

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF HR: ADAPTING THE TEAM TO NEW REALITIES

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*In response to the unprecedented challenges caused by the full-scale war, Ukrainian organizations are facing the need for rapid and profound organizational change, making the study of HR approaches to adaptation particularly relevant both in the national context and for international practice. This article explores the role of HR practices in ensuring effective organizational change management under crisis conditions, with a specific focus on the context of the war in Ukraine. The theoretical foundation of the study is based on five key change management models – Lewin, Kotter, ADKAR, Bridges, and McKinsey 7-S – which encompass various levels of transformation, from structural and individual to psychological and cultural dimensions. The paper analyzes contemporary research emphasizing the proactive role of HR as a driver, communicator, and facilitator of adaptive processes. The empirical component includes case studies from international experience and Ukrainian organizations during wartime, particularly in the IT sector, public administration, and healthcare. Key challenges in HR-led change initiatives are identified, including employee resistance, loss of trust, skill shortages, cultural barriers, and financial constraints. The study proposes an original model of the HR adaptation cycle, consisting of five consecutive stages: challenge identification, rapid response, stabilization, retraining, and future readiness. The model illustrates the cyclical nature of adaptation and the need for flexible responses to emerging conditions. It is emphasized that the HR function is not only a supportive, but also a strategic component of change management, capable of integrating human potential, digital tools, and organizational culture into a cohesive mechanism for resilience and development.*

*Keywords: HR management, organizational change, employee adaptation, war in Ukraine, crisis environment, transformation management, human capital.*

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### INTRODUCTION

A deeper exploration of organizational change is particularly relevant for Ukraine, as the full-scale war has generated unprecedented challenges for business, public administration, and labor relations. These challenges demand rapid adaptation, flexible structures, and a rethinking of the role of the HR function. The experience of Ukrainian organizations in overcoming crisis situations is valuable not only at the national level but also internationally – as a model of resilience, responsiveness, and innovation that can inform other countries facing global threats, wars, pandemics, or economic disruptions. Under such conditions, HR management is shifting from an operational to a strategic function, focusing on change management, employee adaptation, emotional resilience, and the continuity of business processes. HR practices are becoming key tools for implementing flexible transformations that enable organizations to maintain effectiveness and team cohesion during crisis periods. This article aims to analyze core change management models, investigate the impact of HR practices on the effectiveness of transformational processes, identify the challenges faced by HR departments, and present examples of successful adaptation during wartime in Ukraine. Special attention is given to the development of a practical model of HR adaptation to change in crisis environments.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary change management theory highlights a number of foundational models that constitute the theoretical and practical basis for organizational transformation. One of the most well-known is Kurt Lewin's three-step model (unfreezing – changing – refreezing), which offers a simple structure for understanding change processes. However, this model has been critiqued for its linearity and oversimplified representation of complex, dynamic contexts [8;15].

A more elaborated approach was proposed by John Kotter, who formulated an eight-step model of change that includes establishing a sense of urgency, building a guiding coalition, developing a vision, and institutionalizing new practices. This model is more detailed and practice-oriented, particularly suitable for team-based environments [10].

The individual level of change is emphasized in the ADKAR model (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement), which is widely applied due to its step-by-step, actionable framework for employee adaptation [14]. In contrast, William Bridges' Transition Model focuses on the internal psychological shifts that accompany external organizational changes.

Other notable frameworks include the McKinsey 7-S model, which explores the interaction of seven interdependent organizational elements, and Theories E and O, which contrast economically driven transformation with culturally oriented change strategies [14].

Recent studies increasingly emphasize adaptive and flexible approaches designed to overcome the limitations of traditional linear models, offering organizations greater resilience in rapidly changing environments [3;16].

Regardless of the chosen model, the literature consistently underscores the importance of transparent communication, stakeholder involvement, and alignment of change initiatives with organizational culture and strategic vision [12;20].

### **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of this article is to define the role of HR practices in organizational change processes, particularly under crisis conditions, and to substantiate effective approaches to employee adaptation based on theoretical models, empirical research, and case examples from wartime Ukraine. The study also seeks to develop a generalized HR adaptation model that can support organizational resilience and transformation in unstable environments.

