

Change Management as a Driver of Organizational Resilience

Roland Filep^{1*}

¹University of Debrecen Faculty of Economics and Business, Institute of Management and Organisational Science, Hungary, 4032 Debrecen, Böszörményi út 138

ORCID: [0000-0003-4849-3265](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4849-3265)

Email: filep.roland@econ.unideb.hu

Paper type: Research Article

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to empirically compare and integrate three classical change management models (Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke) to identify the factors most strongly associated with organizational resilience. The research examines how the leadership behaviors and steps emphasized in these models relate to the implementation of organizational change and to the development of organizational adaptability.

Design/methodology/approach – Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to compare the key elements of the three models. The steps of the Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke models were examined both separately and in an integrated framework to identify overlaps and the variables most strongly related to change success.

Findings – The analysis showed that, in Kanter's model, employee empowerment and problem identification demonstrated the strongest associations. In Kotter's model, anchoring new approaches and communicating the vision were most significant. In Luecke's model, optimism and commitment exhibited the highest explanatory power. Overlapping factors were also identified: vision communication appeared in both Kanter's and Kotter's models, while Kanter and Luecke shared problem identification. Each model explained approximately 50% of the variance in organizational resilience, while the integrated model showed slightly higher explanatory power and highlighted five key factors.

Originality/value – The study's novelty lies in the empirical integration of three widely recognized change management frameworks and the development of practical recommendations to enhance organizational resilience. Based on the findings, leaders may benefit from emphasizing thorough organizational analysis and clear communication of vision in the initial phase, employee empowerment during implementation, and fostering optimism while anchoring new solutions in the closing phase of change management.

Keywords: resilience, change management, leadership

1. Introduction

With advances in technology and the emergence of innovative processes, the ability to respond flexibly and rapidly places ever-greater evolutionary demands on organizations (Dajnoki & Héder, 2017). Organizations are constantly interacting with changing environments. Therefore, their internal processes must undergo regular modifications to adapt to economic conditions, customer demands, and technological developments (Fenyves, 2020). Continuous technological advancement is essential for companies to maintain their competitive advantage. Throughout history, actors in various industries have sought to meet evolving consumer needs, making ongoing technological development inevitable (Szabó-Szentgróti et al., 2021). Market competition, globalization, and digitalization compel organizations to change continuously. In addition, the global economic crises of recent decades, the COVID-19 pandemic, wars, and the energy crisis have posed particularly serious challenges for leaders. Change management is not only a strategic issue but also often a prerequisite for organizational survival and long-term success. In today's rapidly changing environment, effective change management is one of the most important managerial tasks, as the degree to which an organization remains high-performing, flexible, and resilient depends heavily on how it handles change. According to Véghné and Barizsné (2024), these circumstances can also significantly influence employees' workplace behavior and performance.

A review of the literature reveals that few studies have quantitatively examined the relationship between classical change management models and organizational resilience (e.g., using explained variance or R^2). The present study, therefore, investigates this relationship.

Numerous theoretical frameworks and models have been developed to guide organizational change, among which the most well-known approaches are those of Kanter (2011), Kotter (1995), and Luecke (2003). While these models show considerable similarities, they also approach the conditions for successful change from different perspectives.

Although all three models are widely recognized, relatively few studies have empirically compared them. In particular, there

is limited analysis of the extent to which they can explain variance in the success of organizational change. The present study aims to address this gap by applying multiple linear regression. It compares the three models, examines their overlaps, and assesses whether an integrated model offers greater explanatory power for organizational resilience. Through this, this research contributes to the change management and resilience literature and may also provide practical insights for leaders seeking to achieve sustainable performance. In terms of its structure, the study first presents the research questions, followed by the literature review and methodology sections, and then the results and conclusions.

Research questions:

- RQ1: What relationship can be identified between the steps of the change management models of Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke and organizational resilience when examined separately?
- RQ2: What relationship can be identified between the integrated model created from the three models and organizational resilience, and does it show a stronger relationship than the individual application of each model separately?

