Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

The Context and Importance of Change Management in Pre-university Education

Mariana-Florentina DUMITRACHE (MANOLACHE) PhD Student, Valahia University Doctoral School

Email: marimanolache@yahoo.com

Abstract: Following the proliferation of a period marked by successive crises and profound transformations in socio-economic and cultural terms, educational institutions feel more intensely than ever the need to engage in a continuous process of change and organizational development. In this article, we develop the principles of change management at the level of pre-university educational institutions in Romania for the transition to a new managerial system centered on resources, including educational ones, as well as for the adaptability of the school community to new technologies, building its capabilities to face the rigors and changes of the labor market, and the economic and social crises that are predicted to become increasingly intense and frequent. In this context, the school becomes the main vector of change, acting as a driving force through education to shift the teaching paradigm toward adaptability, critical thinking, diagnostic analysis, and contextual evaluation of internal and external influencing factors. An analyzed change factor is the school unit's capacity to become more efficient, generating favorable conditions for increasing professional performance, improving the quality of educational services, and adapting to the continuous evolution of socioeconomic requirements through organizational change.

Key Words: educational management, innovation, research management, organizational behavior.

JEL Classification: H75, I20, O32, D20.

Introduction

The profound transformations marking contemporary society—globalization, accelerated technological advancement, demographic changes, the diversification of educational needs, and increasing international competitiveness—generate constant pressures on education systems, including pre-university education (Carnall, 1990). The school, viewed as a social organization with an essential role in human capital formation, is forced to respond to these challenges through continuous, coherent, and sustainable adaptation. In this sense, change management becomes a fundamental instrument meant to facilitate restructuring, innovation, and development processes at the institutional level (Carnall, 1990).

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

In the context of Romanian schools, as well as at the European level, educational change is often introduced in the form of curriculum reforms, the revision of educational plans, the modernization of school infrastructure, or the updating of teaching and evaluation strategies. However, the mere drafting of reform policies does not guarantee success if they are not supported by a well-articulated change management process that takes into account the internal dynamics of the school organization, institutional culture, the characteristics of the actors involved, and the specificities of the local and national context (Anghelache, 2012).

The importance of change management in pre-university education derives, therefore, from the necessity to efficiently manage complex transition processes from one educational model to another. Proper management ensures not only the planning and coherent implementation of changes, but also the reduction of resistance to change, the motivation of teaching staff, the mobilization of resources, and the creation of an organizational climate favorable to innovation (Sava, 2015). Consequently, change management is not a one-time endeavor, but a continuous process aimed at optimizing school performance, increasing the quality of education, and adapting educational institutions to the demands of a society undergoing rapid transformation.

Furthermore, change management contributes to developing the school's capacity to anticipate future challenges and respond proactively through the consolidation of managerial competencies, the stimulation of collaboration among educational actors, and the valorization of opportunities for continuous improvement (Passenheim, 2017). Thus, in an increasingly complex and volatile educational environment, the role of change management becomes strategic, with a direct impact on the quality of the educational act and on preparing students to face the demands of a knowledge-based economy (Anghelache, 2007).

In the context of a socio-economic environment characterized by instability, dynamism, and heightened competitiveness, the capacity for rapid adaptation to external challenges becomes an essential condition for the success and often the survival of an organization. This capacity naturally requires the initiation and implementation of coherent and sustainable organizational change processes (Biedenbach & Söderholm, 2008). Any change initiative implies a discontinuity with the existing order, creating the premises for transitioning to a new state that is qualitatively superior. Change can be generated either by external factors, such as social, political, economic, or cultural transformations, or by internal dynamics, such as the restructuring of institutional processes, personnel changes, or sub-par organizational performance (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

From this perspective, organizational change simultaneously integrates an innovation component and a learning component. Specifically, the change process implies not only introducing new technologies into operational activities, but also adjustments regarding human resources: accumulating new knowledge, developing professional competencies, cultivating specific skills, and, last but not least, modifying work habits, values, and attitudes. These psychological and

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

behavioral transformations constitute an essential foundation for the functionality and viability of planned changes.