To achieve this goal, the article outlines the following key objectives: (1) to analyze core theoretical models of change management and their relevance to HR practices; (2) to identify the role of the HR function in implementing change at the levels of organizational strategy, internal communication, and personnel engagement; (3) to outline the main challenges faced by HR departments during transformation processes, especially in the context of war and instability; (4) to synthesize empirical data and case studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of HR interventions in managing change; and (5) to develop a practical HR adaptation model focused on flexibility, resilience, and employee support in crisis environments.

### **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS**

The methodological foundation of this study is an interdisciplinary approach that combines theoretical analysis of change management models with empirical generalization of HR practices applied across various industries and countries, including Ukraine's wartime context.

At the first stage, a structured literature review was conducted, examining both classical and contemporary change management models (Lewin, Kotter, ADKAR, Bridges, McKinsey 7-S) for their relevance to HR functions. The second stage involved content analysis of empirical studies and case examples focusing on the implementation of HR initiatives during organizational transformation. Special attention was given to research addressing the impact of HR practices under crisis conditions – particularly in the contexts of war, digital transformation, and economic instability. The analysis incorporated data from both international and Ukrainian sources.

Elements of a systems approach were also applied, enabling the integration of findings into a coherent conceptual model of the HR adaptation cycle. To summarize the key tools and actions of HR departments, a classification method and principles of comparative analysis were used.

The study's results are presented in the form of schematic models, tables, and practical guidelines, which may serve both academic purposes and practical application in HR management under conditions of uncertainty.

### **DESCRIPTION**

For a detailed understanding of the theoretical foundations of change management, it is useful to refer to the summarized characteristics of the most commonly used models that systematize approaches to organizational transformation. The focus here is on five key concepts – Lewin, Kotter, ADKAR, Bridges, and McKinsey 7-S – which represent different levels of influence: organizational, individual, psychological, and structural-cultural.

The generalized characteristics of these models are presented in Table 1, which provides a comparative analysis of their strengths, limitations, and core analytical emphases. This overview establishes a theoretical framework for further examination of the HR role in change processes, particularly in the context of employee adaptation to new organizational realities.

Table 1

**Core Change Management Models**

Model	Focus Level	Key Strengths	Critiques	Key Review Insights
Lewin's Three-Step	Organizational	Simple, intuitive: unfreeze-change-refreeze	Too linear; oversimplifies change in dynamic contexts	A classical model useful for basic analysis, but lacks adaptability
Kotter's Eight-Step	Organizational	Structured and actionable roadmap for implementation	Requires strong leadership and time commitment	Offers clear sequence of steps, effective in team-based execution
ADKAR	Individual	Practical for managing personal transitions	Needs integration with broader organizational processes	Focuses on individual-level change, widely applied in HR contexts
Bridges' Transition Model	Psychological	Emphasizes internal psychological adjustment	Lacks concrete operational guidance	Highlights emotional stages employees go through during change
McKinsey 7-S / Theory E & O	Structural / Cultural	Covers structure, strategy, and culture holistically	Can be abstract; limited emphasis on individual behavior	Provides strategic perspective through interconnected organizational elements

Source: [3; 8; 10; 12; 14-16; 20]

It is important to note that HR practices play a central role in initiating, communicating, and supporting organizational change. Specifically, HR acts as a driver of change by shaping employee attitudes, fostering engagement, and directly influencing organizational effectiveness – both directly and indirectly – through the management of transformation processes [23].

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

At the same time, examining general change management models alone is insufficient for a comprehensive understanding of employee adaptation mechanisms. Therefore, the subsequent analysis focuses on the practical dimension of change – through the lens of HR approaches that not only implement selected transformation strategies but also actively shape the dynamics of these processes across all organizational levels.

One of HR's key responsibilities is to reduce resistance to change, which is achieved by introducing practices centered on employee commitment, as well as by promoting ethical leadership and a supportive organizational culture [18]. Such HR approaches foster a positive attitude toward change and increase employees' readiness for transformation.

In its role as a communicator, HR ensures transparency in the change process: it conveys the objectives of transformation, involves employees in decision-making, and builds trust, thereby reducing uncertainty and tension [1]. Communication is especially critical in intercultural contexts, where HR adapts strategies to local conditions and norms.