2. Literature Review

To examine the relationship between change management models and organizational resilience, this section first reviews the steps of the three models already introduced, then presents the conceptual definitions and key components of organizational resilience. This literature review is structured to address the research questions of this study directly. Examining the steps of Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke's change management models provides a theoretical basis for RQ1 by identifying which model elements may influence organizational resilience when considered separately. Furthermore, comparing and integrating these models addresses RQ2 by highlighting potential synergies and differences in their combined effects on resilience, thereby establishing a clear link between prior research and the objectives of the present study.

Table 1 presents an overview of the three change management models examined in this study. It summarizes the key steps of Kanter's (2011) Change Wheel, Kotter's (1995) eight-step model, and Luecke's (2003) seven-step model for easy comparison.

Table 1. Summary of Kanter's Change Wheel, Kotter's eight-step model, and Luecke's seven-step model

Model	Number of steps	Key steps/Factors
Kanter (2011) Change Wheel	10	1. A common theme and shared vision 2. Rewards and recognition 3. Milestones and feedback measurement 4. Management structure and process 5. Communication and best practices 6. Short-term wins 7. Champions and sponsors 8. Training 9. The approach to change 10. Symbols and signals
Kotter (1995)	8	1. Establishing a sense of urgency 2. Forming a guiding coalition 3. Developing a vision and strategy 4. Communicating the vision 5. Empowering broad-based action 6. Generating short-term wins 7. Consolidating gains and producing more change 8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture
Luecke (2003)	7	1. Mobilizing energy and commitment through the joint identification of business problems and their solutions 2. Developing a shared vision of how to organize and manage for competitiveness 3. Identifying leadership roles 4. Focusing on outcomes rather than activities 5. Initiating change at the periphery and allowing it to spread to other units rather than forcing it from the top down 6. Institutionalizing success through formal policies, systems, and structures 7. Monitoring and adjusting strategies in response to issues arising during the change process

Source: Authors' analysis based on Kanter (2011), Kotter (1995), and Luecke (2003).

Table 2. compares the steps of Kanter’s (2011), Kotter’s (1995), and Luecke’s (2003) change management models. Elements appearing in all three models are marked with two asterisks (**), overlaps between two models with one asterisk (*), and unique elements are listed without asterisks. Highlighting these overlaps and unique steps directly addresses RQ1 by identifying which elements of each model may individually contribute to organizational resilience.

Table 2. Potential relationships among change management models (Kanter, Kotter, Luecke)

Step name	Models in which it appears	Basis of alignment
*1. Identifying problems and solutions	Kanter, Luecke	Starting point based on a shared understanding of problems
**2. Establishing a sense of urgency	Kanter, Kotter, Luecke	A feeling of urgency as a prerequisite for initiating change
**3. Communicating the vision	Kanter, Kotter, Luecke	All stakeholders must understand the direction and meaning of change
**4. Building a coalition	Kanter, Kotter, Luecke	Importance of supportive leaders, champions, and key stakeholders
5. Work groups	Kotter	–
6. Change leaders	Kanter	–
*7. Empowerment	Kanter, Kotter	Enabling people to take action
8. Dramatic, symbolic changes	Kanter	–
**9. Opportunities for early confidence-building wins	Kanter, Kotter, Luecke	Tactical implementation: achieving success first, where it is easier
**10. Monitoring and correction	Kanter, Kotter, Luecke	Continuous monitoring: milestones and feedback
11. Informing employees about progress	Kanter	–
12. Optimism and continuous commitment	Luecke	–
13. Anchoring new solutions	Kotter	–

Source: Authors’ analysis based on Kanter (2011), Kotter (1995), and Luecke (2003).

