





Organisational culture, transformational leadership, and emotional intelligence in change readiness



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Orientation: Neglecting individual roles in change often leads to failed initiatives. Preparing employees to adapt and embrace change is crucial for success.

Research purpose: This study examines how organisational culture (OC) and transformational leadership (TL) influence employees' readiness for change (CR), with emotional intelligence (EI) as a mediator.

Motivation for the study: Understanding employee adaptability helps leaders manage change effectively, offering insights for optimal change strategies.

Research approach/design and method: A quantitative study grounded in change management theory surveyed 450 airline employees. Data were analysed using structural equation modelling (Linear Structural Model 8.72).

Main findings: Organisational culture and TL enhance change readiness (CR). Emotional intelligence partially mediates culture's effect but not leadership's, indicating limited interaction among these constructs in this context.

Practical/managerial implications: Organisations should integrate cultural reinforcement with EI training in emotion regulation, stress management, empathy while strengthening leadership capabilities to enhance CR.

Contribution/value-add: This study integrates OC (contextual foundation), TL (strategic approach) and EI (psychological process) to explain how they collectively shape CR. It offers a nuanced understanding of organisational influences on individual change readiness.

Keywords: organisational culture; transformational leadership; emotional intelligence; change readiness; change management theory.

Introduction

Technology is changing the aviation sector and helping build behavioural changes in regulators, carriers and passengers alike. In an environment of this dynamic, organisations must foster a culture that provides adaptability and resilience in the workforce to make transitions successful. The degree to which employees are ready for change – their willingness and preparedness to support organisational transformation – is a key factor in the success or failure of organisational change initiatives (Armenakis & Harris, 2009; Holt et al., 2007). Moreover, Oreg et al. (2011) highlight that change readiness (CR) is a key area of study because the extent to which employees support organisational change plays a pivotal role in determining the success of change implementation.

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated strong and nuanced relationships between organisational culture (OC) dimensions and various organisational performance measures. At the managerial level, the phenomenological expression of OC has profound interpersonal and strategic implications spanning essential workforce concepts including employee loyalty (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996), staff retention strategies (Sheridan, 1992) and the human resources allocation processes and planning of human capital (Mannix et al., 1995). However, few studies connect these to readiness for a change.

Schein's (2010) theoretical contributions enhance our understanding of these insights. They show how OC enables leaders to comprehend and navigate change effectively, assisting employees throughout the process. A strong OC can help establish shared purpose, psychological safety and increase employees' willingness to change (Cheung et al., 2024).

There is relatively little existing empirical literature that examines the nuanced connection between managerial perceptual frames and employee receptivity to organisational change (Oreg et al., 2011), yet modern organisational behaviour scholarship, as evidenced by the work of Bagga et al. (2023) and Li et al. (2016), identifies transformational leadership (TL) as a key factor in successfully implementing change management processes. Importantly, these scholarly contributions frame transformational leaders as critical organisational change agents whose strategic mediational capacities ignite adaptive organisational dynamics and promote an employee behavioural paradigm that is proactive and change-oriented.

Organisational transformation represents a breakdown of established paradigms, creating a complex psychological context characterised by employees' multidimensional emotional responses and cognitive dissonance. While employees may logically recognise the need for change, strong psychological resistance can arise from misunderstandings, institutional distrust and limited psychological flexibility. Therefore, that change resistance is echoed in predominantly external and behavioural indicators within employees, such as significant emotional volatility and occupational stress (Tai & Omar, 2016). Emerging in this complex context is the role of emotional intelligence (EI) as a critical mediating construct that represents the key psychological instrument of organisational morale enhancement, interpersonal cooperation, motivational momentum cultivation and psychosocially supportive work environment formation that undergird and substantially contribute to organisational metamorphosis (Foltin & Keller, 2012).

Despite the extensive literature on organisational change, few studies have systematically explored the interconnections among OC, TL and EI concerning CR, particularly in the aviation sector. Most previous research has treated these constructs as independent variables, overlooking their potential to enhance employees' adaptability through synergy.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationships between OC, TL and employee CR, with EI as a potential mediator. By integrating these three critical organisational behaviours, the study seeks a comprehensive perspective on change management strategies to enhance workforce resilience and organisational flexibility. This study offers timely insights for navigating industry changes, regulatory developments and sustainability challenges in a dynamic market.

Moreover, this study contributes to the literature by integrating OC, TL and EI into a cohesive framework that enhances the understanding of employee readiness for change. It emphasises the role of OC as a contextual foundation, highlights TL as a strategic approach and positions EI as a crucial psychological process. By elucidating the pathways through which these factors

interact, the research offers a nuanced perspective on how organisational elements collectively influence individual readiness to embrace change, thereby advancing theoretical insights.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Change readiness

As the ability to adapt to transformational changes, CR significantly impacts organisational success (Rafferty et al., 2013). A study by Holt et al. (2007) proved that organisations with a high level of CR are significantly more successful in implementing new strategies and three times more likely to succeed than organisations with a lower readiness level for change. This readiness encompasses a proactive mindset, effective communication and the ability to adapt quickly to new circumstances, all of which contribute to a smoother transition and greater overall success in executing strategic initiatives. While the effectiveness of CR in reducing employee resistance has been debated, involving employees in planning and highlighting the importance of the change can help mitigate resistance (Warrick, 2023).

