Wirth (2021) also deal with the micro level of change by highlighting their findings that

Table 1.
Most important
features of the results
of the systematic
literature analysis

Nr.	Year of Publ.	Title of paper	Journal	Author(s)	Level of change management approach (according to the Authors' classification)	Keyword(s) (defined by the authors)
1	2018	Impact of quality management practices on change readiness due to new quality implementations	<i>International Journal of Lean Six Sigma</i>	Uluskan <i>et al.</i>	micro	Quality; Employees' commitment
2	2018	Organisational effectiveness and agility	<i>Journal of Organizational Effectiveness</i>	Holbeche	micro	Agility; Resilience; Organizational culture; Paradigm change
3	2019	The changing nature of managerial work: The effects of corporate restructuring on management jobs and careers	<i>Human Relations</i>	Foster <i>et al.</i>	micro	Leaders; Careers
4	2019	Managerial practices for designing circular economy business models: The case of an Italian SME in the office supply industry	<i>Journal of Manufacturing Technology</i>	Ünal <i>et al.</i>	micro	Leaders' commitment; Circular economy business model
5	2021	Sustainable development through commitment to organizational change: the implications of organizational culture and individual readiness for change	<i>Management Journal of Workplace Learning</i>	Olafsen <i>et al.</i>	micro	Sustainability; Commitment; Organizational culture
6	2022	Strategic sustainable development of Industry 4.0 through the lens of social responsibility: The role of human resource practices	<i>Business Strategy and the Environment</i>	Mukhtuy <i>et al.</i>	micro	Industry 4.0; Socially responsible human resource
7	2020	HRM institutional entrepreneurship for sustainable business organizations	<i>Human Resource Management Review</i>	Ren and Jackson	micro and macro	HRM philosophy; HRM practices from financial indicators to economic, environmental and social performance
8	2020	Artificial intelligence for sustainability: Challenges, opportunities, and a research agenda	<i>International Journal of Information Management</i>	Nishant <i>et al.</i>	mezo and macro	AI; Environmental governance; Sustainability
9	2021	The history and future of projects as a transition innovation: Towards a sustainable project management framework	<i>Systems Research and Behavioral Science</i>	Sankaran <i>et al.</i>	mezo	Sustainable project management; Innovation
10	2021	Social Media Engagement, Organizational Agility and Digitalization Strategic Plan to Improve SMEs' Performance	<i>IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management</i>	Rozak <i>et al.</i>	mezo	Social networking; Digital skills; Technological innovation
11	2022	The changing role of innovation for crisis management in times of COVID-19: An integrative literature review	<i>Journal of Innovation and Knowledge</i>	Sharma <i>et al.</i>	mezo	Innovation
12	2022	Managing BPM life cycle transition risks in a small educational company to support change management	<i>Benchmarking</i>	Souza <i>et al.</i>	mezo	Business processes

(continued)

Nr.	Year of Publ.	Title of paper	Journal	Author(s)	Level of change management approach (according to the Authors' classification)	Keyword(s) (defined by the authors)
13	2022	Benchmarking organisational innovativeness types for sustainability: a study of Indian firms	<i>Benchmarking</i>	Bhupendra and Sangle	mezo	Risk-innovativeness
14	2022	Exploring the journey of Responsible Business Model Innovation in Asian companies: A review and future research agenda	<i>Asia Pacific Journal of Management</i>	Magni <i>et al.</i>	mezo	Responsible organizational innovation; Business ethics
15	2019	Why and how to compete through sustainability: a review and outline of trends influencing firm and network-level transformation	<i>International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal</i>	Parida and Wincent	macro	Networks; Sustainable innovation; Digitization
16	2019	Is circular economy the key to transitioning towards sustainable development? Challenges from the perspective of care ethics	<i>Futures</i>	Pla-Julian and Guevara Camilleri	macro	Ethics; Circular economy; Sustainable development
17	2019	Measuring the corporate managers' attitudes towards ISO's social responsibility standard	<i>Total Quality Management and Business Excellence</i>	Hofmann and Jaeger-Erben	macro	ISO 26000; Environmental responsibility; Organizational governance
18	2020	Organizational transition management of circular business model innovations	<i>Business Strategy and the Environment</i>	Hofmann and Jaeger-Erben	macro	Circular business model; Sustainability innovation
19	2021	Do hybrid organizations contribute to Sustainable Development Goals? Evidence from BCorps in Colombia	<i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>	Tabares	macro	Corporate social innovation; Sustainable development; B corp; National culture
20	2021	Relationship follows technology! How Industry 4.0 reshapes future buyer-supplier relationships	<i>Journal of Manufacturing Technology</i>	Veile <i>et al.</i>	macro	Buyer-supplier relationships; Digitization; Industry 4.0
21	2021	Business innovation and critical success factors in the era of digital transformation and turbulent times	<i>Management Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation</i>	Florek-Paszowska <i>et al.</i>	macro	Change management; Digital transformation; Innovation; Knowledge management
22	2023	Nonfinancial Reporting and Real Sustainable Change: Relationship Status—It's Complicated	<i>Organization and Environment</i>	Hahn <i>et al.</i>	macro	Social sustainability