Reviewing the conceptual definitions and key components of organizational resilience provides the necessary context to evaluate how change management steps – individually and in combination – affect resilience, thereby directly linking to RQ1 and RQ2. Organizational-level resilience, as defined by McCann (2004), is an organization’s ability to recognize opportunities and avoid collisions quickly. According to Panicker and Koswate (2025), it refers to an organization’s ability to recover from crises. Shojaee et al. (2025) interpret resilience as a process that enables organizations to gain a competitive advantage and improve performance in unstable environments threatened by pandemics, economic, or political instability. The foundation of resilience is effective change management, which enables organizations to cope with uncertainty.

Change management affects not only large corporations but also smaller firms. According to Ates and Bititci (2011), micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often focus more on owner-centric management, informal routines, and short-term problem-solving, which means that resilience is not always successfully embedded into organizational culture in the long term. The study by Branicki et al. (2018) also highlights that, in the case of SMEs, resilience differs significantly from the “best practices” applied by large corporations. Based on their exploratory qualitative research, entrepreneurial resilience provides a foundation for SME resilience. The authors emphasize that the qualitative nature of their study limits the generalizability of the results. Therefore, they recommend applying additional quantitative methods. Based on Branicki et al. (2018), planning, resource abundance, well-developed formal processes and systems, and redundancy are overall key factors in building resilience in large organizations. Among these, Pal et al. (2014) emphasize proactive risk identification, identification of vulnerability points, and the development of contingency plans in times of crisis, to which employees across the entire organization can contribute. In resource-abundant contexts, financial resources, for example, can provide a protective buffer in crises (Gittell et al., 2006). Physical resources, such as finished goods and raw materials, may be particularly important for resilience in the face of supply chain disruptions or production shutdowns (Sheffi, 2007). However, Branicki et al. (2018) note that these areas may be particularly deficient in SMEs. Therefore, it is important to consider alternative foundations when examining resilience in this context. The authors analyze how entrepreneurial behavior and individual resilience drivers can support SME resilience and conclude that SME resilience is primarily underpinned by entrepreneurs’ individual adaptability and proactive responses to change, that is, by more conscious change management.

Pal et al. (2014) identify three main domains that are necessary for organizations to strengthen resilience. The following classification is compiled based on their framework, supplemented with the work of other authors.

1. *Resources (R) (Freeman, 2004)*

- Material resources, raw materials, semi-finished goods, and finished products (Sheffi, 2007).
- Financial resources, financial reserves, and liquid capital (Gittell et al., 2006).
- Social resources, including employees' capabilities, teamwork, and trust, which support the development of a risk management culture and proactive communication (Freeman, 2004).
- Network resources, such as strategic alliances, acquisitions, and outsourcing, which enable the sharing of knowledge and resources and increase flexibility (Schoorman et al., 2007).
- Intangible resources, including trust, human relationships, and reputation, which enhance long-term resilience, as Flores-Hernández et al. (2020) argue, constitute a source of sustainable competitive advantage based on differentiation from competitors.

2. *Dynamic competitiveness (DC)*

- Flexibility, in the case of SMEs, fast and efficient internal communication, learning capability, and adaptability (Vossen, 1998). Rapid decision-making enables SMEs to respond promptly (Sullivan-Taylor & Branicki, 2011). In a rapidly changing environment, strategic flexibility emerges as a critical factor (Darnai et al., 2025).
- Redundancy, meaning the development of reserve capacity and multi-source procurement, which may be challenging for resource-constrained SMEs. A balance must be considered between the costs of maintaining reserves and long-term economic interests (Linnenluecke & Griffiths, 2010).
- Robustness, which refers to resistance ensured by quality in products, services, and processes, and which Ismail et al. (2011) identify as an important factor even for SMEs.
- Networking, which, according to Sullivan-Taylor and Branicki (2011), enables faster decision-making through established trust-based relationships.