Change Management: Context and Motivation

Specifically, prior to the actual implementation of organizational change, two fundamental steps are required: evaluating the organization's and involved actors' readiness for change, and identifying potential barriers and forms of resistance. Even when change is rigorously planned, it is not always anticipated or accepted by the individuals and groups involved. To create the premises for the acceptance and sustainability of the change process, the analysis of individual, organizational, and contextual factors that can facilitate or hinder its implementation is essential (Asbari et al., 2021).

Specialized research emphasizes that the efficiency of a change program depends directly on a prior assessment of the level of readiness and availability of organizational actors to actively engage in the process (change capacity). This assessment allows for the anticipation of attitudinal and behavioral reactions toward the planned change and provides indications on how personnel—for example, teachers—might integrate and apply new knowledge and practices in their current activity (Sava, 2015).

Starting from the premise that the analysis of change capacity constitutes a fundamental benchmark in any institutional transformation endeavor, it is justified to approach specific methods for the psychological evaluation of readiness for change, as well as the actual availability to generate and sustain organizational transformation.

Change management can be defined as a structured approach to the process by which an individual, a team, or an organization transitions from a current state to a desired future state (Enache, 2019). It represents an organized endeavor designed to support stakeholders in accepting and assuming the necessary transformations in their activity environment, with the ultimate goal of consolidating and maintaining change over time. From this perspective, change management constitutes a coherent response to the challenges generated by transformation.

The concept of change management can be understood as an activity of coordinating transformation processes, as a professional practice domain, as well as an academic research field gathering specific models, methods, and techniques, or as a set of regulatory mechanisms based on requirements, standards, processes, and procedures.

In the current context, marked by an accelerated pace of change, change management has established itself as an indispensable practice of general interest. The unstable and complex environment in which individuals and organizations carry out their activities demands continuous

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

adaptation, without which they could not face contemporary challenges (Enache, 2019). Furthermore, to ensure sustainable development, organizations must integrate the principles and practices of change management, transforming them into fundamental components of their sustainable evolution strategies.

The issues associated with change, whether in education or other fields, have been frequently analyzed from multiple perspectives: both organizationally and individually, through the lens of psychosocial mechanisms generating resistance to modifying the status quo, and from the perspective of triggering factors or long-term consequences.

Regardless of the angle from which it is approached, change remains a complex phenomenon that is not limited to a simple punctiform event devoid of deep implications. It implies qualitative and quantitative transformations, can be planned or spontaneous, can occur as a sudden leap or a gradual evolution, but in all cases, it represents an essential instrument of progress (Șendrea, 2015). Through change, organizations adjust their structure and practices to present and future realities, consolidate their environmental adaptation capacity, and increase their chances of success.

Educational management represents a dynamic concept with multiple dimensions branching into various specialized areas, including school organization management, curriculum management, educational programs and projects management, classroom management, human, material, and financial resource administration, time management, and quality management (Enache, 2019).

Change can manifest in any of these areas, adopting varied forms such as modification, innovation, replacement, transformation, reconfiguration, deviation, reformation, or adaptation—all of which are consequences of the open nature of the school as an organizational system subject to pressures exerted by the external environment in which it operates. From this perspective, change management integrates naturally into the sphere of school organization management.

Transformations in the field of education are generally initiated through the implementation of reforms. However, the process of implementing change, regardless of the field, is complex, generated by inherent uncertainties and significant costs compared to benefits that materialize only after prolonged periods (Dîrjan, 2020). In the case of education, these difficulties are accentuated by a series of particularities highlighted in specialized literature, such as the diversity of actors involved (students, parents, teachers, employers, and society as a whole), the scale of educational infrastructure, the difficulty of accurately assessing costs and benefits (their nature and distribution), and the extended period required for effects to become visible (Enache, 2019).

Determinants of Change Management

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

The complexity of the variables involved, along with their interdependencies, makes it impossible in most cases to anticipate clear and predictable relationships between implemented policies and obtained results (Nickols, 2016). Numerous obstacles are felt even more intensely in education, where pressure for change is more acute, and the coordination and synchronization of actions at different administrative levels prove difficult, as is the transfer of good practices from other national contexts and their adaptation to local specifics. The path of Romanian educational reform after 1989 is a relevant example in this regard.