Source: Authors' compilation

Three levels of organizational change

Table 1.

three forms of organizational learning are needed to achieve business sustainability including the deutero-learning mode, which, according to [Senge \(1990\)](#), also uses the commitment and skills of employees. This approach acknowledges that commitment is a resource, which this theory considers in connection with capability. And it follows from this that commitment, like all other resources, is a resource that must be managed. In other words, successful organizational learning is cost-effective when the commitment of those whose capability is higher is intensified more extensively. This logic is also supported by [Kollmann *et al.*'s \(2020\)](#) finding on equity: if commitment is seen as a resource like money, then for leaders the appropriate long-term successful and sustainable strategy is not to maximize all employees' commitment uniformly – with different levels of effort and different individual outcomes – but to optimize it in the light of the long-term interests of the organization and individual goals as well as with respect to value in the organization.

If we are trying to find the characteristics of organizations that can survive in the long term – that is, organizations with future potential – then willingness to change and its embedding in the given organizational culture are key. In addition to employee's organizational commitment dimensions, commitment to change must also be distinguished in this respect, and a high level of change commitment is needed on part of both leaders and employees, without which integration into the organizational culture cannot be achieved. [Uluskan *et al.* \(2018\)](#) argue that employees' commitment to quality production and quality service, together with empowerment in terms of quality, allow for a high level of change commitment, which in turn is a basis for a strong organizational culture ([Olafsen *et al.*, 2021](#)).

[Mukhuty *et al.* \(2022\)](#) approached the assessment of change capability from a technological perspective and stated that for an organization to change for Industry 4.0 it is necessary to take measures that strengthen the organizational culture in addition to resistance to change at the micro level. This organizational culture also requires a new approach in which micro-level characteristics can be directly linked to macro level variables, as organizations with future potential are constantly – and not in cycles of change – linked to societal needs and culture. [Ren and Jackson \(2020\)](#) argue that this requires a renewed HR philosophy rather than controlling-driven HR in organizations, and that this places as much importance on contributing to environmental and social performance as on the employees themselves. To achieve this, it is necessary to examine and redesign not only HR but also all other organizational processes, let be it structure, management practices or cultural characteristics. As these jointly form a basis for agile organizations, where the ability to change is not a capability level but a basic requirement ([Holbeche, 2018](#)). A good example of the need for continuous renewal is the circular economy, whose business models require a high level of managerial commitment, which moderates the relationship between value network and customer value proposition ([Ünal *et al.*, 2019](#)). This strong managerial commitment is also a basic requirement in any quality model that emphasizes the need to increase the ability to change and argues for a strong and flexible organizational culture (e.g. TQM, Six Sigma, ISO 9000, etc.).