3. *Learning and culture (LC)*

- Leadership and decision-making, according to Vossen (1998), small firms benefit from faster decision-making, more flexible learning, and more efficient internal communication, all of which strengthen resilience. McManus et al. (2008) argue that resilient leadership mitigates the impact of economic crises. Based on Czucka-Varga's (2025) findings, leaders' innovation capability is related to firm performance.
- Collectivity, which provides employees with trust, optimism, and a clear vision of the future. This results in collective thinking and shared sense-making (Weick et al., 1999). A sense of involvement in decision-making and regular feedback can become cornerstones of organizational culture (Pelyák, 2025).
- Employee well-being, from a resilience perspective, employee responsibility, commitment, continuous development, knowledge sharing, and an appropriate mindset are fundamental (Keller & Price, 2015). According to Boisot and Child (1999), this value-based approach—grounded in shared values, culture, vision, and responsibility—leads to well-being, which in turn supports learning. Veresné (2013) argues that learning capability represents the true competitive advantage of today's organizations.

3. Conceptual Framework

In Table 3, the methodological framework for the systematic review of change management models (Kanter, 2011; Kotter, 1995; Luecke, 2003) and the resilience model (Pal et al., 2014) is based on Snyder (2019), which enables comparison across theoretical models. The table does not constitute empirical evidence. Rather, it represents a theoretical framework that may serve as a starting point for future empirical research. In the Results section, the relationship with organizational resilience is presented as a single aggregated variable, without detailed elaboration on which specific change management steps are associated with which resilience dimensions. This analysis was also conducted because, from a conceptual perspective, it is of interest to examine how the two domains are related based on their internal structures.

Table 3 also shows that the steps of the integrated model do not fully permeate all levels of the resilience model. Instead, they are primarily linked to the third stage, “Learning and Culture (LC),” which encompasses the less tangible “soft elements.” Of the 13 steps listed, 10 may appear within this third stage, with collectivity and well-being receiving particularly strong emphasis. At the same time, certain steps—such as “1. Identifying problems and solutions,” “9. Early wins,” and “10. Monitoring and correction”—may play a more prominent role within Dynamic Competitiveness (DC). Within the “Resources (R)” dimension, social resources in particular may be linked to steps such as “4. Building a coalition,” “7. Empowerment,” and “11. Informing employees,” while these steps may simultaneously strengthen elements of the “Learning and Culture (LC)” dimension. Consequently, the two dimensions may jointly relate to change management steps. According to Pal et al. (2014), the elements of “Learning and Culture (LC)” play a particularly crucial role in strengthening organizational resilience in SMEs. As shown in Table 3, these elements appear more prominently, while some elements appear only to a limited extent or not at all.

Table 3. Potential relationships between the integrated change management model and the resilience model

Change management step	Related resilience dimensions	Explanation
1. Identifying problems and solutions	DC (flexibility, robustness)	Facilitates rapid decision-making and quality assurance
2. Establishing a sense of urgency	LC (leadership, collectivity)	Provides a clear future vision and shared sense-making
3. Communicating the vision	LC (collectivity, well-being)	Provides direction and supports commitment
4. Building a coalition	R (social) LC (collectivity, well-being)	Builds on trust and relational networks, which enhance resilience
5. Work groups	LC (collectivity, well-being)	Knowledge sharing supports learning capability
6. Change leaders	LC (leadership)	Strengthens crisis management capability and rapid response
7. Empowerment	R (social) LC (collectivity, well-being)	Empowerment strengthens individual responsibility and ownership
8. Dramatic, symbolic changes	LC (collectivity, well-being)	Foster shared interpretation and the development of a new culture
9. Early wins	DC (flexibility)	Increase confidence and adaptive capacity
10. Monitoring and correction	DC (flexibility)	Learning from feedback supports adaptive responses
11. Informing employees	R (social, intangible) LC (collectivity, well-being)	Strengthens trust and dialogue
12. Optimism and commitment	LC (collectivity, well-being)	Enhances long-term resilience
13. Anchoring solutions	DC (robustness, networking) LC (collectivity, well-being)	Embedding change into organizational culture ensures durability and long-term learning

R = Resources, DC = Dynamic Competitiveness, LC = Learning and Culture

Source: Authors’ analysis based on Kanter (2011), Kotter (1995), Luecke (2003), and Pal et al. (2014).