Under these conditions, change management fully demonstrates its utility within the school and other organizational contexts, contributing to a deep understanding of the transformation process among organizations that propose or are forced to adapt, as well as among individuals who wish or are forced to change their behaviors and practices. Effective change management facilitates the coherent implementation of transformations and supports a better understanding of the dynamics.

In analyzing the concept of educational reform, four terms are frequently used with close meanings: reform, innovation, change, and transformation. In the *Dictionary of Sociology*, innovation is defined, on the one hand, as an idea, method, or product with a novel character resulting from individual or collective creative activity, and, on the other hand, as a modification occurring in a technical, economic, social, or cultural system generated by the implementation of new discoveries (Enache, 2019). This modification can be either spontaneous or planned, depending on the degree of intentionality attributed to change.

The close relationship between innovation, novelty, and change is evident in any reform process that proposes an interpretation of innovation in education as an improvement with measurable, lasting impact—less likely to be produced repeatedly—and as a process of selection, organization, and creative utilization of human and material resources through innovative methods capable of raising the level of objective achievement (McKinsey, 2011).

Its definition adds the dimension of progress and evolution to the idea of innovation—elements without which the concept would be emptied of content, especially in relation to educational reform. In this conceptual framework, innovation reflects a modification of structures and practices in the education system, while reform constitutes a social instrument meant to facilitate the introduction and consolidation of this change. Thus, educational innovation appears as a deliberate, planned intervention, a coherent process aiming at the installation, acceptance, and utilization of a change, whereas reform integrates multiple innovations into a coherent model (Șendrea, 2015).

Therefore, any innovative initiative inevitably produces change, which is otherwise one of the fundamental functions of education. Any educational act aims to generate visible transformations at the individual, group, or societal scale. Educational reform provides the institutional framework necessary to facilitate changes at all levels of the educational system (Dîrjan, 2020).

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

In a sociological sense, social change designates the transition of a system or a component from one state to another, qualitatively and/or quantitatively distinct, being itself a transitional state signifying the difference between two successive stages of a structure (Dîrjan, 2020). This change can be viewed at the macrosocial level, referring to society as a whole and concepts such as growth, progress, or regression, or at the microsocial level, targeting certain subsystems and components of social life. In both cases, the common element remains the emphasis on evolution and development (Anghelache, 2007).

Social change presents several defining features: it manifests as a collective phenomenon, involving extended groups and influencing lifestyles and mental representations; it has a structural character, affecting the organization of society as a whole or in its fundamental parts; it unfolds over time and has a durable dimension. These characteristics are also relevant in the case of changes generated by educational reforms, which determine multiple transformations in the school—material, conceptual, and relational—targeting old behaviors that are replaced, reshaped, or eliminated to consolidate new practices (Sava, 2015).

Education reforms produce not only structural mutations but also changes at the individual level, supporting individuals' adaptation to new conditions and stimulating their availability to accept and sustain change (Sava, 2015). An open educational system thus becomes a propitious environment for innovation and the conscious assumption of transformations, reducing social, individual, or institutional resistance. Any change process presupposes natural stages, from denial and defense to rejection, adaptation, and ultimately internalization.

Strategies for managing change are based on models of social influence, being classifiable according to the means utilized: from persuasion and manipulation through informational insistence, rewards, and sanctions, to authoritative imposition or conviction achieved through explanation, co-interest, and the stimulation of alternatives. Internalization of change through persuasion strategies ensures real adaptation, where new processes and behaviors become natural practices, and a new transformation cycle can be triggered.

Thus, changes brought by innovations provoke internal modifications of individuals and the system, transforming reform into a process of organic development and progress from within. The term transformation, defined as the action of modification and its result (DEX), is frequently associated with notions such as becoming, development, evolution, and change. In conclusion, the relationship between reform, innovation, change, and transformation can be described as a logical sequence: the creation of the institutional and normative framework (reform) facilitates the introduction of the novelty element (innovation), which generates concrete modifications (change), leading to the targeted qualitative leap (transformation) (Tripon & Dodu, 2013).