If the organizational conditions for development and change are available from a cultural and human point of view, it is also worth looking at what innovation strategies support sustainable development for future potentiality. From this point of view, an outstanding study is the research of [Sharma *et al.* \(2022\)](#), who associated sustainable development and innovation with sustainable economic performance. Sustainable economic performance also rejects the paradigm of moderation and equity and sets the realization of immediate benefits as its goal. Indeed, it is not new that organizational stability and flexibility are needed simultaneously in change management, and this is usually created by integrating several successful organizational processes as internal innovation ([de Souza *et al.*, 2022](#)). However, organizational innovation in the broader sense is often risky, and if the development of

organizations is to be managed in a sustainable way, then innovation also requires moderation, or else risk measurement is necessary (Bhupendra and Sangle, 2022). These innovations are implemented through sociotechnology based project management practices. Today another key issue in the development of these technologies is how project management can support the sustainable future of organizations (Sankaran *et al.*, 2021). In other words, project management does not offer different solutions focused on the lifetime of a project but optimizes solutions to support organizational vision.

Opinions are already divided on the extent to which it is appropriate – from a sustainability – to rely on the most up-to-date electronic solutions in innovation projects or in organizational operations in general. One view is that digitalization itself is the key to success, and that digitalization does not necessarily have an upper limit. A high degree of digitalization promotes marketing activity and also contributes to agility and strategic planning (Rozak *et al.*, 2023). According to another approach, the pinnacle of digitization is Artificial Intelligence (AI) itself, which – while it can contribute to various sustainability goals – must also address phenomena such as over-reliance on data, human reactions to AI-based interventions or the harmful effects of AI applications (Nishant *et al.*, 2020). However, all of these not only threaten sustainability goals but also work directly against environmental sustainability. This issue is still to be resolved at the meso level of organizations with future potential, so what we are highlighting at this point in particular is that organizational strategy should reflect on how customers' needs are met in the very long term through sustainably managed innovation methods. The relevance of this has also been confirmed by Magni *et al.* (2022):

[...] Findings show that recent research in the field of sustainability and ethical values are improving the impact on business models, thus encouraging the advent of responsible business model innovation.

However, AI poses a threat not only to environmental sustainability but also the current lack of incentives for companies to use their nonfinancial sustainability reporting for purposes other than greenwashing (Hahn *et al.*, 2023). A socially responsible company acts for the well-being of its social environment regardless of reporting obligations, and does not publish deliberately low-quality reports on its own operations. Furthermore, the positive impact of digitization on social well-being is also underscored by Begum *et al.* (2022), who argue that Industry 4.0 automation and digitization solutions contribute to economic and social sustainability and, through them, to the development of frameworks that ensure optimal operating conditions in the very long term. At the macro level, organizational functioning must therefore contribute to serving the well-being and sustainability of the society.

However, this is not a self-evident activity, as organizational performance, environmental sustainability and social sustainability can only be assessed together. An increase in organizational performance alone tends to degrade environmental sustainability to a greater extent than it degrades social well-being (Mikkelsen, 2021). And if we also consider that social well-being requires environmental sustainability, the impact is even greater. The so-called B corps organizations, which aim to contribute to solving social or environmental problems in a profit-oriented way, can serve as a good example of this approach (Tabares, 2021). In this case, the fundamental goals of these organizations serve future potentiality, but this does not necessarily mean that these have the same expectations at both the micro and meso levels.

On the organizational side, the key to forming the future depends on organizations' ability to adapt quickly and effectively to changing environmental conditions, and to consciously make changes thereto, while enhancing the well-being of all stakeholders. In fact, we already have working models that detail the consequences of macro-level solutions.

One example is circular business model innovation, which – unlike the circular business model adaptation model – does not adapt to but changes society (Hofmann and Jaeger-Erben, 2020). However, even if leaders would like to create a world where they can operate in perfect harmony with the environment and society, in their efforts to do so they must tackle the situation that the dominant perspective of today’s business environment is fundamentally different from this logic (Ren and Jackson, 2020). Camilleri (2019) details the impact of ISO 26000 on business performance. This standard focuses on the ethical behavior of companies, stakeholder interests as well as on social and environmental sustainability. Why do corporate leaders introduce such systems? In the circular business innovation model, the financial results achieved may also be the main reason for adoption, with social aspects being a subordinate factor. But in ISO 26000, financial considerations seem to take a backseat in favor of sustainability and future potentiality. The results of Camilleri’s research suggest that leaders who introduce this standard at a company – i.e. prioritize the above-mentioned aspects related to sustainability and future potential – are the ones who are more receptive to social and environmental well-being anyway. Just as the success of corporate innovations depends not only on leaders’ expertise in the subject of innovation but also on their ability to integrate human aspects into the development process (e.g. knowledge transfer, research culture, motivation, etc.) (Florek-Paszowska *et al.*, 2021), the ability of the organization to shape the society’s own national culture – which provides the broadest framework for both corporate and societal functioning in addition to enhancing social well-being – may likewise be important in developing future potentiality.

