Change Management Institute

Summary Report:

FUTURES *OF* CHANGE

A summary of the Change Management Institute's new research on the emerging futures of change towards 2035

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the summary of our Futures of Change research initiative. This report provides a snapshot of what was explored and a summary of our high-level findings. This initiative was the first of its kind for the Change Management Institute. It invites us all to expand the lens through which we currently view change, and to open our minds to the alternatives and possibilities presented by the research.

The research was commissioned in response to the increasing pace and uncertainty of change. Over the past two decades, the core pillars of change have remained steady: planning, leadership and governance, embedding change and realising outcomes. These foundations continue to matter – but how they show up is evolving.

We live in a world where the pace, scale, and interdependence of change is accelerating, yet many of our approaches, assumptions and systems haven't evolved at the same speed.

The report invites you into a different kind of conversation. It's not a forecast, a best-practice guide, or a roadmap for certainty. It's a space for curiosity. A provocation. A shared inquiry into what change could become, and what change professionals, adjacent roles and next generation leaders might need to navigate what's next.

THE **APPROACH**

We saw a need for a forward-looking lens that considered not only trends in change, but also the broader societal, technological, political and environmental shifts that will drive change over the next decade. We wanted to explore how change might be conceived, led, experienced and sustained by 2035. We therefore commissioned Dr Elissa Farrow, futurist, strategist and long-time Change Management Institute member, to apply a 'futures approach' to the project – moving beyond a traditional research study into predictions to open up multiple possibilities and test today's assumptions about change.

Rather than predicting a single definitive future, 'futures thinking' explores multiple futures – including possible, probable, preferred and even preposterous futures – to open thinking and choices.

The Futures of Change initiative adopted a comprehensive, multi-method design that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches:

LITERATURE REVIEW

- 100+ sources
- High-quality academic and industry sources, published between 2023 and 2025
- Rigorous criteria were applied, including peer-reviewed sources, transparent methodologies and relevant business school cases
- Inclusion of cross-cultural perspectives for global relevance

SURVEY

- 630 global respondents including 199 senior leaders including CEOs
- Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data
- Questions inspired by Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (1999)
- Statistical analysis identified trends and correlations

FOCUS GROUPS

- 40 participants
- Four 90-minute sessions
- Explored early signals and trends using SEED and STEEPE frameworks
- Thematic analysis identified rich qualitative insights

INTERVIEWS

- 23 influential leaders across change, business, neuroscience, behavioural science, and futures thinking
- Semi-structured interviews
- Thematically analysed for key patterns and novel insights