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

Pedagogical changes induced by educational reform can affect the general orientation of the education system, redefining its finalities and reconfiguring the activity of personality formation and development at the macro and micro-structural levels (Sava, 2015). Thus, pedagogical ideals, general goals, and educational objectives can be revised, with direct implications for curricula and school or university programs. The restructuring of the education system's organization responds to the need to balance imbalances generated by recurrent pedagogical and social crises, imposing the update of educational plans, the renewal of curricular logic, and the adjustment of school evaluation and selection mechanisms (Anghelache, 2007).

Therefore, educational reforms represent complex, hierarchically structured processes aiming at modifying macrostructural orientation, qualitatively transforming organization, and redesigning curricular instruments in concordance with new finalities assumed at the educational policy level.

Viewed from the perspective of an organization, the school is permanently subject to the transformation process. Organizational change implies modifications of activities carried out within the organization, targeting both work processes and the subsystems supporting them. The finality of this change process consists in achieving success, understood as an optimal correlation between the organization and its operating environment, as well as an increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of activities carried out (Cioniaru, 2017).

The success of organizational change depends on the quality of identified solutions and the manner in which they are put into practice. Implementation can lead to three distinct results: on the one hand, efficient application can bring added performance to the organization; on the other hand, correct implementation may have no visible effects on performance; and in the worst-case scenario, change can fail completely (Avram, 2007). This possibility of failure highlights the risks generated by the lack of a real correlation between the content of change and the implementation process. In this context, a well-structured change management process can favor the success of the school organization and diminish obstacles appearing in the path of transformation (Tripon & Dodu, 2013).

To implement valuable transformations at the organizational level, a deep understanding of organizational culture prior to initiating any change endeavor is essential. At the same time, it is important to valorize organizational members and support their professional development, promote and clearly affirm core values, and stimulate collaboration both between management and staff and between the organization and its partners, beyond mere formal co-optation (Dîrjan, 2020). A helpful instrument in this sense becomes the design of alternatives offering real choices, the utilization of bureaucratic instruments as support for change, and the consolidation of links with the community environment, both close and extended.

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

In this context, the concept of organizational development is defined as the coherent application and transfer of knowledge from behavioral sciences, aiming to plan, improve, and consolidate strategies, structures, and processes contributing to increased organizational efficiency, making a clear distinction necessary between organizational development, organizational change, and change management (Tripon & Dodu, 2013). Although organizational development and change management similarly target the effective implementation of planned transformations and concern the sequence of activities, processes, and leadership aspects meant to produce significant improvements, they differentiate through fundamental values defining their orientation. Another factor of change is the organizational structure, which directly influences the institution's capacity to implement transformation processes. A clearly defined structure facilitates the distribution of responsibilities, internal communication, and the coordination of activities specific to change. Conversely, the existence of multiple hierarchical levels or excessively bureaucratic procedures can slow down the decision-making process and generate resistance to change. Specialized literature highlights that the success of change implementation depends largely on the organizational structure's capacity to support collaboration, information exchange, and personnel involvement in decision-making (Burnes, 2020).

At the same time, organizational culture influences how formal structure functions in practice. Schein and Schein (2017) show that relationships among organization members are determined not only by regulations and procedures, but also by shared values, norms, and beliefs at the institutional level. Thus, two educational units with similar organizational structures can obtain different results in change implementation depending on the organizational climate, leadership style, and personnel involvement level.

In the current context of educational reforms, digitalization, and increasing institutional autonomy, the organizational structure of educational units must be analyzed not only as an assembly of administrative compartments and functions, but as a mechanism through which educational and managerial processes are coordinated. Its capacity to respond rapidly to legislative, technological, and social changes represents one of the essential conditions for institutional development and the increase of educational quality (Gherguț, 2007).

Although the legislative framework establishes a unitary organizational structure for all pre-university educational units, managerial practice demonstrates the existence of significant differences regarding the efficiency of its functioning. The degree of involvement of collective structures in decision-making, the director's leadership style, organizational culture, and relationships developed among educational actors directly influence the institution's capacity to implement change (Ilica, 2022).

In addition, the predominantly bureaucratic character of the Romanian educational system limits, in certain situations, the flexibility of the managerial process. Numerous decisions regarding

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

curriculum, human resources, or activity organization are adopted centrally, which reduces the autonomy of educational units and can delay the implementation of change initiatives adapted to local needs. Under these conditions, the efficiency of change management depends not only on the organization's formal structure, but also on leadership's capacity to valorize collaboration, participation, and communication mechanisms existing at the institutional level (Bush, 2021).

