



A Fact File on CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION



PERSPECTIVES FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(A Joint Publication of the NAM S&T Centre and JSS Academy of Higher Education & Research, Mysuru, India)

FROM THE DG'S DESK

Warmest Greetings to our Esteemed Readers!!

It is with great pleasure that I present another Fact File titled **"Change Management in Higher Education: Perspectives from Developing Countries"** brought out by the NAM S&T Centre. The document highlights the increasing importance of strategic, inclusive and adaptive change management in higher education institutions.

As countries face rapid technological advancements, evolving policy reforms, labour market dynamics and the impacts of globalisation, higher education systems must adapt to remain relevant, efficient and effective towards delivering excellence.

This Fact File provides a comprehensive overview of both planned and unplanned changes, showcasing diverse examples from across Africa, Asia and Latin America. From India's National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 to South Africa's Decadal Plan for STI, and from Brazil's AI Strategy to Kenya's Emergency Digital Learning Response, the document captures a global mosaic of initiatives aimed at transforming higher education to meet the emerging challenges. It explores critical drivers of change such as digitalisation, policy shifts and international collaboration, while also addressing key challenges like limited resources and institutional resistance.

The document represents our contribution towards the achievement of the *"UN Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education for All"*, underscoring the pivotal role of higher education in promoting equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.

We extend our sincere thanks to Dr. C. G. Betsurmth, Executive Secretary, JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysuru, India, for serving as the Lead Author and Scientific Editor of this Fact File.

I am confident that this Fact File will be a valuable source of information and knowledge for policymakers, experts and other stakeholders interested in higher education systems in the Global South.

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INTRODUCTION

Change Management is the ongoing process of shifting an organization's capabilities, structure and direction to successfully meet the changing needs of both internal and external clients. Higher education is undergoing unprecedented transformation due to its fast expansion, changing expectations and growing complexity, especially in developing nations like India. Developing countries need to find a balance between institutional inertia, cultural settings and limited financial resources. In developing countries, change management is driven by factors such as technological developments, government initiatives and policy reforms, demographic changes, globalization and internationalization, pressures on the labor market and employability and objectives for equity and inclusion. Hence, higher education institutions need to adapt and thrive, especially when external circumstances shift.

Need for a Change

According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2025), the gross enrollment ratio of countries in the Global South in 2023 ranged from 27.7% to 59.7% (Fig 1). This data demonstrates the necessity of strategic change management initiatives intended to improve higher education systems in the Global South.

According to the All India Higher Education Survey (2021–2022), India has over 34.2 million students in 1,168 universities and 42,825 colleges. Globally, the higher education sector is projected to reach USD 2,558 billion by 2034. Despite growth, challenges like outdated curricula, limited resources and leadership gaps persist, especially in developing nations. Institutions must adapt to global trends such as digitalization, employability and rankings. Resistance to change, driven by fear and uncertainty, affects all levels.

Gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education, 1970 to 2023

Number of people of any age group who are enrolled in tertiary education expressed as a percentage of the total population of the five-year age group following on from secondary school leaving.

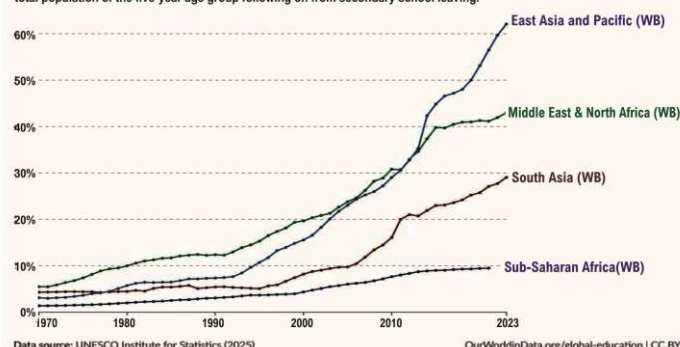


Fig.1 Gross Enrollment ratio in Global South

Without proper planning, change efforts fail—making systematic, coordinated strategies and a shared vision essential for success (Higher Education Change Management, 2024).