4. Methodology

The empirical study was based on a sample of 100 SME managers. Respondents were asked to evaluate their organization's organizational resilience relative to competitors using a Likert-type rating scale, as well as to assess the steps applied in the case of deliberate organizational change. Regarding change management steps, respondents evaluated the models by Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke. The survey was completed by managers from Hungary's Northern Great Plain region. The sample included nearly equal proportions of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, as well as organizations engaged in service, manufacturing, and commercial activities. Data collection took place during the first two months of 2022. The steps from the Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke models served as the basis for a custom-designed questionnaire, which SME managers answered using a 5-point Likert-type rating scale. The data analysis was performed using SPSS software. The reliability of the scales was high, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.831 for Kanter (10 steps), 0.818 for Kotter (8 steps), 0.819 for Luecke (7 steps), and 0.876 for the integrated (13 steps) model. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values remained below 2 for all variables. The assumptions of the multiple linear regression analyses were checked before conducting the analysis. No significant deviation from normality was observed in the residuals. Homoscedasticity was evaluated by plotting predicted values against residuals, and no heteroscedasticity was observed. Based on these results, the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity are considered satisfied, supporting the reliability of the analysis. Based on the standardized residuals from the regression analyses, no outliers were identified in the sample, as all residuals fall within the acceptable range. No control variables were included in the regression models, as the primary aim of the study was to examine the direct relationship between change management steps and organizational resilience. Future research could extend the model by incorporating control variables such as firm size or industry.

Figure 1 illustrates that the analysis was conducted in two stages using multiple linear regression. In the first stage (1), the relationships between the steps of the Kotter, Kanter, and Luecke models and organizational resilience were examined separately (RQ1). In the second stage (2), the same analysis was performed using the new model obtained by integrating the three models (RQ2). In both analyses, the change management steps served as the independent variables, while organizational resilience was the dependent variable. The number displayed next to each model name indicates the number of steps in that model.