Khaw et al. (2023) emphasised a socio-technical approach prioritising people during organisational change. Implementation failures often arise because systems are prioritised over human resources (Oreg et al., 2011). Therefore, readiness is crucial in shaping employees' attitudes towards change in its early phases (Holt et al., 2007). Consequently, employees' perceptions of the organisation's readiness significantly affect their adaptation to change over time (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

Organisational culture

Schein (2010) defines OC as a collection of shared values, beliefs, assumptions and norms developed by group members to address adaptation and integration challenges affecting employee behaviour. This culture influences member behaviour explicitly and implicitly, even during organisational changes. Glaser et al. (1987) identify six components of OC: teamwork and conflict resolution, employee climate and morale, information flow, involvement in strategic decision-making, performance-based supervision and effective meetings to achieve desired outcomes. Organisational culture is a complex, multidimensional construct that reflects the intertwining of shared meanings, normative patterns and interaction dynamics within institutional social environments (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014).

Transformational leadership

Transformational leaders are charismatic and visionary figures who inspire shared identity, trust and confidence among subordinates. Research shows that TL positively impacts employee outcomes, particularly during organisational change (Paulsen et al., 2013). Li et al. (2016) believe that transformational leaders are one of the key

elements for the success of change initiatives and act as change agents that help bring about organisational change and encourage change-oriented employee behaviour. Transformational leadership behaviours are relevant during organisational transitions (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and it is a well-studied style known for effectively addressing organisational challenges and enhancing performance at all levels (Avolio et al., 2009; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership has been linked to improved outcomes for managers (Waldman et al., 2011), teams (Bass et al., 2003) and overall personnel (Zohar, 2002). Moreover, a recent study by Schiuma et al. (2024) emphasises the important role of transformational leaders in fostering organisational digital transformation, particularly in shaping OC and context for nourishing, developing and managing digital-based knowledge.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence emerged as a psychological construct through key theoretical advancements. Mayer et al. (2004) established EI as a measurable set of mental abilities involving emotional perception, understanding and regulation. Their model distinguished EI from social intelligence while demonstrating its role in cognitive-emotional integration. Goleman (1998) transformed EI into a practical framework for organisational behaviour, emphasising learnable emotional competencies such as self-awareness and empathy. This shift reflected growing recognition of emotion regulation as a distinct psychological process. Later refinements by Cherniss and Adler (2000) strengthened EI's applied dimensions, particularly in interpreting emotional cues. This evolution positioned EI as essential for understanding adaptive functioning in personal and professional contexts. The construct's progression highlights the critical intersection of emotion and cognition in human behaviour.

Culture and change readiness in organisations

Organisational culture significantly impacts various aspects of organisational life, particularly openness to change (Schein, 2010). Olafsen et al. (2021) found a strong link between OC and employee readiness for change, emphasising its importance. This connection provides practitioners with insights for fostering a supportive environment for transformation. Zammuto and O'Connor (1992) found that flexible, supportive cultures are more successful in adopting advanced technologies than rigid ones. Employees generally have more positive attitudes towards change in workplaces that prioritise human relations. Moreover, Johansson et al. (2013) stressed the need to examine the factors influencing individual readiness for change, with OC being crucial. This aligns with research by Armenakis and Harris (2009), which shows that various contextual factors affect OC and employee readiness.

Thus, the first hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 1: Organisational culture positively influences change readiness.

Transformational leadership and change readiness

Numerous studies highlight the critical role of TL in fostering employee readiness for organisational change. Research by Nordin (2012) revealed a positive relationship between leadership behaviour and CR, indicating that greater emphasis should be placed on developing TL in the workplace. Similarly, Saragih (2014) emphasised that individual readiness for change can facilitate or hinder successful organisational change, with TL playing a crucial role in driving such transitions. Further supporting this, Novitasari et al. (2020) identified TL as a key factor in enhancing employees' willingness to adapt to change. This notion is reinforced by Asbari et al. (2021), who demonstrated a strong positive link between TL and employee change acceptance, ultimately leading to improved performance.

Hence, the second hypothesis of the article arises:

Hypothesis 2: Transformational leadership positively influences change readiness.

Organisational culture and emotional intelligence

The relationship between OC and EI is reciprocal. Organisational culture greatly influences the emotional process because it manipulates the choice of action or behaviour in response to an event and acts as a tool to modify and align the needed emotions, behaviour, norms and attitudes (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2010). Research on the direct influence of OC on individual EI is limited, but culture is recognised as crucial in shaping EI understanding and expression (Huynh et al., 2018). Specifically, it affects cognitive processes related to emotional interpretation, influencing how individuals perceive and respond to others' emotions. Research on emotionally intelligent OCs (Ghenu & Tudor, 2016; Hess & Bacigalupo, 2010) indicates that culture serves as a contextual variable, aligning employee behaviours, values, attitudes and emotions with organisational goals, thus facilitating the acceptance of behaviours conducive to improvement initiatives.

Hence, the third hypothesis of the article arises:

Hypothesis 3: Organisational culture positively influences emotional intelligence.