In its function as a facilitator, HR supports line managers, organizes training, and adjusts HR practices to the specific context, thereby enabling change implementation at all levels [26]. In fast-changing business environments, the flexibility of HR strategies is also crucial, particularly through the use of agile approaches to adapt to new conditions [17; 27].

Overall, effective HR practices provide both emotional and practical support for employees during change and serve as a bridge between leadership and staff, increasing the likelihood of successful change implementation [2; 22].

Successful employee adaptation to organizational change largely depends on the systematic and purposeful application of HR tools. According to recent studies, the most effective practices include internal communication, targeted training, coaching, sentiment assessment, and support for team self-organization. The combination of these tools creates a robust foundation for facilitating team adaptation during periods of change.

The summary table of HR tools (Table 2) for employee adaptation during organizational change systematizes the main instruments, their function, expected outcomes, and key conditions for effective application.

Table 2

**HR Tools for Supporting Employee Adaptation During Organizational Change**

<b>Tool</b>	<b>Function</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>	<b>Conditions for Effectiveness</b>
Internal Communication	Informing, explaining changes, reducing uncertainty	Increased trust, reduced resistance	Transparency, contextual and audience-based adaptation
Targeted Training	Developing relevant skills and competencies	Enhanced confidence and readiness for change	Content relevance, practical orientation
Coaching & Leadership Development	Supporting change leaders and team cohesion	Development of autonomy, cohesion, proactivity	Leadership style (transformational, humble), feedback mechanisms
Employee Sentiment Assessment	Identifying moods, concerns, level of engagement	Timely response, improved morale	Regularity, anonymity, effective interpretation of results
Fostering Self-Organization	Increasing autonomy and decision-making capability	Flexibility, innovation, team adaptability	Organizational support, culture of trust
Agile HR Approaches	Flexible response, adaptation through iterations	Improved resilience, team effectiveness	Collaboration, rapid feedback, minimal bureaucracy

**Source:** compiled by the authors based on [5-6; 21]

An analysis of the presented tools demonstrates that none of them is self-sufficient in ensuring effective employee adaptation to change. Maximum effectiveness is achieved through a comprehensive combination of interventions that simultaneously address the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of employees. For instance, the combination of transparent communication with targeted training fosters readiness for change, while coaching and leadership support facilitate internal acceptance of the new reality. Regular sentiment assessment enables timely strategy adjustments, and fostering self-organization alongside implementing agile approaches allows teams not only to respond to change but also to actively shape it. Therefore, HR practices must be adaptive, integrated, and culturally sensitive to the specific organizational context.

Despite the strategic potential of the HR function in change management, research consistently highlights several critical challenges that undermine the effectiveness of such initiatives. Among the most common are employee resistance, lack of trust, skill shortages, hierarchical cultures, and limited resources. Thus, successful implementation of HR-driven change requires a conscious effort to overcome psychological, structural, and resource-related barriers, combining strategic vision, ethical leadership, and systematic employee support.

The full-scale war in Ukraine has significantly heightened the urgency and complexity of organizational adaptation, compelling HR functions to evolve rapidly. Research on Ukraine's wartime experience emphasizes that HR strategies must now extend beyond maintaining operational efficiency to encompass adaptability, innovation, workforce security, and emotional resilience [13]. Scholars [2; 25] highlight that effective internal communication, employee flexibility, health measures, and rapid reskilling are crucial for organizational survival during wartime. These adaptive efforts reflect the intense pressures faced by Ukrainian employers, where workforce disruptions – due to mobilization, displacement, or conscription – necessitate the accelerated implementation of modern HR tools such as flexible contracts, fast-track training programs, and internal communication systems tailored to fast-changing conditions [25].

The analysis of international case studies and empirical research further demonstrates that successful change implementation is closely tied to active HR involvement at all stages of the transformation process – from planning to execution. A notable example from a Brazilian mining company revealed that employees' positive perceptions of HR practices – such as communication, training, and participation in change – were foundational to the successful execution of strategic organizational transformation [7]. This finding reinforces the strategic role of HR as not only an operational but also a planning resource.