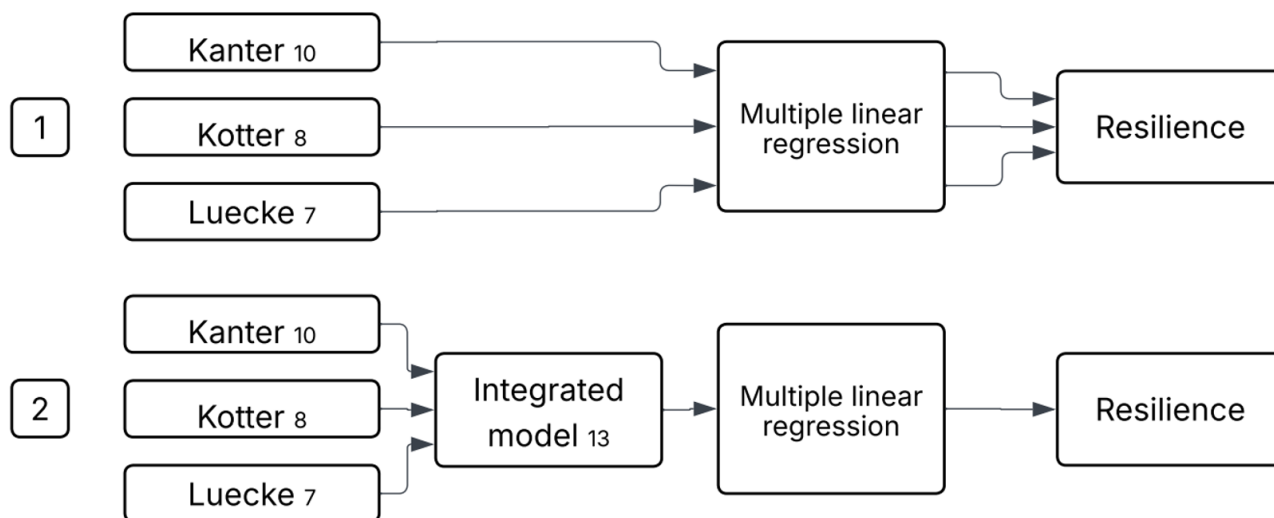


Figure 1. Research framework mode
Source: Authors' compilation.

In the following chapter, the potential relationships between the presented change management models and organizational resilience are analyzed in line with Figure 1.

5. Results

During the comparative analysis of the different change management models, the regression results revealed that several factors were statistically significantly related to organizational resilience (Table 4).

Table 4. Regression relationships between the Kotter, Kanter, and Luecke models and organizational resilience

Independent variable	Kotter β (rank)	Kanter β (rank)	Luecke β (rank)
Anchoring new solutions	0.386** (1)	–	–
Communicating a clear vision of the benefits of change	0.324** (2)	0.386** (3)	–
Empowering competent employees for planning and implementation	0.341** (3)	0.561** (1)	–
Establishing a sense of urgency regarding change	0.235* (4)	–	–
Organizational analysis and problem identification	–	0.432** (2)	0.368** (2)
Optimism and continuous commitment to change	–	–	0.557** (1)
Building a broad coalition to support changes	–	–	0.249* (3)
Adjusted R ²	50.4%	50.7%	50%

***significant at the 1% level, *significant at the 5% level*

Source: Authors' analysis

The analysis begins with Kotter's model, which includes four variables, whereas the other two models each retain three variables. In the case of the Kotter model, the strongest association was found with anchoring new solutions ($\beta = 0.386$; $p < 0.01$), followed by communicating a clear future vision ($\beta = 0.324$; $p < 0.01$) and empowering competent employees ($\beta = 0.341$; $p < 0.01$). In addition, establishing a sense of urgency proved statistically significant, though with a more moderate effect ($\beta = 0.235$; $p < 0.05$). The model's explanatory power was 50.4%. Vision and urgency can primarily be interpreted as psychological elements, while anchoring and empowerment represent more structural steps.

In the Kanter model, the strongest association was found with employee involvement and empowerment ($\beta = 0.561$; $p < 0.01$), followed by identifying organizational problems ($\beta = 0.432$; $p < 0.01$) and communicating the vision ($\beta = 0.386$; $p < 0.01$). The adjusted coefficient of determination in this case was 50.7%. A common characteristic of these three steps is that they are all related to the preparatory phase of change.

Within Luecke's approach, optimism and continuous commitment showed the strongest association ($\beta = 0.557$; $p < 0.01$), alongside which organizational diagnosis ($\beta = 0.368$; $p < 0.01$) and broad coalition building ($\beta = 0.249$; $p < 0.05$) also emerged as significant factors. The model's explanatory power was 50%.

It is important to note that, although the Kotter and Kanter models do not occupy the same rank positions, two steps overlap: communicating a clear future vision and empowering employees. Between the Kanter and Luecke models, the analysis of organizational problems emerged as a common step. These overlaps indicate that certain key factors are reinforced across multiple theoretical frameworks.

In addition to these overlaps, the results also demonstrate that while the models focus on different aspects, they are independently robust, with each model exhibiting at least 50% explanatory power. The findings suggest that future research could focus on developing hybrid approaches that integrate the strengths of different models, with particular emphasis on empowerment, diagnosis, and vision communication. The models examined can be considered complementary rather than competing approaches.