Transformational leadership and emotional intelligence

The link between TL and emotional aspects is well-established in leadership literature. Bass et al. (2003) proposed that emotional elements are as important as rational components in leadership. Multiple studies support this, with Roush and Atwater (1992) finding significant correlations between TL behaviours and affective domains. This aligns with Ross and Offerman's (1997) work, which described TL as nurturing and collaborative, in contrast to more authoritative styles. In addition, research shows a consistent connection between TL and the development of EI. However, Zhao and Zhang (2024) suggest that this relationship may vary based on organisational context and individual differences.

Hence, the fourth hypothesis of the article arises:

Hypothesis 4: Transformational leadership positively influences emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence and change readiness

The importance of emotions in organisational change management is well-documented, as Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) highlighted the need for emotional considerations during change processes. Effectively recognising and managing employees' emotional responses is vital for successful change initiatives. Coetzee and Harry (2014) found that EI significantly improves employees' adaptability to change. Research by Al-Zahrani (2019) showed a strong positive correlation between EI and CR, identifying it as a key point in employee readiness for organisational change. Thus, EI is crucial for successful change management.

Therefore, the fifth hypothesis of the article arises:

Hypothesis 5: Emotional intelligence positively influences change readiness.

Mediating role of emotional intelligence

Empirical research suggests that EI serves as a critical mediator in the relationship between OC and employee readiness for change. Organisational culture shapes employees' attitudes, behaviours and responses to change initiatives (Schein, 2010), but its impact is significantly influenced by individuals' ability to process and adapt to cultural expectations. A study by Cameron and Quinn (2011) found that adaptive cultures that emphasise flexibility, innovation and collaboration foster higher employee CR. However, employees must possess the EI to interpret, align with and thrive in such cultures. Druskat and Wolff (2001) demonstrate that EI enables employees to navigate cultural norms effectively by enhancing social awareness, self-regulation and interpersonal relationships. In cultures that prioritise teamwork, emotionally intelligent employees are better at managing conflicts and building trust, which reduces resistance to change (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Similarly, a study by Shafait et al. (2021) revealed that EI mediates the effect of OC on CR by helping employees manage the stress and ambiguity associated with change. Thus, EI acts as a psychological bridge, allowing employees to internalise cultural values and translate them into proactive adaptability.

Moreover, EI enhances the psychological safety necessary for employees to embrace change within different cultural frameworks. Edmondson (1999) argues that a culture of psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable taking risks, is crucial for CR, but this safety is contingent on individuals' emotional competencies. Employees with high EI are more adept at interpreting cultural cues, managing emotional responses and fostering resilience during transitions (Mayer et al., 2004). In addition, research by Vakola et al. (2004) found that employees with higher EI perceive organisational changes as less stressful, regardless of cultural rigidity, because they can reframe challenges constructively. Thus, EI mediates the culture- CR relationship

by enabling employees to align with cultural expectations, manage emotional turbulence and maintain adaptability in evolving work environments.

Meanwhile, empirical studies suggest that EI is crucial in the relationship between TL and employee CR. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate employees by fostering trust, open communication and a shared vision. However, for employees to embrace change, they must feel emotionally secure and capable of adapting, which is where EI becomes pivotal (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Research by Goleman (1998) and Mayer et al. (2004) indicates that EI enhances an individual's ability to manage stress, navigate uncertainty and maintain resilience during transitions as key factors in CR.

A study by Kaur, Sambasivan and Kumar (2013) found that leaders with high EI better recognise employees' emotional responses to change, allowing them to address concerns empathetically and reduce resistance. Similarly, Ashkanasy and Daus (2005) argue that transformational leaders with high EI create an emotionally supportive environment, increasing employees' confidence in adapting to new demands. Thus, EI acts as a bridge, translating TL behaviours into higher CR by fostering employee emotional stability and adaptability.

Furthermore, empirical evidence demonstrates that EI strengthens the psychological mechanisms linking TL to CR. Transformational leaders encourage intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration, but employees must possess the emotional skills to process these influences constructively (Barling et al., 2000). A study by Miao et al. (2017) confirms that EI enhances self-efficacy and reduces anxiety, making employees more receptive to change. Furthermore, Hur et al. (2011) found that employees with high EI are more likely to perceive TL as supportive, increasing their willingness to engage in change initiatives. As TL elicits strong emotional responses, employees with higher EI can better regulate these emotions, leading to greater CR (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995).

There is a gap in the literature regarding the emotional impacts of OC and TL during change. While evidence indicates that organisational change affects emotional dimensions and can act as a stressor (Robinson & Griffiths, 2005), the psychological mechanisms underlying these relationships are not well-explored. Organisations can enhance employee adaptation through targeted psychological support interventions. The findings suggest that EI is a mediating variable, providing a new perspective in this field. This investigation aims to clarify the relationships among OC, TL and EI, particularly regarding their influence on employee readiness for organisational change.

Hence, the sixth and seventh hypothesis of the article are as follows:

Hypothesis 6: Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between organisational culture and change readiness.

Hypothesis 7: Emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and change readiness.