Based on these, three intervention points can be identified for the development of organizations with future potential: these are summarized in Figure 1. This situation necessitates that organizations prepare their employees at a micro level for the following: for the change they are carrying out to achieve operation with future potential and for supporting the change so that it becomes an essential part of organizational culture. At this point, it is crucial that the organization identifies a strong organizational culture and clear

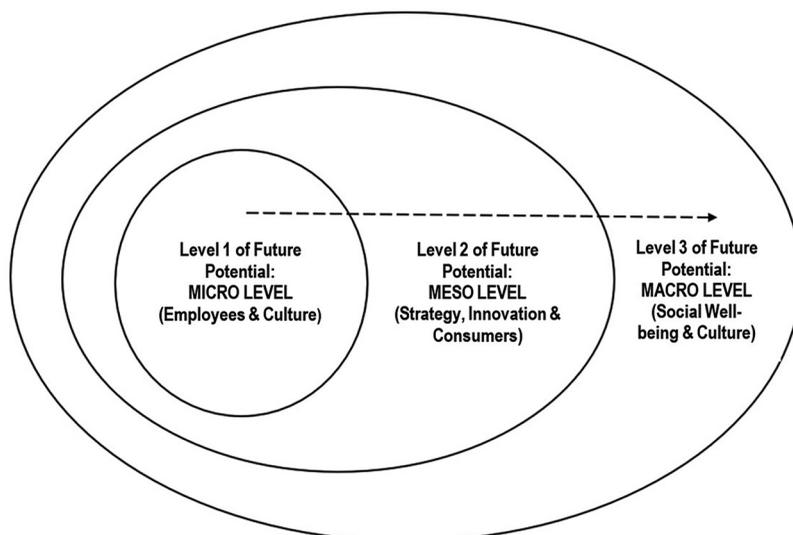


Figure 1.
Three levels of
intervention required
by organizations with
future-potential

Source: Authors’ own work

values in the first place. An organization with future potential must offer employees carefully thought-out, resource-efficient and, above all, equitable outcomes. At the next level, i.e. at the meso level, the way an organization should manage its innovations when it aims to achieve future potentiality becomes an important question. In this new approach, the organizational strategy must be designed in such a way that it still enables meeting consumers' needs, but such meeting of needs is no longer the fundamental objective. An organization with future potential must meet the needs of its stakeholders in a moderated way and plan its innovations – including risk analysis – in a thought-out manner. Finally, at the macro level, organizations with future potential strive to form national culture, which determines social well-being, and the efforts of such organizations are only self-interested in that they create the broadest possible limit to the framework of future potentiality, but are not self-serving in their desires to impose their will on external stakeholders.

4. Discussion

In our first research question, we analyzed that what kind of paradigm change is needed at the micro level in organizations with future potential. Our preliminary literature review already suggested that employees' commitment will need to be considered from a new perspective in the future. The issue of equity was also raised, whereby commitment as an essential resource for change and performance is not needed at *high levels*, but commitment is needed *only to an extent* that satisfies the needs of both the employee and the organization. This represents a new approach from the point of view of organizational psychology, as until now we have considered commitment as an equally important resource for all employees. The most important advantage of this is that employees will be self-driven and will be more active doing their best at work (Khaskeli *et al.*, 2020). The fact that over-commitment, for example, leads to burnout, and in this way works against exactly what we wanted to enhance is not a new notion. Maher (1983) states that commitment works similarly to rewards: there is an optimal level above which additional benefits provided through it already decrease. If we combine this insight with equity theory, we can say that *there is a need to form an equitable level of employee commitment* in organizations with future potential, as this is the most beneficial for both the employees and organizations.