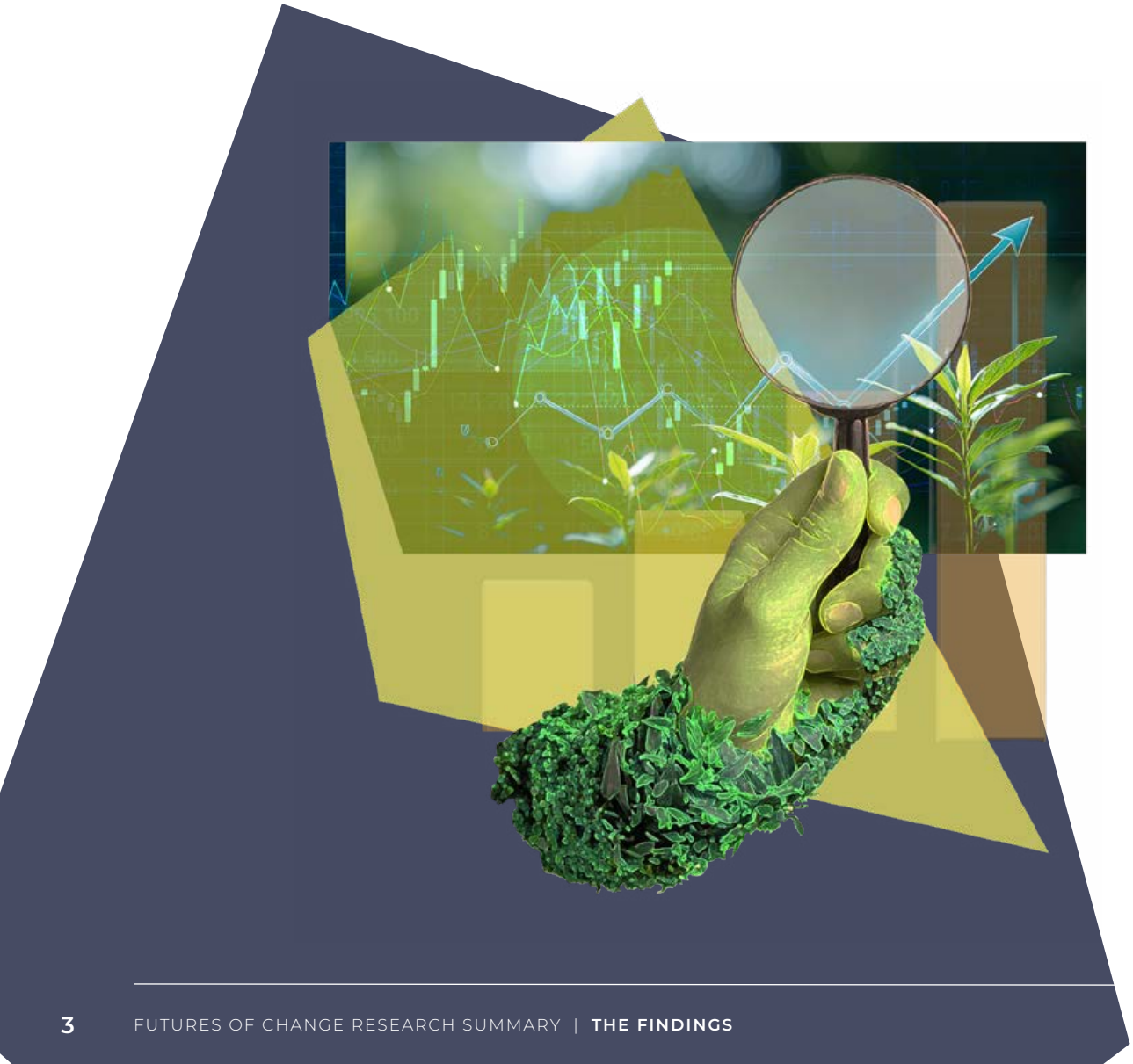
THE **FINDINGS**

Drawing from academic research, public commentary, industry white papers and thought leadership, a structured literature review of over 100 sources published between 2023 and 2025 explored how change is evolving across disciplines and geographies.

The insights identified in the literature embrace complexity, prioritise lived experience and inclusion, and embed change more deeply within organisational identity, technological systems and social purpose.

Building upon the findings from the literature, the next phase gathered insights from the field to test. Collectively, the literature and lived experience offered a richer and more future-conscious perspective on what might come next for those working with change. The findings offered a breakdown of the key challenges in managing change today and the legacy beliefs that no longer serve the industry. Consistent with the literature, a clear move away from change as a 'linear process' or 'separate event' was identified, with participant insights signalling a need for linear models to adapt and change to be more effectively embedded with ownership shared across roles.

The full report explores the factors that participants believed to be driving change and change responses, considering organisational impacts and individual impacts. The findings highlighted how deeply connected 'personal' and 'systemic' change are, making it clear that they should be addressed in tandem for meaningful, future-focused transformation. Respondents were also asked to reflect on not just what change looks like now, but how it will be understood, owned and valued over time – revealing subtle but significant shifts in language, mindset and leadership expectations.



Five 'Evolving Perspectives' emerged from a full analysis of the findings across the literature and the field, collectively showing how the practice of change is building on its traditional foundations while adapting to a more complex, fast-moving and interconnected world.

Each evolving perspective reflects a shift – co-creation, trust-building, systems thinking and ethical stewardship – that invites us to reimagine the mindsets, methods and measures of change.

1 CHANGE IDENTITY IS REIMAGINED

By 2035, sustainable and successful change – from strategy to delivery – becomes a core capability that is embedded into the fabric of an organisation.

2 HUMAN EXPERIENCE IS THE DIFFERENTIATOR

Change success may be measured not just by outcomes, but by how people feel along the way. Human well-being, cultural safety, emotional resonance and lived experience will matter as much as delivery timelines.

3 CHANGE LEADERSHIP IS DISTRIBUTED

Leadership is shifting from authority to influence, control to contribution and from hierarchy to networks. By 2035, change will be co-led by diverse contributors – from informal influencers and middle managers to digital agents and partner ecosystems.

4 CHANGE PRACTICE ADAPTS FOR COMPLEXITY AND CONTEXT

By 2035, professionals will blend systems and portfolio thinking, design, behavioural science and cultural insight – adapting to organisational context and environmental factors.