TYPES OF CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher education can undergo two types of change: forced change and planned change.

1. Forced or Unplanned Change: The unplanned or forced changes are often outside-driven changes to which institutions must respond rapidly. Examples: Pandemics, Regulatory mandates such as National Education Policies or economic shocks.

2. Planned Change: Planned change is a forward-thinking, deliberate process in which organizations set goals and create strategies to improve policies, processes or systems. Examples: Reforming academic curricula, incorporating new

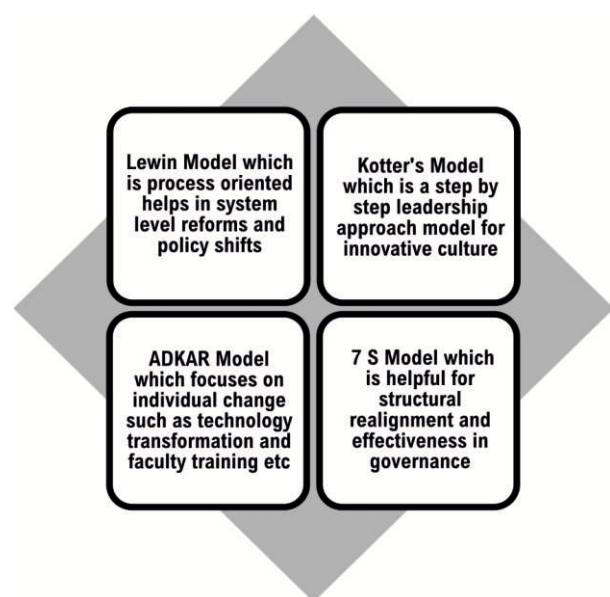
Forced Changes	Countries& Changes
Implementation of National Ranking Systems	India: National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) Indonesia: Kemenristekdikti's National Higher Education Ranking Nigeria: National Universities Commission (NUC) Rankings Malaysia: SETARA (Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions)
Implementation of Digital Education Platforms (COVID-19 Pandemic)	India, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Kenya implemented the Digital Education Platforms
Policy Shifts	Nigeria: New Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) Rwanda: Mandated English as medium of instruction mandated English (Samuelson,2010)

Planned Change	Countries& Changes
Education Policy	India: National Education Policy 2020 South Africa – Policy on Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) 2020 Malaysia – 12th Malaysia Plan South Africa – Decadal Plan for Science, Technology and Innovation (2020–2030) Brazil – National Strategy for Science, Technology, and Innovation Indonesia – Kampus Merdeka Program
Strategic Initiatives	India – Establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF) African Centres of Excellence (ACE) Project Brazil – National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (2021) Thailand – Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation Policy (2023–2027) Philippines – Harmonized National R&D Agenda (HNRDA)

technologies, improving quality assurance techniques and regulatory frameworks such as National Education Policies.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT MODELS

In order to help institutions and overcome these changes and make sure that reforms are not just implemented but maintained, change management models offer structured frameworks. Those ideas support long-term effect, institutional preparation and resistance management for leaders and stakeholders. To support the higher education reforms for variable settings the following are some of the widely accepted models adopted across the organisations:



CHALLENGES IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Higher education sector faces several significant and systemic issues when it comes to change management, particularly in the Global South. The following key challenges occur at operational, policy, structural and cultural levels (Fig.2):

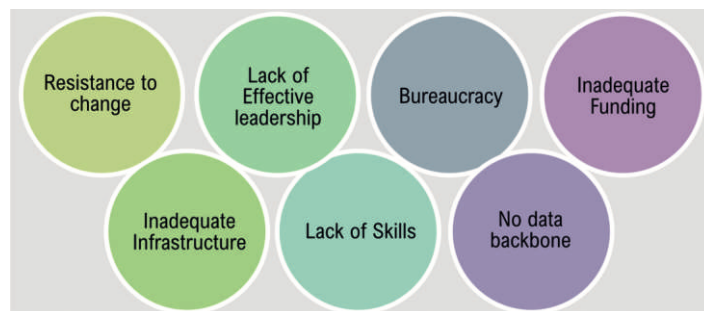


Fig. 2 Key Challenges in Change Management

KEY STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING PLANNED CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The following are essential elements that can be used to manage the planned changes in Higher Education:

1. Strategic Planning

The basis of any successful planned change is strategic planning. National strategic education frameworks, like India's NEP 2020, are being integrated by several emerging nations to transform higher education through digital learning, global benchmarking and multidisciplinary curricula. It includes setting clear goals, aligning initiatives with the institution's vision and mission and sensibly allocating funds. For example, to become a research-oriented institution, a university may develop a five-year strategic plan focused on establishing multidisciplinary research centers, increasing research financing and encouraging publications in high-impact journals. This process ensures that the change is deliberate, long-term and goal-oriented. UNESCO reports that, despite financial limitations, strategic plans for Sub-Saharan African institutions frequently aim to increase access while achieving a balance between equity and excellence. Governments should bring the supporting schemes to develop the infrastructure and academic reforms. For example, in India, the RUSA (Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan) scheme supports strategic planning for state universities.

2. Stakeholder Involvement

Engaging stakeholders, including academics, students, staff, alumni and industry partners, ensures that proposed changes are accepted and inclusive. For instance, educational institutions obtained feedback during India's NEP 2020 curriculum revision process. They conducted conferences and meetings with professors, students and industries to develop relevant and job-oriented programs. Involving people wisely and consistently helps to establish ownership, lower resistance and improve implementation success. In countries like Thailand, Kenya and Bangladesh, universities that involve industry partners in curriculum development have experienced better graduate employability.

3. Training and Development

To succeed with proposed changes, ensuring that those affected have the required skills and knowledge is necessary. For example, when an institution implements the new Learning Management System (LMS) for digitized teaching, it must organise workshops, develop user guides and provide practical training for teachers and their supporting staff. These methods will ensure that the changes are adopted and utilized efficiently and help increase the acceptance and confidence among the stakeholders.

Faculty development is still a significant concern in many under-developed countries due to restricted access to technology integration and pedagogical training. India started the ARPIT (Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching; <https://nmtt.gov.in/components/ARPIT-NRC>) and PMMMNMTT (Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission on Teachers and Teaching) programs to provide professors in higher education with both online and offline training to enhance academic and technical growth. According

to a 2021 World Bank study, colleges in South Asia and Africa that are regularly funded professional development experienced quantifiable gains in student performance and the caliber of their instruction.

4. Evaluation and Adjustment

Planned change is a dynamic process that necessitates constant assessment and adjustment rather than a one-time occurrence. Pilot testing, performance metrics and feedback should all be used by institutions to track their progress. For instance, following the implementation of a blended learning model, a college can examine data on student involvement and administer surveys to evaluate its efficacy before making modifications to enhance instruction. This iterative process makes long-term sustainability and ongoing development possible. The National Level accreditation and Ranking assessment will compel the institutions to assess their performance and make changes routinely. For example, India's NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) Accreditation and NIRF (National Institutional Ranking Framework) Ranking help determine their performance. Similarly, in Vietnam and Indonesia, the feedback loops and performance dashboards have been implemented to track the efficiency of curriculum modifications, leading to prompt interventions.

KEY STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING UNPLANNED CHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Responding rapidly and effectively to unexpected disruptions, such as pandemics, emergencies, political unrest or regulatory shifts, is essential to managing unplanned or forced change in higher education. Institutional stability is tested in such circumstances, necessitating a quick shift despite inadequate planning. In contrast to planned change, which is intentional and goal-oriented, forced change frequently causes stakeholders to feel anxious and stressed. For institutions to successfully manage these changes, they must be resilient, have strong leaders and communicate clearly. Sustainability requires a robust structure for crisis response. The following key areas help to manage the forced or unplanned changes in the Higher Education System:

1. Crisis Response Frameworks

Many countries had to rapidly respond and establish or activate crisis response mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, India's UGC released recommendations on exam postponements, mental health support and online learning to guarantee academic continuity. With an emphasis on remote learning and the distribution of digital resources, South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training created a National Framework for guaranteeing academic year completion. Nevertheless, the absence of pre-existing frameworks in many developing nations resulted in fragmented responses, underscoring the necessity of institutional emergency preparedness.