In the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS), a systematic review found that HR practices such as involving employees in shaping change, offering training, and providing regular feedback positively influenced not only staff outcomes but also the quality of healthcare services delivered [19].

In Kenya, a study of state-owned corporations confirmed that active involvement of HR managers and other stakeholders in decision-making processes enhances the effectiveness of organizational change and overall performance [4]. Stakeholder engagement and support emerged as critical determinants of success.

Research further indicates that HR departments can strengthen change implementation by empowering line managers, framing change initiatives in an appealing manner, and involving employees

in the development of new strategies [11]. Notably, the "cascading change" model illustrates how aligning planned and emergent changes through employee participation leads to more coherent and effective transformations.

In the context of digital transformation, studies emphasize that not only the degree of employee involvement but also the quality of HR interventions, their adaptation to specific organizational contexts, and the genuine incorporation of employee feedback are decisive for success [28].

Overall, these cases demonstrate that proactive HR engagement consistently contributes to smoother and more effective change processes, regardless of industry, scale, or region.

Empirical studies and case analyses conducted in Ukraine during the full-scale war since 2022 also underscore the critical role of HR departments in facilitating change, supporting employee adaptation, and maintaining organizational resilience under crisis conditions. The IT sector, in particular, led in implementing innovative approaches, rapidly transitioning to digital HR processes – including HR analytics, cloud-based services, and onboarding platforms. These initiatives helped maintain productivity, support remote work, and enhance employee loyalty, even amidst resource constraints [9].

In the context of workforce reductions, relocations, increased workloads, and psychological stress, HR departments adapted by implementing mental health programs, flexible employment arrangements, and targeted reskilling to support employees in taking on new roles or relocating to different areas [24]. These interventions aimed not only to maintain business continuity but also to strengthen team morale under extreme conditions.

Studies also emphasize the effectiveness of people-centered HR strategies focused on employee well-being, inclusive cultures, and flexible management practices. These approaches helped sustain motivation, adaptability, and organizational cohesion during active hostilities [29]. Gradual, budget-conscious improvements enabled organizations to not only address immediate threats but also lay the groundwork for sustainable recovery in the post-war period.

Overall, proactive HR involvement in change management during the war in Ukraine has been empirically linked to improved organizational stability, employee retention, and preparedness for future challenges.

It is important to note that HR effectiveness during periods of change depends not only on the set of employed tools, but also on the ability to adapt rapidly, account for cultural context, and proactively foster environments of trust and development. The wartime experience of Ukraine has demonstrated that HR can act as a key stabilizing factor capable of ensuring organizational resilience even under the most challenging conditions.

In light of the above, we propose an original model of HR adaptation under crisis-driven change, integrating both theoretical foundations and practical cases from the Ukrainian experience. The model outlines a five-stage response cycle of HR function to dynamic external challenges, progressing from challenge identification to strategic readiness, as illustrated in Figure 1.