Research design

The current research adopts an explanatory approach within the positivist paradigm, utilising a cross-sectional survey design to examine structural relationships among multiple variables. While the study tests theoretically derived associations within the conceptual model using structural equation modelling (SEM), the non-experimental nature of cross-sectional data limits the analysis to identifying significant relationships rather than establishing causal directions. These observed associations provide meaningful insights into the hypothesised linkages while underscoring the need for longitudinal verification of temporal relationships.

Grounded in theory testing, the study employs survey-based questionnaires to collect robust and valid data, ensuring precise measurement of constructs within the conceptual framework (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). To rigorously assess these relationships, the study utilises Linear Structural Model (LISREL) 8.72 for SEM, a method chosen for its superior statistical rigour, precision in parameter estimation and ability to handle complex causal pathways. LISREL's covariance-based framework ensures robust hypothesis testing through maximum likelihood estimation (MLE), advanced fit indices (comparative fit index [CFI], incremental fit index [IFI], normed fit index [NFI], Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA] and Standardised Root Mean Square Residual [SRMR]) and the capacity to model intricate relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables via mediating constructs. This methodological choice aligns with the study's confirmatory objectives, reinforcing the validity and reliability of the findings while maintaining the highest standards of analytical rigour.

Population and sample

We identified a population of 4421 permanent employees across various levels and used a proportionally stratified random sampling technique to determine the minimum sample size. This approach aims to obtain samples accurately representing each stratum based on the total number of subpopulations. A minimum sample size of 10% (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019) was established for each subpopulation to ensure that the sample accurately represented each stratum proportionally, leading to a total minimum sample size of 443.

Research instruments

The instruments in this study are measured by a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire consisted of four main sections: Section 1 contained questions to obtain general demographic information about the respondents, including gender, working experience, position level and education. Section 2 comprised the independent variables, focusing on OC and TL. Organisational culture has been measured by six dimensions: teamwork and conflict, climate and morale,

information flow, involvement, supervision and meetings, as adapted from Glaser et al. (1987), consisting of a 13-item scale. Transformational leadership was evaluated using an 11-item scale adapted from Bass and Riggio (2006). Section 3, as the mediator, addressed the issue of EI that has been measured using three dimensions from previous studies (Goleman, 1998): self-management, social awareness and relationship management, consisting of a nine-item scale. Lastly, in Section 4, the dependent variables concerned the CR, which consists of four dimensions: appropriateness, management support, change efficacy and personally beneficial. These dimensions are broken down into a 15-item scale adapted from Holt et al. (2007).

Pre-test

Before collecting primary data, it is crucial to validate the questionnaire to ensure it accurately measures its intended constructs. An expert panel of three academicians reviewed the questionnaire and incorporated the feedback. Subsequently, the research instruments were tested by distributing questionnaires to small sample groups, with sample size determined based on recommendations from Hair et al. (2019), suggesting a minimum ratio of five subjects per independent variable, ideally 15:1 or 20:1 for optimal results.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 respondents to ensure clarity and relevance. Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), the Pearson correlation was calculated, yielding degrees of freedom (df) of 28 ($df = n - 2$). At a 5% significance level, the r table value was 0.361, and all items in the pre-test had calculated r values above this threshold, confirming their validity. Moreover, alpha values were 0.917 for OC, 0.935 for TL, 0.807 for EI and 0.918 for CR, all within acceptable ranges, indicating internal consistency. Consequently, no items were removed, and all were included in the final questionnaire.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Universitas Brawijaya Faculty of Economics and Business (No.: 04596/UN10.F0201/B/PT/2025).

Results

Descriptive statistics

It is known that a minimum number of samples is 443, so 450 questionnaires were distributed and all were returned with valid responses within 3 months (from February 2024 to April 2024), resulting in a response rate of 100%. The respondents included 36% ($n = 160$) males and 64% ($n = 290$) females. Most of the respondents have been working for over 20 years, 39% ($n = 175$), 15–20 years 22% ($n = 99$), 10–15 years 27% ($n = 120$), 5–10 years 10% ($n = 46$) and 1–5 years 2% ($n = 10$). Regarding the position level, staff-level management comprised 88% ($n = 396$), followed by 8% manager level ($n = 38$) and 4% senior manager ($n = 16$).

Respondents held at least a bachelor's degree, 31% ($n = 139$), and 69% ($n = 311$) with a diploma or high school educational background. Table 1 describes the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 2 illustrates that mean values range from 4.22 (TL) to 4.72 (EI), with standard deviations between 0.38 and 0.61. The correlation matrix shows that CR correlates moderately with EI (0.63), OC has strong correlations with both CR (0.73) and EI (0.80), and TL shows strong correlations with CR (0.73), EI (0.65) and OC (0.81). All correlations are positive, suggesting that these variables tend to increase together, with the strongest relationship between TL and OC (0.81).

The study established construct validity through second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using LISREL 8.72, adhering to stringent psychometric standards to ensure robustness. Following Hair et al. (2019), factor loadings were deemed acceptable if they exceeded 0.5, confirming adequate item representation of their respective constructs. To rigorously assess convergent validity, the analysis incorporated the Fornell–Larcker criterion, requiring fulfilment of three key conditions: (1) composite reliability (CR) values ≥ 0.7 , demonstrating internal consistency, (2) standardised factor loadings (λ) ≥ 0.5 , indicating strong item-construct relationships and (3) average variance extracted (AVE) ≥ 0.5 , ensuring that each latent construct explains sufficient variance in its indicators (Cheung et al., 2024).