2. Transparent Communication

Managing uncertainty amid unexpected challenges requires rapid and transparent communication. In India, the IITs and central universities successfully notified the students about changes to exams and procedures for distance learning through emails, public announcements and webinars. The universities established an open-access COVID-19 resource page and updated their faculty and students' frequently asked questions. Due to the lack of digital infrastructure, many developing nations, especially rural institutions, experienced stakeholder disconnect, which taught the institutions to establish effective communication systems.

3. Flexibility and Adaptability

Universities that adopted flexible learning models and an evaluation system and rapidly adjusted to the change performed better. Online learning platforms like MOOC, Google

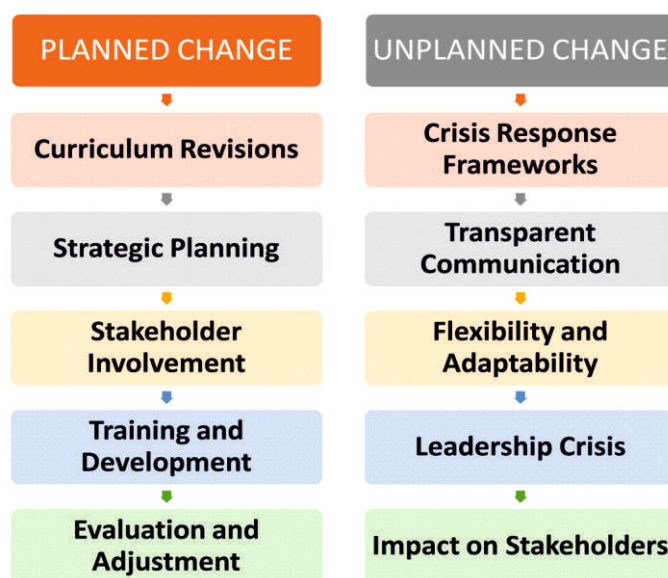


Fig.3. Key Strategies for Change Management

Classroom and Zoom were widely used in developing countries and several colleges switched to alternative assessment procedures and open-book exams. Academic leniency and flexible deadlines ensure that students in low-connectivity areas benefit and avoid unfair treatment. Under such conditions, the educational institutions must reconsider strict academic schedules and cumbersome decision-making procedures.

4. Leadership Crisis

Effective leadership often made a significant difference between chaos and continuity during the forced change. Proactive leadership ensured sustainability at establishments such as JSS Mahavidyapeetha (JSSMVP) Institutions in India and Makerere University in Uganda, the University of Johannesburg, by forming exclusive committees, making prompt decisions about online instruction, decentralized autonomy, fee waivers and support systems (Betsurmeth, 2024 & Menon, 2021). Through effective leadership, these institutions emphasized empathy, teamwork and creativity, increasing morale and trust. Effective leadership in place will avoid a lack of clarity in direction and a delay in action.

5. Impact on Stakeholders

Students, teachers and staff were among the stakeholders who experienced a significant and distinct impact. In India, abrupt closures impacted millions of kids from lower-income families. Due to a lack of training, faculty found the digital transition difficult and many administrative staff members experienced job instability. As mental health problems increased, universities like JSS AHER (JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research), Delhi University and the University of Colombo (Sri Lanka) established peer support programs and counselling hotlines.

EFFECTIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES DURING CRISES WITH KEY EXAMPLES

1. Developing a Clear Strategy and Effective Communication

Institutions may navigate uncertainty with an established strategy supported by prompt, transparent communication. For instance, the JSS AHER Deemed University, India, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and many universities created a quick reaction plan and provided staff and students with clear instructions and updates during the COVID-19 pandemic, which promoted unity and trust inside the university.