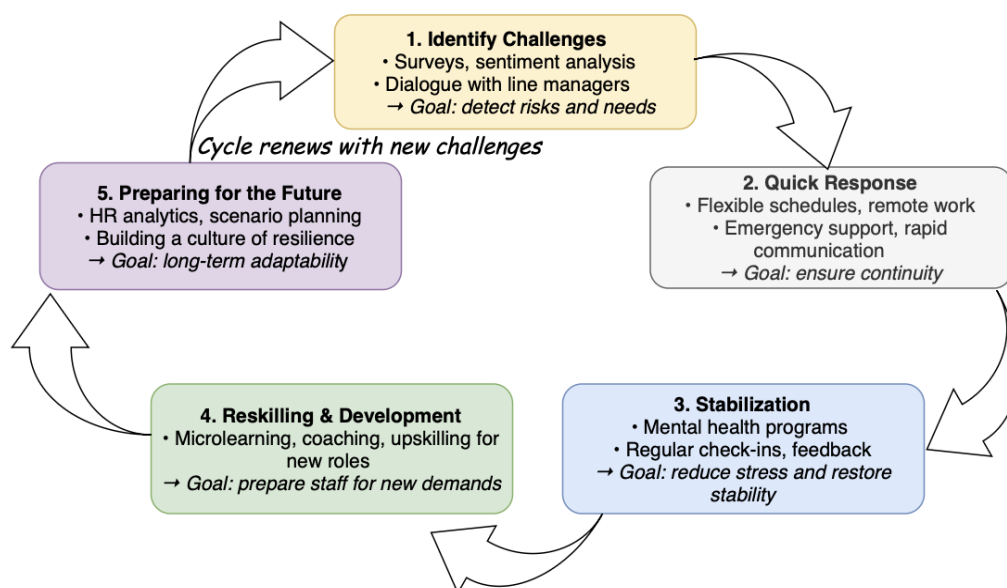


Fig. 1. HR Adaptation Cycle in Crisis Conditions

Source: author's development

The cyclical nature of the model emphasizes the need for continuous monitoring, rapid response, and flexible reconfiguration of HR strategies in accordance with changing contextual conditions. This approach enables organizations not only to respond to crises but also to lay the foundation for long-term resilience, preserving the value of human capital even in the most unstable environments.

To provide a more detailed understanding of each phase within the HR adaptation cycle in a crisis context, Table 3 below outlines the key instruments and corresponding objectives for each stage of the process.

Table 3

**Phases of the HR Adaptation Model in Crisis-Induced Change**

Phase	Key HR Actions	Objective
1. Identifying Challenges	Surveys, sentiment analytics, liaison with line managers	Identify risks and emerging needs
2. Rapid Response	Flexible scheduling, remote work, emergency support	Ensure operational continuity
3. Stabilization	Communication, support programs, feedback loops	Reduce stress, restore a sense of control
4. Reskilling and Development	Microlearning, adaptive courses, coaching	Prepare staff for new roles and tasks
5. Future Readiness	Planning, forecasting, resilience culture development	Build long-term adaptability

Source: Developed by the authors

The proposed model can be adapted to specific organizational contexts, especially in environments marked by high turbulence, such as war, economic instability, or large-scale transformation. Based on synthesized practices and empirical findings, it is useful to outline a set of practical guidelines that HR departments can integrate into their operations to enhance effectiveness during periods of change. These guidelines reflect not just a toolkit but a mindset—strategic, flexible, and human-centered. Their implementation can be realized through targeted actions illustrated in Table 4, which demonstrates how specific goals can be achieved using relevant HR tools tailored to crisis conditions, particularly in wartime settings.

Table 4

**Model of Rapid HR Adaptation in Crisis Conditions (Based on the War Context)**

Goal	HR Tool	Implementation	Expected Outcome
Ensure continuity	Flexible schedules, remote work	Online platforms, asynchronous coordination	Functionality, safety
Reduce anxiety	Mental health support, stable communication	Check-ins, access to psychologists, weekly updates	Stress reduction, trust
Support productivity	Microlearning, coaching, delegation	Online trainings, peer-to-peer mentoring	Readiness for new tasks
Retain the team	Engagement, horizontal communication	Cross-functional initiatives, feedback	Motivation, team cohesion
Prepare for the future	Needs analysis, scenario planning	Surveys, sentiment dashboards, strategic HR sessions	Predictability, adaptability

Source: Developed by the authors

Therefore, in conditions of constant change and high uncertainty, the HR function must operate not only reactively but also strategically. Based on the analysis of adaptation practices in crisis environments, several key guidelines can be outlined for developing effective HR strategies: 1) Institutionalize transparent communication – by providing regular updates tailored to the current context, which helps reduce employee anxiety and foster trust; 2) Invest in reskilling and upskilling – prioritizing short, intensive programs that enable rapid response to evolving competency requirements; 3) Ensure psycho-emotional support – through mentorship, advisory services, or adaptive work formats such as flexible schedules; 4) Involve employees in the change process – even partial participation in decision-making increases engagement and a sense of ownership over outcomes; 5) Optimize HR tools – focusing not on the number of implemented practices, but on their relevance to the organization's specific context and challenges.

This approach emphasizes a strategic, human-centered mindset that enhances organizational resilience and responsiveness in times of crisis.

## CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study position the HR function as a key factor in organizational adaptation during times of change, particularly in crisis contexts such as the war in Ukraine. The analysis of theoretical change management models (Lewin, Kotter, ADKAR, etc.) confirms that effective transformation requires not only a structured approach to change phases but also active employee engagement through relevant HR interventions.

Practical examples from different countries and industries, as well as Ukraine's wartime experience, demonstrate that HR departments can serve as agents of change by combining strategic thinking, emotional support for employees, and technological innovation. These findings align with previous studies by Borges [7] and Neves et al. [18], which emphasize the importance of ethical leadership, employee involvement in change processes, and value-oriented practices.

In a crisis environment – particularly in wartime – classical HR tools require flexible adaptation: training becomes shorter and more application-focused; communication, more frequent and emotionally attuned; and the HR role evolves toward that of a “psychological coordinator” and strategic analyst. This necessitates a new behavioral model for HR, grounded in cyclical responsiveness, empathy, and agility.

The HR adaptation cycle model proposed in this study provides a unified yet flexible framework for practical implementation across diverse contexts. It incorporates both fundamental organizational needs (continuity, productivity) and deeper human concerns (psychological safety, inclusion, meaning).

In conclusion, the modern HR function should be viewed not merely as a supporter of change but as its active driver – capable of integrating strategy, emotion, and digital tools into a cohesive adaptive mechanism. This premise merits further exploration across various economic sectors, taking into account the specificities of both local and global challenges.

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## УПРАВЛІННЯ ЗМІНАМИ КРІЗЬ ПРИЗМУ HR: АДАПТАЦІЯ КОМАНДИ ДО НОВИХ РЕАЛІЙ

МИХАЙЛОВСЬКА Олена, ФІЛІПОВА Наталія  
ЗВО «Університет трансформацій майбутнього»

У відповідь на безпрецедентні виклики, спричинені повномасштабною війною, українські організації опинилися в умовах високої невизначеності, постійних ризиків і необхідності оперативного прийняття управлінських рішень. Це зумовлює потребу у швидких, глибоких і водночас стійких організаційних змінах, що робить дослідження HR-підходів до адаптації персоналу та управління змінами особливо актуальним як для національного контексту, так і для міжнародної управлінської практики. У статті досліджується роль HR-практик у забезпеченні ефективного управління організаційними змінами в умовах кризових викликів, зокрема у контексті повномасштабної війни в Україні, коли людський капітал стає ключовим фактором збереження функціональності та відновлення організації.

Теоретичною основою дослідження стали п'ять класичних і сучасних моделей управління змінами – Lewin, Kotter, ADKAR, Bridges і McKinsey 7-S, які охоплюють різні рівні трансформації: від структурних і процесних до індивідуальних, психологічних та культурних аспектів. Проаналізовано сучасні наукові публікації та прикладні дослідження, що акцентують на проактивній ролі HR як стратегічного партнера керівництва, драйвера змін, комунікатора та фасилітатора адаптаційних процесів у кризових умовах.

Емпіричну частину дослідження становлять кейси з міжнародного досвіду та практики українських організацій у воєнний період, зокрема у сферах інформаційних технологій, державного управління та охорони здоров'я. Виокремлено ключові виклики HR-реалізації змін, серед яких опір працівників, зниження рівня довіри, нестача необхідних компетенцій, культурні бар'єри, психологічне виснаження персоналу та фінансові обмеження. На основі узагальнення теоретичних і практичних результатів запропоновано авторську модель HR-циклу адаптації до змін, що включає п'ять послідовних етапів: визначення викликів, швидке реагування, стабілізація, перенавчання та підготовка до майбутнього. Запропонована модель ілюструє циклічний характер адаптації та підкреслює необхідність гнучкого й системного реагування на динамічні умови зовнішнього середовища. Зроблено висновок, що HR-функція є не лише підтримувальним, а й стратегічним елементом управління змінами, здатним інтегрувати людський потенціал, цифрові ресурси та організаційну культуру в цілісний механізм організаційної стійкості та сталого розвитку.

Ключові слова: HR-менеджмент, організаційні зміни, адаптація персоналу, війна в Україні, кризове середовище, управління трансформаціями, людський капітал.