By employing LISREL's covariance-based SEM framework, the study maintained methodological rigour, as its MLE provided statistically efficient and unbiased parameter

TABLE 1: Demographic profiles ($N = 450$).

Categories	Frequency (n)	%
Gender		
Male	160	36
Female	290	64
Work experience (years)		
1–5	10	2
More than 5–10	46	10
More than 10–15	120	27
More than 15–20	99	22
Above 20	175	39
Position level		
Staff	396	88
Manager	38	8
Senior manager	16	4
Education		
Secondary or post-secondary	311	69
Undergraduate or graduate	139	31

TABLE 2: Descriptive statistics and correlations.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
CR	4.4868	0.50668	1.00	-	-	-
EI	4.7182	0.38382	0.63	-	-	-
OC	4.5721	0.48752	0.73	0.80	-	-
TL	4.2248	0.61401	0.73	0.65	0.81	1.00

CR, change readiness; EI, emotional intelligence; OC, organisational culture; TL, transformational leadership; SD, standard deviation.

estimates, while advanced fit indices (CFI, RMSEA and SRMR) validated the hypothesised second-order structure. This approach eliminated the need for exploratory techniques such as exploratory factor analysis (EFA), as the measurement model was theoretically grounded and confirmatory by design, ensuring both precision and reproducibility in assessing factorial validity. Consequently, the analysis not only met but exceeded conventional validity thresholds, reinforcing the robustness of the structural relationships under investigation.

Table 3 shows that the loading values are all in the range of 0.58 to 0.98, except for item C8, which had a factor loading of less than 0.50. All items exceeded the threshold of 0.7, with CR values ranging from 0.963 to 0.986 and an AVE greater than 0.5. Therefore, all criteria of the measurement model were met.

Model assessment

The measurement model evaluation before hypothesis testing showed acceptable fit (CFI and IFI > 0.95), although the RMSEA (0.10) indicated some misfit. Despite this limitation, the model proved adequate for testing hypotheses with our 450-observation dataset, supported by both fit indices and theoretical justification.

The model Chi-square value of 624.79 with a p -value of 0.000 indicates statistical significance, which suggests a poor fit if evaluated solely by the chi-square test. However, the Chi-square test is susceptible to sample size. For datasets with large samples (> 200), even minor discrepancies between the observed and model-implied covariance matrices can lead to a significant p -value, potentially misrepresenting the model's fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

The goodness-of-fit for the entire model was assessed using the CFI, IFI and NFI metrics as shown in Table 4. The CFI evaluates how well a proposed model fits the data compared to a baseline model where all variables are assumed to be uncorrelated. Comparative fit index values range from 0 to 1, with values above 0.95 indicating good fit and above 0.90 suggesting acceptable fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998). The IFI measures the incremental improvement of a specified model over a baseline model. Incremental fit index values range from 0 to 1, with values above 0.90 indicating acceptable fit and above 0.95 suggesting good fit. Meanwhile, the NFI compares the Chi-squared value of the proposed model with that of a null model. The values range from 0 to 1, where values above 0.95 indicate a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

In addition, the multicollinearity test revealed a correlation value of 0.80 between the independent variables, indicating that all SEM assumptions have been met, allowing the analysis to proceed with hypothesis testing.

Hypotheses testing

Structural equation modelling analysis explored the relationship between OC, TL, EI (as the mediator) and CR.

The results in Table 5 and Figure 1 demonstrate a positive and significant relationship between OC and CR ($\gamma = 0.30$, t -value = 4.02). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Hypothesis 2 proposed a positive effect of TL on CR. The results supported this hypothesis with $\gamma = 0.40$ and t -value = 6.74. This suggests that employees in organisations

with strong, adaptive cultures and leaders who inspire and communicate a compelling vision are more prepared to embrace change. Notably, TL has a stronger direct impact than culture, emphasising its crucial role in fostering CR.

TABLE 3: Assessment of measurement model.