5 HUMAN-TECHNOLOGY PARTNERSHIP IS THE NEXT FRONTIER

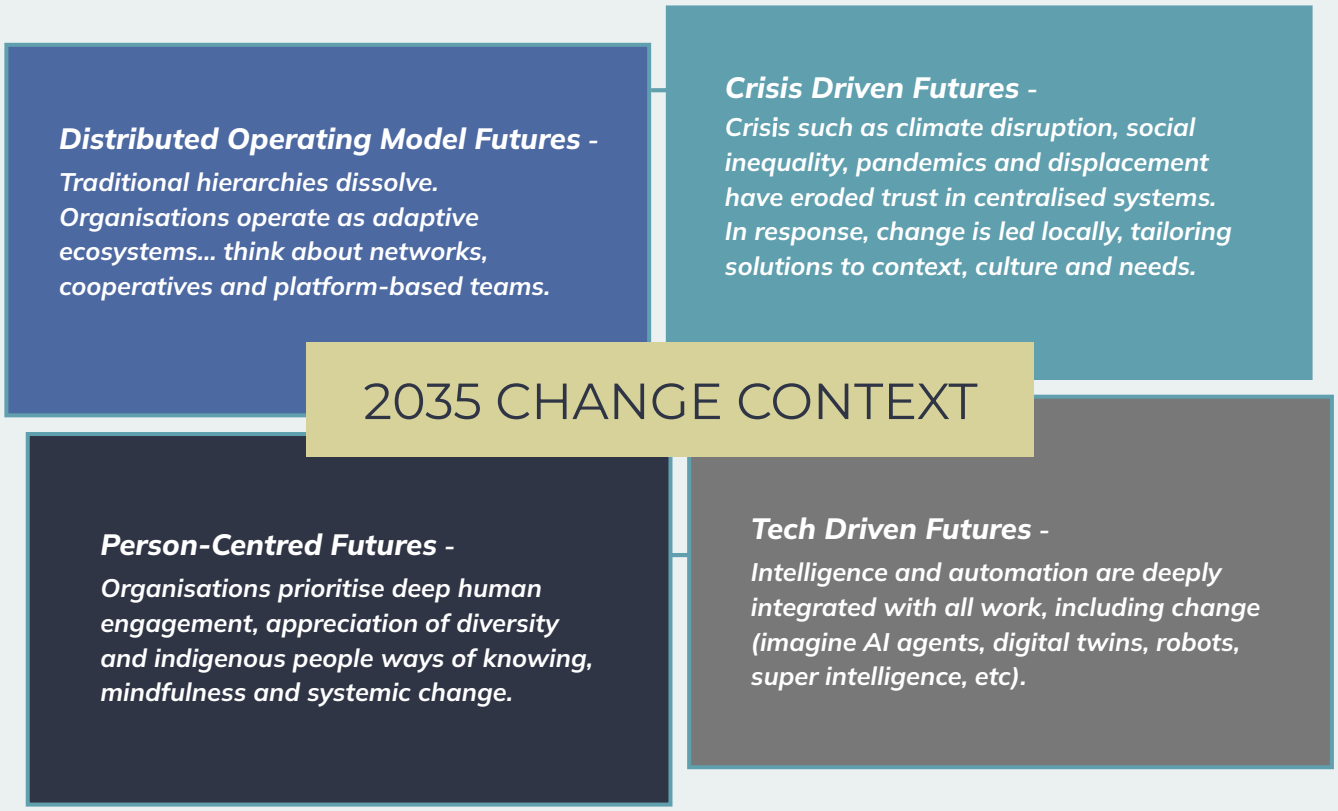
AI, digital twins, immersive tools and intelligent agents will likely reshape how change is conceived and delivered. By 2035, change professionals may co-create with machines, use predictive diagnostics and design adaptive human-tech ecosystems.

FOUR FUTURES

Our aim for the *Futures of Change* initiative was to meet you where you are today – in the language, realities, and lived experience of current practice – and to guide you toward more speculative perspectives on what lies ahead. The full report therefore culminates in 'Four Futures', designed to stretch thinking and explore the edges of possibility, while grounding strategic choices in the present. Together, these insights form the bridge between today's realities and tomorrow's possibilities.

It is important in futures thinking processes to be able to set current state bias aside and imagine a range of futures and possibilities without being limited by today.

Four scenarios offer distinct yet overlapping perspectives on how change could unfold in 2035, driven by technology, human values, system disruption, and decentralised operating structures.



Across all four futures, a clear set of signals emerged about how the field of change may need to evolve. The full report explores the implications and opportunities presented by each of the futures, helping readers to prepare. It offers a space for curiosity. A provocation. A shared inquiry into what change could become, and what change professionals, adjacent roles and future leaders might need to navigate what's next.

CONCLUSION

This report expands the lens through which we view change, revealing new possibilities for how we lead, learn, and create impact in a world that refuses to stand still. These insights are not predictions, but invitations — to rethink our identity, stretch our practice, and step boldly into what comes next.

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Change Management Institute members can access the full version of the report in the Member Hub.

The future of change belongs to those who lead with empathy, curiosity, and courage. The Change Management Institute stands beside you, championing the next horizon.

Together we shape the futures of change, today.

ABOUT THE CHANGE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

The Change Management Institute is a global leader in strengthening, connecting and advancing the change management profession. We support members in growing their capability, credibility and professional networks.

With a vibrant community across 42 countries, the Institute provides global insights, a strong peer network and practical resources to help change professionals thrive.

Members gain access to internationally recognised standards including our Change Capability Frameworks, The Effective Change Manager (CMBoK™), the Change Practice Playbook, and more than 190 virtual and in person development and networking events each year.

They also benefit from global special interest groups and a respected three level Accreditation Program that supports career progression.

Read more about The Change Management Institute:

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