2. Building resilience

Resilience in higher education aims to develop individuals and organizations ready for change and to recover quickly. By

improving digital infrastructure, offering emergency teaching training for staff members and promoting psychological safety, institutions may develop resilience. In India AICTE and UGC mandated blended learning models across the institutions. Introduced Digital University, ABC (Academic Bank Credit) and SWAYAM portal for flexible and resilient education. JSS AHER's ability to quickly transit to online learning is a prime instance of this initiative.

3. Engaging stakeholders

Participating in planning and decision-making with learners, educators and support personnel and outside organizations promotes ownership and ensures that all needs are fulfilled. By establishing cross-functional committees and fostering open discussion, JSS AHER ensured that decisions were well-researched and broadly accepted. In Nigeria, TET (Tertiary Education Trust) Fund sets an example for stakeholders engagement in R&D for targeted research funding collaboration.

4. Providing support systems

Robust academic, emotional and technical support systems are essential during crises. Recognizing the impact of the crisis on its community on a personal and professional level, these universities provided helplines, device distribution, data bundles and staff well-being programs. University of Cape Town (UCT) distributed nearly 5,000 laptops to students and provided data access facility. They also introduced a Mental Health Task Force and online counselling platforms. JKUAT University in Kenya established 24/7 IT Helpdesk for students and staff during the covid.

5. Institutional flexibility

Sustaining operations need flexibility in curriculum delivery, guidelines and assessment methods. South African and Indian institutions showed the necessary flexibility by allowing contact-based academic programs to transition online and changing practical requirements under the CHE's guidance and UGC Guidelines (Menon, 2021 and UGC, 2021). University of Nairobi, Kenya and JSS AHER, India implemented online thesis defense and viva-voce exams for graduate students.

6. Leadership and decision-making

Efficient crisis management requires balancing inclusiveness with responsiveness. At JSS AHER, swift action was enabled through an in-house portal and a distributed leadership model complemented by top-down decisiveness. This approach fostered trust and ensured the continuity of academic activities. In India, IIT Bombay leaders declared the semester online early during covid and enabled virtual guidance. Covenant University, Nigeria swiftly adopted Learning Management System and Digital transformation and in Bangladesh BRAC University announced Internet for all and provided data subsidies for students.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION - KEY ENABLER OF SDG 4

Further, the change management in higher education is essential for accomplishing the UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 - Quality Education, which emphasizes inclusive, equitable and lifelong learning opportunities for all (Fig 4.). To navigate the shifting societal demands, technological advancement and global issues, higher education institutions must handle change in an orderly and responsive way which focuses on sustainable, student-centered and consistent with the mission of leaving no one behind.

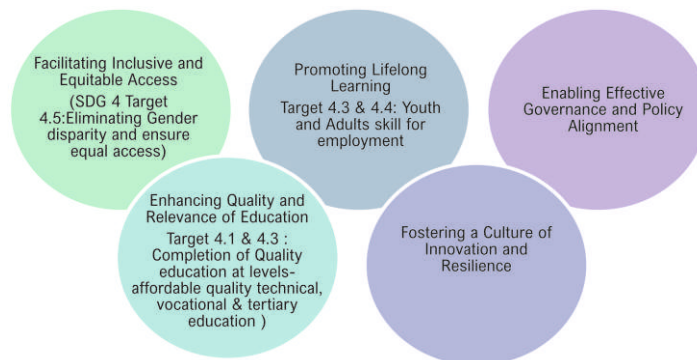


Fig.4. Change Management in Higher Education - Key Enabler of SDG 4

CONCLUSION

In an era marked by global crises and rapid change, higher education systems, especially in developing countries, must adopt proactive and responsive change management methods. The necessity of establishing a balance between inclusive stakeholder involvement, strategic planning, institutional adaptation and top-down decisiveness has been highlighted by the experience of institutions during crises like COVID-19 pandemic. While unexpected events demand adaptability, transparent communication and effective leadership, planned changes like curriculum reform necessitate organized participation, training and continuous evaluation. Institutions like JSS MVP have shown that sustaining continued academic excellence and equity needs a decentralized leadership approach, technology readiness and a culture of collaboration. To navigate uncertainty and maintain the relevance and resilience of higher education in a complicated developing world, it is crucial to develop strong change management frameworks moving forward.

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