Constructs and items	Item loading (λ)	λ^2	$1-\lambda^2$	CR	AVE
A. Organisational culture				0.972	0.729
A1	0.75	0.56	0.44		
A2	0.93	0.86	0.14		
A3	0.92	0.85	0.15		
A4	0.96	0.92	0.08		
A5	0.86	0.74	0.26		
A6	0.83	0.69	0.31		
A7	0.85	0.72	0.28		
A8	0.81	0.66	0.34		
A9	0.67	0.45	0.55		
A10	0.85	0.72	0.28		
A11	0.66	0.44	0.56		
A12	0.96	0.92	0.08		
A13	0.97	0.94	0.06		
B. Transformational leadership				0.986	0.863
B1	0.96	0.92	0.08		
B2	0.96	0.92	0.08		
B3	0.80	0.64	0.36		
B4	0.94	0.88	0.12		
B5	0.89	0.79	0.21		
B6	0.95	0.90	0.10		
B7	0.96	0.92	0.08		
B8	0.86	0.74	0.26		
B9	0.94	0.88	0.12		
B10	0.97	0.94	0.06		
B11	0.97	0.94	0.06		
C. Emotional intelligence				0.963	0.765
C1	0.79	0.62	0.38		
C2	0.95	0.90	0.10		
C3	0.75	0.56	0.44		
C4	0.84	0.71	0.29		
C5	0.98	0.96	0.04		
C6	0.86	0.74	0.26		
C7	0.95	0.90	0.10		
C9	0.85	0.72	0.28		
D. Change readiness				0.972	0.703
D1	0.70	0.49	0.51		
D2	0.69	0.48	0.52		
D3	0.64	0.41	0.59		
D4	0.85	0.72	0.28		
D5	0.86	0.74	0.26		
D6	0.82	0.67	0.33		
D7	0.84	0.71	0.29		
D8	0.58	0.34	0.66		
D9	0.72	0.52	0.48		
D10	0.92	0.85	0.15		
D11	0.96	0.92	0.08		
D12	0.95	0.90	0.10		
D13	0.96	0.92	0.08		
D14	0.96	0.92	0.08		
D15	0.98	0.96	0.04		

Note: For reliability (CR > 0.70), convergent validity (AVE > 0.50) (Hair et al., 2019). CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted. Item No C8 drop ($\lambda = 0.34$).

The analysis showed that OC significantly and positively impacted EI ($\gamma = 0.78$, t -value = 12.12). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is supported. Hypothesis 4 was conducted to test the influence of TL on EI, with a statistical result $\gamma = 0.03$ and t -value = 0.52. From this result, it is stated that there is no significant effect between the variables. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is not supported. This implies that while a supportive workplace culture fosters employees' emotional skills, transformational leaders may not inherently enhance these competencies.

Hypothesis 5 proposed a positive impact of EI on CR. The results supported this hypothesis with $\beta = 0.13$ and t -value = 2.51. Hypothesis 6 was conducted to test the mediating effect of OC and EI on CR. The test results show $\gamma = 0.10$ and a significant t -statistic value of 2.45. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is supported. It proves that EI partially mediates the relationship between TL and CR.

Lastly, Hypothesis 7 was conducted to test the OC and EI's mediating effect on CR. The statistical results are $\gamma = 0.00$ and t -value = 0.53. Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is not supported. These results underscore that OC is a dual-force driver, directly

TABLE 4: Goodness-of-fit model assessment.

The goodness-of-fit index	Cut off value*	Result	Model evaluation
Absolute fit measure			
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.86	Poor fit
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.10	Mediocre fit
RMR	< 0.05	0.08	Mediocre fit
Incremental fit measure			
AGFI	≥ 0.90	0.81	Marginal fit
CFI	> 0.90	0.98	Good fit
IFI	≥ 0.90	0.98	Good fit
RFI	≥ 0.95	0.97	Marginal fit
Parsimonious fit measure			
NFI	The higher the better	0.97	Perfect fit
PNFI	The higher the better	0.81	Marginal fit
PGFI	The higher the better	0.63	Marginal fit

Note: *, Hu, L.T., & Bentler, P.M. (1998). Fit indices in covariance structure modeling: Sensitivity to underparameterized model misspecification. *Psychological Methods*, 3(4), 424. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.3.4.424>.

CFI, comparative fit index; IFI, incremental fit index; NFI, normed fit index; RMR, root mean square residual; GFI, goodness of fit index; AGFI, adjusted goodness of fit index; RFI, relative fit index; PNFI, Parsimony normed fit index; PGFI, Parsimony goodness of fit index.

TABLE 5: A summary of results.

Hypotheses	Std. path coeff. and standardised loading factor	t -value (t -table = 1.645)*	Result
H1: OC \rightarrow CR	0.30	4.02	Supported
H2: TL \rightarrow CR	0.40	6.74	Supported
H3: OC \rightarrow EI	0.78	12.12	Supported
H4: TL \rightarrow EI	0.03	0.52	Not supported
H5: EI \rightarrow CR	0.13	2.51	Supported
H6: OC \rightarrow EI \rightarrow CR	0.10	2.45	Supported
H7: TL \rightarrow EI \rightarrow CR	0.00	0.53	Not supported

OC, organisational culture; TL, transformational leadership; EI, emotional intelligence; CR, change readiness; Std. path coeff., standardised path coefficient.

*. One-tailed.

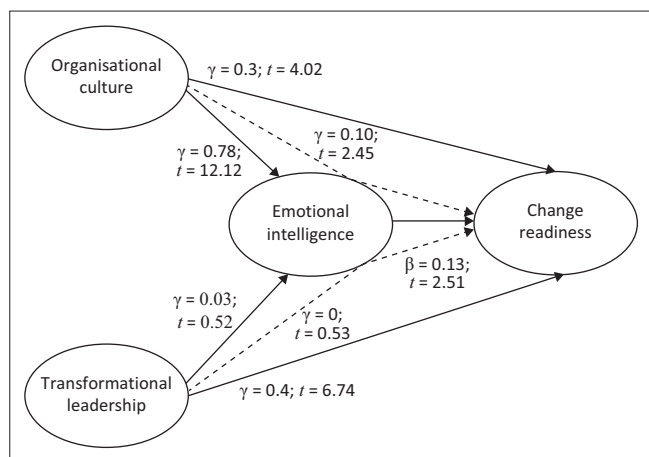


FIGURE 1: Standardised structural parameters of the research model.

increasing CR while also fostering EI, which further aids adaptation. In contrast, TL operates primarily through direct influence, suggesting that leaders should focus on change-specific behaviours rather than relying on EI development.