Our second research question looked for intervention points at the meso level. The literature review has shown that *organizational moderation* is of paramount importance for achieving future potentiality in areas such as processes for meeting customer needs, and innovation in particular. Future potentiality is closely related to sustainability (Corral-Verdugo and Pinheiro, 2006), concerning which – in addition to environmental considerations – external stakeholders and the long-term survival of the organization play a key role. Buhl *et al.* (2019) also reinforce this approach when they conclude that sustainable consumption and production can only be achieved through sustainable innovations. Theoretically, we have come to the conclusion that organizations with future potential should produce goods for their external stakeholders by *replacing short-term economic benefits as a criterion with conscious moderation*. Organizations with future potential should incorporate this approach into their innovation activities, and also into their corporate strategies, which connects to their attitudes to consumers.

In our third research question, we analyzed what an organization with future potential can do, on the one hand, to adapt to the external framework that influences its operations, and, on the other hand, to actively change it in a way that benefits it. Our analysis has shown that, from this point of view, future potentiality depends on the ability of the organization to harmoniously coexist with its social and natural environment. In doing so, organizations need to *strengthen social well-being, and, through this, they should actively form national culture*.

The general initial state of the three levels of intervention, the targets of change and the resulting criteria for practices with future potential are illustrated in [Figure 2](#).

5. Conclusions and limitations

In this study, we tried to place the concept of organizations with future potential in the context of related concepts. We have pointed out those theoretical-conceptual elements that we consider essential and which are integral to the approach of organizations with future potential, and we also considered those distinctive features (e.g. the removal of life cycle from the theoretical framework) concerning which we build on other assumptions.

In our model, the creation of organizations with future potential is process-based and takes place on three levels. The three-level approach is based on the recognition that organizational success shifts from the efficient management of internal synergies of organizational resources to the effective leadership of external, networked resources and external synergies. This means that we can only get closer to understanding them by embedding them in a wider context.

In our approach, we formulate as a strong premise that in the interaction of national (societal) and organizational future potentiality (or societal and organizational culture) has a stronger impact with respect to bottom-up than top-down determinations.

A limitation of our current model is that our process- and change-oriented approach leaves open important questions such as what strategies, organizational and management tools can be used to achieve effectiveness of future potentiality. We are convinced that for this a series of additional basic management concepts (e.g. value creation, organizational performance, win-win formulation of organizational goals, leadership) will also need to be

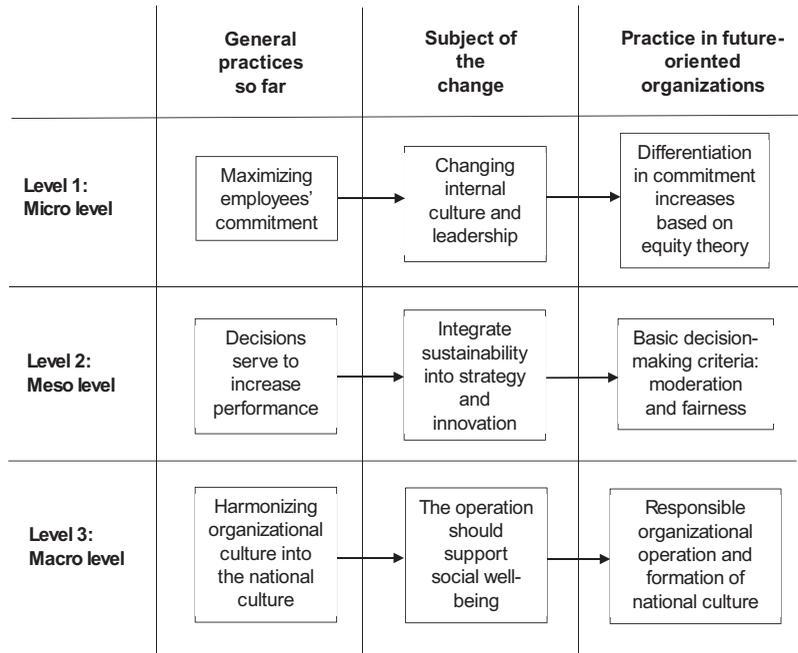


Figure 2.
The transformation of a classic profit-oriented organization into a future-potential organization at different levels

Source: Authors' own work

reinterpreted. However, the discussion of these falls beyond the scope of the present study, and we intend to address these issues after having done some further research.

Three levels of
organizational
change

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