In the aggregated model (Table 5), optimism and commitment ($\beta = 0.286$; $p < 0.05$), problem identification ($\beta = 0.332$; $p < 0.01$), and employee empowerment ($\beta = 0.335$; $p < 0.01$) emerged as the strongest associations. Communicating a clear vision ($\beta = 0.232$; $p < 0.05$) and anchoring new solutions ($\beta = 0.220$; $p < 0.05$) also contributed to the success of change, though to a lesser extent. The explanatory power of the integrated model was 56.1%, the highest among all models.

Table 5. Regression relationships between the integrated model and organizational resilience

Independent variable	β (rank)
Optimism and continuous commitment to change	0.286* (1)
Organizational analysis and problem identification	0.332** (2)
Empowering competent employees for planning and implementation	0.335** (3)
Communicating a clear vision of the benefits of change	0.232* (4)
Anchoring new solutions	0.220* (5)
Adjusted R ²	56.1%

***significant at the 1% level, *significant at the 5% level*

Source: Author's own analysis

Comparing the results with the explanatory power of previous resilience models, the study by Khin Khin Oo and Rakthin (2025) shows that absorptive capacity and knowledge-oriented leadership together play a significant role in enhancing the quality of innovation ($R^2 = 45.2\%$), which in turn improves three components of organisational resilience: adaptability ($R^2 = 30.5\%$), cultural resilience ($R^2 = 28.3\%$), and adaptive competence ($R^2 = 55.0\%$). Although the present study does not examine the same variables, the explanatory power of the models analyzed here – approximately 50% for individual change management models and 56% for the integrated model – is comparable and similarly substantial. This suggests that key factors identified in different models of change management also meaningfully contribute to explaining organizational resilience, reinforcing the importance of combining overlapping and distinct elements for a more comprehensive understanding.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to empirically compare and integrate the change management models of Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke to identify the key factors associated with organizational resilience. The analysis examined how the steps of these models relate to organizational resilience both individually (RQ1) and in an integrated manner (RQ2). The regression analysis results highlight that several key factors overlap across models, while different models also emphasize distinct elements. An examination of RQ1 suggests that the steps of the Kanter, Kotter, and Luecke models are each individually related to organizational resilience. While the models emphasize both overlapping and distinct factors, they exhibit similar levels of explanatory power (approximately 50%). Based on the examination of RQ2, the integrated model showed the highest explanatory power (56.1%) among the models analyzed. These results indicate that, rather than relying on a single model, combining the steps of different approaches may provide a more effective explanation of organizational resilience. Taking into account both the overlapping and distinct elements of the models, managers may benefit from fostering and maintaining a positive mindset, for example, through motivational conversations, presenting obstacles as opportunities, and regularly communicating and recognizing successes. Additionally, managers should develop processes that support the durability of changes. Professional training and workshops can facilitate the dissemination of experience, ensuring that new solutions become a long-term part of the organization.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The study is not representative. A key limitation is that the sample was drawn exclusively from the Northern Great Plain region of Hungary. In the future, it would be advisable to conduct studies covering multiple regions or the entire country to improve generalizability.

Even so, the integrated model showed higher explanatory power than the individual models. This indicates that combining elements from different frameworks may yield a more comprehensive understanding of the factors underlying organizational resilience. However, further empirical research is needed to confirm these findings.

Additional limitations should also be noted. The study relies on self-reported data from the same respondents for both change management practices and organizational resilience, which may introduce common-method bias. Furthermore, organizational resilience was measured with a single Likert-type item, which, while practical, provides a relatively narrow

assessment of a multi-dimensional construct. The cross-sectional design also limits the ability to draw causal conclusions. Future research could also explore the deeper relationships between change management steps and the various dimensions of resilience. The comparison presented in Table 3 provides only a theoretical framework that has yet to be validated. Nevertheless, it can serve as a starting point for subsequent empirical studies. Longitudinal designs or the inclusion of objective performance measures would further strengthen this line of inquiry.

Acknowledgments:

Supported by the EKÖP-25-4 University Research Scholarship Program of the Ministry for Culture and Innovation from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

Conflict of Interest:

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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