Figure 1 and Table 5 present the research model's standardised structural parameters and a summary of the results.

Discussion

This study identifies a significant positive relationship between OC and employee CR, supporting Hypothesis 1. The results demonstrate how OC shows strong relationships with employee attitudes and behaviours, while being closely linked to their perceptions of change. This finding aligns with previous research that has observed the consistent role of culture in organisational behaviour patterns. A robust OC correlates with greater feelings of belonging and resilience among employees, which coincides with more confident responses to new initiatives (Ly & Huang, 2024). Furthermore, the current findings are consistent with Vakola's (2014) observation that cultures emphasising open communication and participatory decision-making tend to coincide with higher individual CR, addressing research gaps noted by Suwaryo et al. (2016).

The results indicate a significant positive association between TL and CR, supporting Hypothesis 2. This finding aligns with existing literature that has consistently observed a strong relationship between TL and employee CR (Bagga et al., 2023). The study suggests that organisations where TL is present tend to show higher levels of employee openness to change. These findings imply that adopting TL practices may coincide with greater workforce adaptability in dynamic business environments.

The study demonstrates a significant relationship between OC and EI, supporting Hypothesis 3. Organisational culture emerges as an important contextual variable that relates to employees' behaviours and emotions, showing alignment with organisational goals (Ghenu & Tudor, 2016).

However, Hypothesis 4, which assumed a significant relationship between TL and EI, was not supported, indicating that EI is a stable trait, less influenced by external factors such as leadership style, aligning with trait EI theory, which posits that EI is an inherent personality characteristic rather than a malleable skill. This perspective is supported by empirical evidence, suggesting that trait EI remains consistent across different situational contexts, including workplace environments (Mikolajczak et al., 2015). However, while EI may be relatively stable, research also indicates a positive correlation between EI and adaptive leadership behaviours (Sivanathan & Fekken, 2002), suggesting that individuals with higher EI may respond more effectively to varying leadership styles, even if their core EI levels do not fluctuate significantly.

Despite these findings, the relationship between EI and leadership dynamics remains complex. Some studies propose that while EI may be stable, its expression and impact can be moderated by situational factors, such as OC or stress levels (Mikolajczak et al., 2015). This raises questions about whether EI's influence on workplace outcomes is direct or mediated by other psychological or environmental variables. Further research is needed to explore these interactions, particularly longitudinal studies that assess EI's stability over time in response to leadership changes. In addition, investigating potential moderators, such as personality traits or job demands, could provide deeper insights into how EI functions in different professional settings.

Furthermore, the findings support Hypothesis 5, indicating a positive association between EI and CR. Employees with higher EI demonstrate greater openness to organisational change, typically perceiving it as an opportunity rather than a threat (Vakola et al., 2004). These results suggest that organisations with workforces displaying higher EI may experience smoother adaptation during periods of change.

Supporting Hypothesis 6, the results indicate that EI plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between OC and CR. The findings suggest that employees with higher levels of EI tend to demonstrate better understanding of OC and its alignment with change initiatives (Mayer et al., 2004). The data show that openness to change appears more pronounced when employees both comprehend the organisation's cultural values and exhibit higher EI. These results are consistent with previous research (Vakola et al., 2004) that identified EI as a potential mediator between OC and readiness indicators. In addition, the analysis reveals that higher EI is associated with a stronger positive relationship between cultural factors and CR measures.

Contrary to Hypothesis 7, the analysis did not support a mediating role of EI in the relationship between TL and CR. These findings suggest that the observed association between TL and CR may be sufficiently explained by direct factors, with potential conceptual overlap between leadership dimensions and EI components (Bass et al., 2003). The results align with previous research indicating that TL characteristics

tend to show stronger direct relationships with organisational outcomes such as CR, rather than operating through mediator variables such as EI (Antonakis et al., 2009).

This pattern is consistent with empirical work by Barling et al. (2000), which found TL to correlate more directly with CR measures, without significant mediation effects. The conceptual similarity between certain dimensions of TL (inspirational motivation and individualised consideration) and EI competencies (emotion regulation and empathetic capacity) (Mayer et al., 2004) may help explain why these factors appear to function concurrently rather than sequentially concerning CR. This pattern implies that the leadership-readiness relationship may naturally incorporate elements typically associated with EI, potentially accounting for the absence of mediation effects in the current analysis.

Moreover, the model's goodness-of-fit indices present a complex picture, while incremental fit measures (CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98) indicate excellent relative fit; the elevated RMSEA (0.10) and suboptimal goodness of fit index (GFI) (0.86) suggest potential model misspecification that warrants cautious interpretation. Notwithstanding these psychometric limitations, the pattern of results makes three substantive contributions to change management theory: (1) it establishes OC as a contextual antecedent whose effects on readiness are partially channelled through EI, (2) it delineates the boundary conditions of EI's mediating role by showing its non-mediation between TL and CR, and (3) it extends Vakola's (2014) work by empirically differentiating culture-based from leadership-based pathways to CR.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the importance of OC and TL in developing CR, while also highlighting the complex interaction involving EI within these dynamics. Further research is recommended to explore these relationships in greater depth.

Theoretical implications

This study enhances the existing research on organisational change by evaluating OC, TL and EI as key determinants of CR. The findings align with previous studies that underscore the impact of OC on employee perception of change (Holt et al., 2007). By demonstrating that EI partially mediates the relationship between OC and CR, this research contributes to the theoretical discourse on the psychological processes involved in organisational change.

Additionally, the study enriches TL theory by revealing that while TL significantly influences CR, it does not have a notable effect on EI. This challenges earlier assumptions that TL inherently enhances employees' EI (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Goleman, 1998). Future research should investigate the contextual and individual factors that might moderate this relationship.

Moreover, the findings highlight EI as a critical predictor of employees' ability to support changes. This is consistent with

previous studies indicating that high EI employees can better manage the stress and uncertainty associated with change (Coetzee & Harry, 2014). The lack of significant mediation of EI between TL and CR suggests that operational mechanisms, such as effective communication and participative decision-making, may play a more substantial role in connecting TL with CR.

Practical implications

This study offers a nuanced framework for enhancing organisational CR by identifying EI as the pivotal mechanism through which OC influences employee adaptability. The finding that EI partially mediates the culture-readiness relationship suggests that cultural interventions will be most effective when explicitly designed to develop employees' emotional capabilities. Organisations should implement integrated programmes that simultaneously strengthen cultural foundations (psychological safety and transparent communication) and deliver targeted EI training focusing on emotion regulation, change-related stress management and empathetic team collaboration.

For leadership development, while transformational leaders directly affect readiness without relying on EI mediation, organisations can amplify their impact by training leaders to recognise and complement their teams' emotional competencies during transitions. The recruitment process should incorporate EI evaluations for change-sensitive positions and performance metrics should reward demonstrated emotional adaptability during transitions. By addressing the cultural context that shapes EI development and the leadership behaviours that directly motivate change acceptance, organisations can create a robust, multi-layered system for CR that accounts for the complex interplay of organisational and psychological factors revealed in this research.

Simultaneously, leaders should recognise that their direct influence on CR does not rely on employees' EI, meaning they must consistently model adaptability and communicate change visions clearly. The most effective strategy combines cultural development (creating psychologically safe environments that value emotional skills) with strong, transparent leadership, addressing both the organisational context and individual capabilities needed for successful change implementation.

Conclusion

This study provides nuanced insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying organisational CR, revealing distinct pathways through which key factors operate. The findings demonstrate that EI serves as a significant partial mediator between OC and CR. This significant theoretical contribution encourages a deeper examination of the psychological dimensions inherent in change management. The result advocates for organisations to emphasise adaptive culture and EI training programmes. This approach is proposed as a more effective strategy for developing CR.

The non-significant relationship between TL and EI suggests the need for further investigation into alternative leadership styles (servant, authentic or ethical leadership) that may more effectively cultivate employees' emotional competencies. In addition, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences; future longitudinal or experimental studies could better establish temporal precedence and clarify whether EI develops as a consequence of leadership behaviours or other contextual factors. This would help disentangle the mechanisms through which leadership influences CR, addressing a key gap in the current findings.

Meanwhile, EI does not mediate the relationship between TL and readiness. This differential pattern suggests that culture influences readiness partly by enhancing employees' emotional capabilities, whereas TL affects readiness through more direct behavioural and motivational channels. The robust mediation effect in the culture-readiness pathway underscores EI's critical role as an adaptive mechanism in cultural contexts, aligning with Mayer et al. (2004) theoretical framework. Conversely, the non-significant mediation between leadership and readiness supports Antonakis et al.'s (2009) proposition about the conceptual overlap between TL behaviours and EI's competencies.

Future research should explore how OC interventions perform differently across aviation subsectors. Comparative studies could identify best practices for tailoring change initiatives while maintaining operational safety and efficiency. Given aviation's global nature, longitudinal studies would also help determine how leadership approaches should vary across regions to maximise employee buy-in during transitions. Such research would provide actionable insights for implementing context-aware readiness strategies in this high-stakes industry.

Furthermore, examining these relationships across various sectors could provide insight into how such dynamics shift in differing contexts. In summary, this research enriches our comprehension of the determinants influencing CR and offers actionable strategies for organisations aiming to navigate the complexities of change effectively.

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Authors' contributions

I.S., N.N., R.R. and S.S. contributed to the study's conception and design, performed material preparation, data collection and analysis and commented on previous versions of the manuscript. I.S. wrote the first draft of the manuscript, and all authors read and approved the final manuscript. Conceptualisation: I.S. and N.N.; methodology: I.S., N.N. and S.S.; formal analysis and investigation: I.S. and R.R.; writing – original draft preparation: I.S.; writing – review and editing: I.S., N.N., R.R. and S.S.; resources: I.S.; supervision: N.N., R.R. and S.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, I.S., upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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