Therefore, the organizational structure of educational units must be viewed as a dynamic system in permanent relation with organizational culture, leadership, and the external environment, all of which decisively influence the success of institutional change and development processes (Harris et al., 2006).

Conclusions

Organizational culture occupies a particularly important role among internal factors because values, norms, and behaviors developed over time can favor or, conversely, limit the implementation of change. Organizations characterized by a culture oriented toward collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning manifest a higher adaptation capacity to external environmental changes compared to organizations where procedural rigidity and resistance to assuming new managerial practices predominate (Schein, 2017).

In the case of pre-university educational units, change is the result of permanent interaction between external and internal factors. While educational reforms, legislative modifications, and technological evolution generate pressure for change from the outside, the success of its implementation depends largely on the director's leadership, the involvement of teaching staff, organizational culture, and the institution's readiness for innovation and continuous development. From this perspective, change management presupposes not only identifying factors determining transformation, but also valorizing them for organizational development and the increase of institutional performance.

In conclusion, the particularities of the school organization confer a complex and multidimensional character to change management. Change cannot be reduced to modifying administrative procedures or applying legislative regulations, but implies the simultaneous transformation of organizational structures, institutional culture, and the professional behaviors of actors involved in the educational process. From this perspective, the success of change depends on the organization's capacity to mobilize human and institutional resources into a joint development process.

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

References

1. Anghelache, V. (2007). *Management educațional*. Editura Universitară.
2. Anghelache, V. (2012). Reformă și schimbare în învățământul preuniversitar. *Revista de Pedagogie*, *60*(1), 33–48.
3. Asbari, M., Purwanto, A., & Santoso, P. B. (2021). The effect of organizational culture and readiness for change on school performance. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *10*(3), 112–125.
4. Avram, E. (2007). *Psihologie organizațională și managerială*. Editura Polirom.
5. Biedenbach, T., & Söderholm, A. (2008). The challenge of organizing change: A review of the change management literature. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, *1*(1), 125–142.
6. Burke, W. W., & Litwin, G. H. (1992). A causal model of organizational performance and change. *Journal of Management*, *18*(3), 523–545.
7. Burnes, B. (2020). *Managing change* (8th ed.). Pearson.
8. Bush, T. (2021). *Theories of educational leadership and management* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
9. Carnall, C. A. (1990). *Managing change in organizations*. Prentice Hall.
10. Cioniaru, C. (2017). *Managementul schimbării în organizații*. Editura Economică.
11. Dîrjan, C. (2020). Provocări ale reformei educaționale în România. *Studia Universitatis*, *25*(2), 89–104.
12. Enache, R. (2019). *Managementul schimbării în instituțiile de învățământ*. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
13. Gherguț, A. (2007). *Managementul general al instituțiilor școlare*. Editura Polirom.
14. Harris, A., Day, C., Hadfield, M., Hopkins, D., & Hargreaves, A. (2006). *Leadership and school improvement*. Open University Press.
15. Ilica, A. (2022). Managementul educațional și eficiența instituțională în învățământul preuniversitar. *Revista de Pedagogie*, *70*(2), 45–58.
16. McKinsey & Company. (2011). *Education innovation: Lessons from around the world*. McKinsey & Company.
17. Nickols, F. (2016). Change management 101: A primer. *Management Journal*, *14*(2), 12–25.
18. Passenheim, O. (2017). *Change management*. Bookboon.
19. Sava, S. (2015). *Managementul programelor educaționale și al schimbării*. Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”.
20. Schein, E. H. (2017). *Organizational culture and leadership* (5th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
21. Schein, E. H., & Schein, P. (2017). *Humble leadership: The power of relationships, openness, and trust*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
22. Șendrea, M. (2015). Dinamica schimbării educaționale. *Analele Universității*, *40*(1), 110–122.

Social Economic Debates
Volume 15, Issue 2, 2026
ISSN 2360-1973; ISSN-L 2248-3837

23. Tripon, C., & Dodu, M. (2013). *Dezvoltare și schimbare organizațională*. Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană.