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# Catalyzing Action on Social and Environmental Challenges: An Integrative Review of Insider Social Change Agents

**Katrin Heucher** (University of Groningen),  
**Elisa Alt** (King's College London),  
**Sara Soderstrom** (University of Michigan),  
**Maureen Scully** (University of Massachusetts Boston), and  
**Ante Glavas** (University of Vermont)

**Corresponding Author:**  
Katrin Heucher, PhD, [k.s.heucher@rug.nl](mailto:k.s.heucher@rug.nl)

Author accepted version

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Accepted by Denise Rousseau

**Catalyzing Action on Social and Environmental Challenges:  
An Integrative Review of Insider Social Change Agents**

**ABSTRACT**

Urgent societal issues require corporations to make changes and contribute solutions. Insider social change agents are uniquely poised to propel this work. Operating from within their workplaces, they can advance changes that are linked to external social concerns but have purposes distinct from the organization's core strategies and operations. They undertake mobilization activities, making local moves that aim toward more broadly impactful changes. These efforts form the micro-foundations of organizational approaches to positive social change. We review and integrate five streams in which such insider social change agents have increasingly appeared: employee activism, issue selling, tempered radicalism, micro-corporate social responsibility (CSR), and social intrapreneurship. Our framework maps the features of change efforts, with elements of persons, issues, places, activities, and outcomes. With a shared framework, researchers can better characterize the multiplicity of insider change efforts and ascertain how they compare, collaborate, or compete. Research will benefit from taking a more integrative view, especially toward the aim of understanding how local efforts aggregate to broader social impacts. To understand how change is inhibited or supported, future research can theorize blockers of societal change alongside insider social change agents and look to the ecosystem level for reciprocal and amplifying processes.

## INTRODUCTION

*“As an organizer, I start from where the world is, as it is, not as I would like it to be. That we accept the world as it is does not in any sense weaken our desire to change it into what we believe it should be — it is necessary to begin where the world is if we are going to change it to what we think it should be. That means working in the system.”* (Alinsky, 1989: 11)

Insider social change agents act from within their workplace organizations to pursue changes that could address their organization’s role in urgent societal and environmental challenges. In doing so, they occupy a distinct location for pursuing social change. Simultaneously constrained by internal power dynamics and potential career risks, they are often also enabled by savvy insider knowledge of levers, resources, networks, and allies that could propel social change. The field of management and organization studies has seen a wave of commitment to addressing “grand challenges” (George, Howard-Grenville, Joshi & Tihanyi, 2016), such as poverty, inequality, and a rapidly escalating climate crisis. The efforts of those we call *insider social change agents* are now widely studied as one locus for actions that tackle these grand challenges. However, they are characterized through a profusion of terms and concepts, dispersed across fragmented literatures.

A fuller appreciation of their role requires a broad and measured view. On the one hand, insider social change agents work against the grain in settings vested in the status quo. Organizational scholars point out ways in which corporations do not substantively address grand challenges but rather can be implicated in their perpetuation, such as the reproduction of inequality through employment practices (Amis, Mair & Munir, 2020), monetization rather than reduction of the climate crisis (Wright & Nyberg, 2017), or legitimization of global capital mobility that affects unemployment and poverty (Vaara & Tienari, 2008). In this context, change is challenging. On the other hand, corporations might be precisely the context in which potentially vital change efforts can be launched, redirecting strategies and practices

where power resides. Insider social change agents can work with focused precision to exploit change opportunities that might be harder to see from the outside. External social activists may fight for stronger regulations over corporate activities, but even as these are enacted, insider social change agents are often responsible for making them robust and meaningful in their implementation, lest they become hollow symbolic stances.

To address complex, systemic grand challenges, all sectors are needed, especially corporations with their knowledge, influence, innovation, and resources (George et al., 2016; Reitz & Higgins, 2022). Companies are signaling their commitment to deliver on positive social change, with 95% of S&P 500 companies publicly committing to action (Center for Audit Quality, 2021) and over 17,000 businesses embracing social and environmental issues through their membership in networks such as the UN Global Compact (UNGC, 2022). However, research shows that despite stated intentions, most corporate approaches to positive social change have been symbolic and peripheral, only loosely coupled with core strategy and operations (Barnett, 2019; Kalev, Dobbins & Kelly, 2006; Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011). As societal and environmental challenges persist, there is a need to ask how corporations can meaningfully contribute to positive social change. Change efforts confined to a specific department (such as corporate social responsibility or sustainability) or signaled solely through communication from top-level management will not take hold and make a difference. Rather, the need exists for change that is meaningful for stakeholders' routines and practices (Maguire, Hardy & Lawrence, 2004). The issue is how to integrate knowledge about far flung and disparate change efforts to see where they may aggregate toward substantive change in the intended directions.

While extant reviews have approached this issue with a focus on the actions of organizations (e.g., Stephan, Patterson, Kelly, & Mair, 2016), or on the creation of new social entrepreneurial ventures outside or alongside the corporate sphere (Battilana, Leca &

Boxenbaum, 2009; Vedula, Dobliger, Pacheco, York, Bacq, Russo, & Dean, 2022), the individual actions and outcomes of those working inside existing organizations is an area which remains rich for review and integration. These efforts are the *microfoundations* of broader change, and as such, are foundational processes of interest both to scholars who focus directly on the micro level, as well as to macro scholarship for which they are vital as mechanisms (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012).

It is through and by insider social change agents that innovative and even renegade approaches become more tightly coupled with strategy and embedded in practices (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012, 2019; Scully & Segal, 2002; Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012). The role of these insider social change agents has been approached in a rich but fragmented way, lacking the conceptual clarity needed to see patterns of actions and draw links from actions to sustained mobilization for grand challenges. In exploring this domain, we found that many different terms were used, including activist, advocate, champion, internal reformer, and outsider within, with some shared sensibility but different nuances. In this era where a greater corporate role is needed, it is time to integrate this substantial but siloed body of work to understand: *How can insider social change agents catalyze organizational action that promotes positive social change?*

In probing this question and offering an integrative review, we make three main contributions to the literature. First, we put forward a model that integrates prior research so that scholars can collaborate and build on one another's work. Our model includes the root elements of persons, places, issues, activities, and outcomes, which makes possible comparisons and insights across studies. This model also makes it easier to appraise when and how insider social change agents can be most effective in influencing their organizations to positively impact social change. Second, while focusing on the individual level as the spark to action, we also include how the literature treats multiple contexts, including

organizations, social movements, politics, and society. We uncover both potential positive and negative effects on the social change agents themselves, as well as on other internal and external stakeholders, society, and the planet. Third, we contribute to moving the field forward by outlining pressing issues for a future research agenda, derived from tensions and questions in the literature. These include taking a broader ecosystem perspective on ‘insider’ efforts; examining whether and how small wins aggregate to bigger wins or diminish over time; and theorizing obstacles to and blockers of social change as robustly as social change agency. Finally, we offer implications for practitioners, including the business schools where they learn about change agent work and societal issues.

## FOUNDATIONS OF THE REVIEW

### Who Are Insider Social Change Agents

The literature on social change agents has a rich but fragmented history, evolving from different fields such as management (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), political science (McMichael & Weber, 2000), psychology (Elder, 1994), and sociology (Sztompka, 2003). We found that twelve different academic terms were used across the literature for this type of change agent (See Table 1 for definitions and key citations).

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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We settle on the encompassing term *insider social change agents*, to describe individuals or groups of individuals inside businesses who seek to propel their organization toward contributing to social change. We use this broad definition of positive social change: “the process of transforming patterns of thought, behavior, social relationships, institutions, and social structure to generate beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities, organizations, society, and/or the environment beyond the benefits for the instigators of such

transformations” (Stephan et al., 2016: 1252). Social change processes can generate impacts both inside and beyond existing organizations. While we position our review chiefly in the context of catalyzing business responses, our aim is to integrate knowledge about insider social change agents across a variety of organizational settings in which they are active (e.g., hospitals, non-profits, government agencies, the military—all of which are increasingly using business-like logics and market-based strategies).

We define *insider social change agents* as persons working from within an organization to advance changes linked to external societal concerns, which have purposes distinct from the core strategies and operations of the organization, and which require mobilization activities to work against the grain to advance broad social change goals. Each element of this definition is important. First, we focus on persons as catalyzing individuals who spark social change from the inside, while recognizing that an early move is often to generate groups of persons to work collectively. We also note that, while beginning with persons, we also see enabling and inhibiting contextual factors as vital. The next elements of the definition distinguish social change from insider change efforts more generally. While there are shared elements in undertaking any kind of insider change that can be informative, such as selling a new position, addressing concerns, or finding allies, social change is quite distinctive with its linkages to external issues, distance from the organizational core, and provocative content. The motives are not the improvement of organizational functioning in status quo terms, but rather addressing externally urgent societal issues via organizational functioning. The means to this end may ultimately be to show alignment with core organizational purposes such as profit maximizing, but at the outset, tension will exist between these externally oriented goals and what the organization (and those who benefit most from it) will typically support. Corporations are not designed to deliver on societal problems but can be used to do so with some savvy and perseverance. Thus the need to work against the grain, shift status quo



approaches, be provocative, and take risks—giving this kind of change work an essence distinct from making generic changes as an insider.

### **The Role of Insider Social Change Agents**

Insiders mobilizing for social change have been widely depicted in the literature. They experiment with pilot projects, collaborate with external social change agents, and mobilize other insiders to spread positive social change strategies across organizational practices. Some examples offer a flavor for the level and type of their efforts and issues, such as reducing toxic emissions by invoking “lean production” logics to decrease car paint waste (Rothenberg, Pil, & Maxwell, 2001); operating on the ground to make extractive industries more responsive to local human rights issues (Batruch, 2014); developing insider network ties to improve conditions for low wage workers (Davis & White, 2015; Erickson, Fisk, Milkman, Mitchell & Wong, 2002); appealing to consumer data to make the business case for more inclusive financial products for populations traditionally excluded by race, nationality, or sexual orientation (DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed, 2020); translating activist pressures to bring managerial attention to green information systems that reduce carbon emissions (Carberry, Bharati, Levy and Choudhury, 2019); and leveraging purchasing power to push for greener supply chains (Srivastava, 2007). These activities suggest how agents embedded in organizations can propel meaningful organizational action on societal and environmental challenges, despite organizational tendencies toward inertia (DiMaggio, 1988). Their actions both differ from and complement external pressures typically examined in macro studies of corporate social change, which include diffusion of corporate social change through board interlocks (Briscoe & Safford, 2008), corporate social change through expanded legal compliance (Armenia, Gerstel & Wing, 2014), or corporate social change in response to boycotts (McDonnell & King, 2013).

## **Intellectual Genealogy of Insider Social Change Agent Literature: Five Parallel Streams**

Documented examples of insider social change agents involved in a variety of efforts have recently escalated. From a contemporary standpoint, this body of work appears to align with rising calls for management and organization studies to engage with grand challenges. However, even before these contemporary calls (George et al., 2016; Caza, Heaphy, Lawrence, Phillips, & Leroy, 2021), there was a long and far-reaching history of scholars examining how to mobilize companies' own operations to grapple with urgent societal issues of the times. Often, such research sprang more from the margins than in answer to direct mainstream calls. Tracing the intellectual genealogy of this work, we find five streams of research, each with origins in particular contexts and motivating questions (see Table 2). The five streams and their discipline anchors (in historical order of their origin publications), are: employee activism (social movements), issue selling and championing (strategy and organization studies), tempered radicalism (Black feminist theory), social intrapreneurship (entrepreneurship and CSR), and micro corporate social responsibility (CSR and business ethics).

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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Just as organizations are time-stamped by the historic issues and conditions at their time of founding (Stinchcombe, 1965), so too are these research streams. Even though each could be the subject of a dedicated review, we propose that integrating these fragmented literatures offers a more promising pathway toward understanding insider social change agents. The five streams point to certain root features that permit an integrative view of the nature and efforts of insiders, creating a robust portrait of how they operate across settings, issues, and alliances. At the same time, there are some notable differences across the streams, specifically regarding what needs changing, how radical to be, the normative tone, and the

potential efficacy of insider and incremental efforts in the face of severe and urgent issues. In pointing toward directions for future research, we consider whether the issues tackled hew closer to corporate goals or take a more disruptive approach, and how a constellation of such efforts might combine to scaffold broader changes.

The first stream, *employee activism*, originated with a call to analogize change efforts in organizations to how social movements are studied in sociology (Zald & Berger, 1978). Studies of social movements pivoted in the 1970s from what made people angry enough to protest, to what kind of resource mobilization might influence whether or not protests were mounted, in the face of likely ongoing reasons to protest (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The workplace appeared to offer a favorable context for resource mobilization, as potential activists were already co-located, communication channels were established, and meeting places existed. Those resources solved some social movement challenges of simply getting people together. They enabled grassroots efforts to originate inside the workplace, but in “unconventional opposition” and taking place “outside normal channels... at different locations in the [organization’s] social structure” (Zald & Berger, 1978: 825). Mobilization inside organizations was seen as an analog or counterpart to social movements in civic or political spaces. This early work points to positionality in the organization (the top, mid-level bureaucracy, or grassroots), tactics, contestation or alliances, and outcomes.

Increasingly, activism inside organizations was seen as not just an analog but as a medium for those social movement’s specific aims, such as civil rights or gender equity, when battles waged in the streets (in the 1960s) and in the courts (in the 1970s and 1980s) were taken up inside the corporation (Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Scully & Segal, 2002). Launched in 1978, this stream was stamped by the recency of vibrant social movements, documented especially in North America and Europe, involving protests over racism, workers’ rights, war, and nuclear power. The ongoing move from “streets to suites” (Weber, Rao & Thomas, 2009) continued

in the following decades, addressing issues ranging from the public health implications of affordable pharmaceuticals to corporate recycling programs. Drawing on the social movements literature, this stream offers concepts that are applied in studies inside organizations (Davis et al., 2005), including framing of issues to attract followers (Benford & Snow, 2000), passion for an issue (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2001), risk-taking and career risks (Taylor & Raeburn, 1995), and micromobilization contexts in which actors discover common interests and local opportunities (McAdam, 1988).

The *issue selling and championing* stream is more endogenous to the organization studies and strategy literatures (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Its origins are not in the domain of societal or environmental issues, instead addressing how any issue that an employee, especially in the middle ranks, sees as strategically important might gain attention from top managers, as a first step toward making decisions and changes. Defined as “individuals’ behaviors that are directed toward affecting others’ attention to and understanding of issues” within firms (Dutton & Ashford, 1993: 398), the concept of issue selling readily gained traction in translational writing on applied, practical change strategies. Early work drew upon existing concepts of upward influence and impression management. Empirical work added the concept of “moves” such as packaging moves to bundle an issue with other elements of business plans or goals, involvement moves to enroll peers and supervisors to informally or formally join the issue selling, and process moves to do pre-work and adjust the timing (Dutton, Ashford, O’Neill, & Lawrence, 2001). A pivotal article linking issue selling to advocacy for gender equity (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit & Dutton, 1998) forged issue selling as a vehicle for insiders to advance societally relevant causes.

Cross-citation among the five streams is surprisingly limited, given shared domains of concern, but the issue selling stream is an exception. It is invoked by the other streams, perhaps in part because it offers a practical toolkit for advocacy that applies across issues. It

could also be that invoking this concept, with its anchors in mainstream organization and strategy concepts, provides a patina of legitimacy to studies of insider advocacy, which are provocative and even risky in their own way, because they address efforts to shake up the status quo, change standard operating practices, work around the powerful, and address issues such as inequality and climate that can be quite controversial.

The *tempered radicalism* stream (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) attends to this very balancing act of remaining in the mainstream just enough to be taken seriously while using an insider's access and savvy to rock the boat to the extent possible. Tempered radicals are "individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations and also to a cause, community or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with, the dominant culture of their organization" (Meyerson & Scully, 1995: 585). This stream is anchored in the feminist literature, with specific connections to Black feminist scholarship on the tensions of belonging and exclusion for the "outsider within" (Collins, 1986, 2000). It has been taken up particularly in the literature on diversity in organizations (e.g., Kirton, Greene, & Dean, 2007), often to contrast the business case for diversity with the risks and benefits of pursuing a more radical commitment to inequality and redistribution. A central theme is the difficulty in sustaining a tempered radical stance, as pressures to assimilate into the organization and pressures to exit the organization create opposing pulls. If tempered radicals exit, (whether to pursue their passions in the political sphere or because their advocacy marginalizes them and stalls their careers), then there is a loss of insider catalysts for needed organizational changes.

As with the first two streams, some tactics are proposed, including using "linguistic jujitsu" (Meyerson & Scully, 1995: 597) to deploy the organization's own language to argue for change and finding affiliations that provide support in the face of discouragement. The "small wins" (Weick, 1984) strategy is explored, but with the caveat that going small in the face of anger over injustice drains energy: "to quell rage even temporarily in a way that feels

inauthentic can be neither desirable nor possible” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995: 595). The first two streams focus on tactics that make insider change possible but attend somewhat less to the risks. At the time of the first stream, attempting change inside organizations was seen as marginally safer than risky protests and clashes with the police (Gamson, Fireman & Rytina, 1982) or than increasingly crushed union strikes (McCartin, 2006). The tempered radical stream devotes as much attention to the risks of insiders’ action as to their tactics, including charges of hypocrisy by valued external activists, the emotional isolation of taking a calculative stance about true passions, and the cooptation pressures that emerge if the wins are very small, or conformity becomes enticing. Research in tempered radicalism shows the toll on insiders when they enact the notion of unconventional opposition named in the first stream.

The *micro-CSR stream* (for a review see Gond, El Akremi, Swaen, & Babu, 2017) is more recent and attends to how employees leverage their motivation, values, and purpose, as they are both affected by and can affect CSR—the corporate “actions that appear to further some social good, beyond the interests of the firm and that which is required by law” (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001: 117; for other definitions see Bansal & Song, 2017). This focus on the individual in CSR emerged in response to two key gaps in the history of CSR research: the ostensive focus on whether “it pays to be good” and the attention mainly to the organizational and institutional levels of analysis. Micro-CSR appeared with the promise of bringing back the social in CSR (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi, 2007) as well as fostering research that not only includes the individual level of analysis but also offers multilevel models of CSR that spotlight the effects on and the agency of human beings (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

Micro-CSR research challenges the narrow shareholder focus of corporations and goes beyond corporations’ symbolic efforts for society (e.g., philanthropy) and the environment

(e.g., creating recycling programs while maintaining polluting business models). The core question asked is how to broaden the logic of firms from a financial one to a hybrid one, where social value creation is embedded in and coupled with strategies and daily practices—a feat that is not possible without including employees (Collier and Esteban, 2007). Micro-CSR shows that employees feel greater alignment with their whole self when working not only for profit but also for the benefit of society and the planet (Glavas, 2016). Specifically, some of the key individual motivators to engage in CSR are alignment with personal values (Jones, Willness, and Madey, 2014; Swanson, 1995), finding deep purpose and meaning at work (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019), and greater organizational identification (De Roeck et al., 2016; Farooq et al., 2014). As this stream grows, specific processes and activities on how individuals bring about CSR change are increasingly studied and called for (Girschik, 2020b; Girschik, Svystunova, & Lysova, 2022). Implicit in this scholarship is a critique of the mechanistic profit-maximizing firm, encouraging a move towards a more humanistic workplace in which there is care for employees as individuals as well as what motivates them, and also care for external stakeholders, broader society, and the planet. This basis of critique is distinct from the social movement tradition of the first stream, which looks to radical and revolutionary ideologies that have questioned the distributive basis of capitalism (Martin, Scully & Levitt, 1990) and the feminist theorizing of the third stream, with its concerns for outsiders trying to make sense of organizations whose structures will not permit their fitting in (Collins, 1986).

While the first three streams focused particularly on inequality and civil rights, this stream has a substantial body of work on environmental issues, with CSR often intertwined with sustainability programs (Bansal & Song, 2017). This approach also brings attention to how individuals with formal roles in the CSR or sustainability domains might pursue the creation and implementation of insider-driven changes when they have an official mandate to do so

(e.g., Wickert & de Bakker, 2018), in contrast to the other streams where employee activists, issue sellers, and tempered radicals make their moves (sometimes stealthily) outside their formal roles. The micro-CSR approach also takes a more global view, launching in an era when the call to address grand challenges emanates from international bodies such as the United Nations. The work is global, considering both the issues and the locus of action, for example, recognizing human rights in the global supply chain as an issue, and multinational corporations as settings in which employees attempt a variety of locally-informed initiatives (e.g., Gutierrez-Huerter O, 2023). Embedding CSR throughout the organization requires employee engagement, particularly to move CSR from an after-market or outside-market strategy to one connected to core operations, at the heart of the next stream.

The more recent stream on *social intrapreneurship* (Alt, 2023; Austin et al., 2004; Hemingway, 2005) examines social entrepreneurship in the context of corporations, with its distinct focus on market means and methods to address social and environmental problems (Grayson, McLaren, & Spitzeck 2014; Davis & White, 2015). The emphasis is on transforming business at its core to create a new relationship to society (Ambos & Tatarinov, 2022; Austin & Reficco, 2009), by identifying, evaluating, and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities within established corporations that can advance social or environmental goals (Geradts & Alt, 2022). This stream has roots in both CSR and entrepreneurship research (Alt, 2023), emerging in parallel from studies of personal values as drivers of individual action to initiate CSR (Hemingway, 2005), and of individuals playing several roles in social or environmental intrapreneurship processes (Austin et al., 2004, 2006; Hostager, Neil, Decker, & Lorentz, 1998; Darcis, Hahn, & Alt, 2023)—an extension of early intrapreneurship and internal corporate venturing research (Bower, 1970; Burgelman, 1983; Kuratko, Montagno, & Hornsby, 1990; Pinchot, 1985).



As the most recent stream, social intrapreneurship builds on the other streams, specifically concerning the use of framing in social movements, issue selling, and the locus of micro-CSR for entrepreneurial action (Alt & Craig, 2016; Carrington, Zwick, & Neville, 2019). At the same time, this stream flows in a new channel to explore the creation of market opportunities for positive social change, such as new products, processes, and corporate ventures (e.g., Halme, Lindeman, & Linna, 2012; Summers & Dyck, 2011). Through the lenses of social intrapreneurship, insiders sell not only social and environmental issues but also solutions that have the potential to scale up in the mass markets occupied by corporations (Alt & Craig, 2016; Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, & Hansen, 2016), thus extending the outcomes of tempered radicalism beyond small wins.

These streams share three features. First, each one theorizes at the micro level and specifies how individual efforts can spark broader action. Second, they each address how these micro-actions are undertaken against the grain and in some sense against the odds. In organizational studies in general, there is abundant theorizing about how assimilation pressures on individuals or inertial pressures in organizations stifle action and reproduce the status quo. Against this backdrop, any insider activism seems unlikely. However, in each of the streams, study after study shows that these local actions do nonetheless arise. In the aggregation of these literatures, this insider action starts to look like it arises rather widely, and across multiple settings and issues. Third, each of the streams carries a (sometimes implicit) criticism that the root societal and environmental problems are not being substantively addressed in general and that for-profit organizations especially are not doing nearly enough. However, the critiques are muted as the literature, perhaps not unlike the insiders themselves, tempers its tone to publish in more mainstream outlets using business language and concerns. The radical roots become relevant when it is time to catalog the outcomes of these insider social change efforts, particularly whether local, embedded,

incremental, targeted strategies will be sufficient vis-à-vis the magnitude of the grand challenges.

### **REVIEW SCOPE AND PROCESS**

While our review is distinct from previous reviews, it is informed by others and contributes to multiple spaces. Existing reviews (see Table 1 of supplementary material) tend to be stream-specific, building on various related areas such as institutional theory (Battilana, Leca & Boxenbaum, 2009), organizational change (Stouten, Rousseau, & de Cremer, 2018), organizational psychology (Bolino & Grant, 2016), psychology (Lambert, Caza, Trinh, & Ashford, 2022), social movements and activism (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; Davis & Kim, 2021), CSR and sustainability (Gond et al., 2017), and social entrepreneurship (Stephan et al., 2016; Vedula et al., 2022). These differ from our review by examining organizational rather than individual level mechanisms (e.g., Battilana et al., 2009), construct clarity (e.g., Bansal & Song, 2017), general change efforts not related to social or environmental issues (e.g., Lambert et al., 2022), or ventures and movements outside corporations (e.g., Vedula et al., 2022).

Through a systematic search across over 150 journals (spanning social science areas such as management, psychology, sociology), we found a substantial dataset of 3,386 articles that were evaluated for inclusion, resulting in a sample of 409 articles (see Figure 1). We analyzed shared foundational features across this sample along the lines of how the person, place, activities, and outcomes propel change.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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### **Keywords and search string**

We identified keywords from six foundational articles (see Table 3; Table 2 of supplementary material) across the aforementioned five literature streams (two to cover issue

selling and championing), complementing these keywords with the expertise of the full research team. In consultation with university research librarians, we then developed an integrative search strategy and a search string based on characterizing insider social change agents along a combination of dimensions of their identity and roles (person), the context in which they operate (place), what they actually do (activities), and with what results (outcomes).

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Insert Table 3 about here  
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### **Database and journals**

We searched Web of Science for English-language articles and reviewed articles that contained a combination of our search terms in their title, abstract, or keywords. We narrowed the universe of publications to the Web of Science database (specifically: social sciences, business, management, sociology, political science, ethics and applied psychology) and journals included in the ABS list 4 and 4\*, as well as journals of selected disciplines of ABS 3 (see Table 3 of supplementary material for a full list of journals included in the search). The initial search, which was performed on March 28, 2022, yielded 2,755 results. An identical search was performed on May 9, 2023, to capture any articles that had been published (or that had become available in pre publication format) since our initial search. This second search returned an additional 631 papers. This search strategy led us to a total of 3,386 results. We did not limit the time frame in this robust and growing domain in order to capture both origins and the rising wave of recent work (see Figure 2).

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Insert Figure 2 about here  
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## **Robustness checks**

We selected 18 more recent articles from top journals that cite these foundational papers to confirm that they surface through our search (see Table 2 in supplementary material). In addition, we complemented our search by using a literature mapping tool, Litmaps, that recommends relevant papers based on the citation network of a set of seed papers. After entering our six foundational papers in the tool, we scanned the papers published in the last decade (2013-2023). Since insider social change agents are of interest across disciplines, in translational works, and among practitioners of insider social change tactics, we also engaged with books to capture some illustrative examples.

## **Inclusion, exclusion, and coding**

We analyzed the abstracts and excluded those that were not relevant to our research interest, using a set of defined criteria: 1) We include behaviors aimed at addressing social/environmental/ sustainability issues inside established organizations; 2) We focus on behaviors that not only tell organizations what not to do but what *to* do (with a proactive stance, mobilizing resources/others); 3) We exclude top-down behaviors coming from top management teams (C-suite); 4) We exclude behaviors tackling corporate illegal activities (e.g., whistleblowing).

Thereby, we identified a sample of 409 relevant articles. We first coded for the discipline area, key concepts (e.g., environmental, social, sustainability issues; level of management the article focuses on; the type of organization), and methods. We identified 148 articles that were relevant to inform our sensemaking of the phenomenon of insider social change agents. There were 34 articles of theoretical relevance: conceptual pieces or related reviews. The remaining 227 empirical articles form the core of our review, enabling us to integrate empirical research on insider social change agents. We noticed that much of the research is qualitative and relies on interviews, ethnographies, and observations. The quantitative studies

in our sample were largely survey-based. We interpreted this exploratory stance as further confirmation that while the phenomenon has been of research interest for a long time, an integrative review is needed to establish insider social change agents as a concept and move the field forward. Further, because insider social change agents are of interest across disciplines, in research translational works, and among practitioners of insider social change, we include books in our review as well.

Through abductive coding, we added subthemes to person, place, activities, and outcomes, derived from sample articles and insights. We also added a dimension on issues. Abstracting from and reflecting on the insights per dimension, we propose new research directions for using the characterization along the lines of person, place, issues, activities, and outcomes to analyze across studies about how change efforts compare, contrast, or collide, and for addressing some broader tensions and questions.

### **CHARACTERIZING INSIDER SOCIAL CHANGE AGENTS**

We open with a few of our overall observations from the literature. First, some studies in the empirical literature announce the discovery of insider social change agents as a surprise, in as much as inertia and conformity are strong forces and dissent is rare. In a study of resistance to diminished labor rights during increased outsourcing, this unlikely activism was named as an ongoing concern: “The challenge for scholars of organizational entrepreneurship is to understand the processes by which some individuals do engage in intra-organizational struggles, defying the laws of organizational inertia and its multiple forms of control despite both the uncertainty of success and the risk of dismissal or stigmatization” (Courpasson, Dany & Marti, 2016: 135). Studies with this framing portray insiders as singularities. They also caution that such change agents may seem like “heroes” even when they are exemplars of everyday employees’ engagement.

Second, it is interesting that, although through one lens these insider social change agents seem rare and unlikely, they now appear widely across studies, in varying roles and settings. The empirical literature is largely qualitative, drawing upon methods such as interviews (Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012), ethnography (Kellogg, 2009), interactive participant observation (Ramirez & Islam, 2022), and portraiture (Ngunjiri, 2010), generating a wide array of vivid characterizations through these qualitative data, each with its own vocabulary. Classic concepts such as framing (Snow et al., 1986) are deployed or given new twists (Creed, Scully & Austin, 2002; Hoffman, 2011; Howard-Grenville et al., 2017). Other studies offer an array of common action verbs given special conceptual meanings (anchoring, cultivating, encountering, extending, questioning, pitching, retelling). Still others create neologisms (such as “multivocal inscriptions,” Ferraro, Etzion & Gehman, 2015). This colorful proliferation brings to life the work of insiders but makes it hard to have a conversation among scholars with a shared lexicon for building toward broader understanding.

Toward that end, we characterize insider social change agents along the dimensions of person, place, activities, issues, and outcomes, which enables connections across studies. We find that these dimensions can help researchers approach this work systematically and locate broader patterns.

## **Person**

We craft a portrait of the persons who are insider social change agents, on the dimensions of role, identity, and motivations (see Table 4). They are not so much inherent characteristics as states through which a person can move dynamically, across settings, experiences, positions, and the life course. Any given person acting in an insider capacity might vary on these dimensions at different points in their journey. We do not start with portraiture of persons to reify the notion of individual heroes, quite the opposite. Knowing something about

the engaged persons is a grounded starting point, from which to study how collectivities and coalitions may form among these persons, across places, and through a range of activities.

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**Role: *Within and beyond.*** Some persons have an explicit job title or mandate that directs their attention to work that can have societal relevance. Such roles might be affirmative action officer (Edelman, Petterson, Chambliss, & Erlanger, 1991), corporate environmental scientist (Rothenberg & Levy, 2012), sustainability manager (Augustine & King, 2022; Ramirez & Islam, 2022; Sandhu & Kulik, 2018), CSR manager (Hedman & Henningsson, 2016; Hunoldt, Oertel, & Galander, 2020; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018), or director of diversity (Creed & Scully, 2000). For insiders who hold formal roles, their jurisdiction is explicitly regarding environmental and social issues. Having a formal role per se does not automatically make the person a social change agent. Ensuring compliance with corporate rules and external regulations does not necessarily constitute a push toward societal change. Insider social change agents aim to make change that exceeds their minimum mandate, and there are variations in the extent to which they inhabit the role with incremental or more provocative change in mind. Those persons holding formal positions may have greater resources for making change, but also increased pressure to buffer the organization from more substantial change (Rothenberg & Levy, 2012). Their role might be created by internal recognition of the need for the role or as a concession in the face of external agitation against the organization (Augustine, 2021). The origin of the role itself can affect whether their formal mandate is more central or more marginal.

Other persons who do not hold a formal role with a social mandate may also work as insider social change agents, beyond their regular work duties. They engage in voluntary actions to address social issues rather than doing so in fulfillment of their role's mandate

(Hargreaves, 2011; Easter, Ceulemans, & Lynn, 2021). Studies find such insiders hold any of a number of roles, including Vice President for Domestic Marketing at a Fortune 100 company (Bell et al., 2003), Protestant minister (Creed, DeJordy & Lok, 2010), NFL football player (Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe, 2023), janitor (Cranford, 2007), surgeon (Kellogg, 2009), or innovation manager (Darcis, Hahn, & Alt, 2023). The informal roles that they additionally take on can be visible or more backstage (Ramus & Steger, 2000). They sometimes bring their expertise from their home base role or their occupation to bear on their issue of concern, such as an engineer who uses technical knowledge to advocate for reduced waste. Having knowledge of business functions in general can open access to making change beyond role, for example, women in operational positions may step outside their usual role, but with business savvy, to address gender inequity (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit & Dutton, 1998).

***Identity: Values, social identity, occupation, privilege.*** Personal authenticity, or how someone is true to their own values, is an element of identity that can characterize insider social change agency when examined from an intrapersonal stance (Hemingway, 2005). Insiders may first craft a personal identity that helps make sense of their engagement in change (Sonenshein, DeCelles & Dutton, 2014), particularly where they perceive a gap between what they believe to be right normatively and what their organization is doing (Courpasson et al., 2016; Sonenshein, 2006). They seek to align work and values, anchored in how they “perceive themselves and their organizational roles” (Wickert & de Bakker, 2018: 50). Religious identity may guide some people to build on their spirituality, justifying in their minds their work toward socially beneficial change (Shin, Vu, & Burton, 2022). Values-driven individuals are generally committed to their organization—not alienated nor in the trap of cynicism (Courpasson et al., 2016). Their intrinsic values drive them to encourage the organization to change, both for a personal sense of alignment and for the benefit of the



organization (Bansal, 2003; Hemingway, 2005). For those anchored in values, “these actors consider what they do as the best expression of who they are” (Carrington, Zwick & Neville, 2019: 984).

On another dimension, social identity, such as race, gender, or sexual orientation, propels some people to assume the insider social change agent role, when they belong to a broader group that has faced injustice and exclusion in the workplace and beyond (Bell & Nkomo, 1998; Prengler, Chawla, Leigh, & Rogers, 2023; Seegars, 2021). These social identities each have narratives and ideologies available from related external social movements—in the form of anti-racist, feminist, and LGBTQ+ civil rights activism (Creed, Scully & Austin, 2002). Formal organizational diversity roles are often held by those for whom greater equality is also on the agenda: “Many of the people who do diversity work and who are familiar with the relevant legislation and all the concomitant discourses, arguments, tactics, techniques and training agendas are women, and many are from racialized minorities” (Swan & Fox, 2010: 569). For other employees not in a formal role, their social identity may nonetheless mark them as a change agent, even if they prefer to work more quietly without wearing the mantle of change agent. For Black women, “having a racial obligation and speaking out against injustice are just parts of everyday life... Black women did not feel they had a choice about whether to act in the face of injustices. They were tempered radicals almost by the very fact of their positions in White-dominated organizations” (Bell et al., 2003: 391). Employees with intersectional social identities may find they are “singing in more than one choir” (Creed & Scully, 2000: 405). Having an identity-based social movement connection “charges up activists’ efforts,” even as they keep in mind that their social identity in the workplace context may not be as boldly claimed as their social identity in the external sphere (Scully & Segal, 2002:160).

An occupational identity might propel individuals to consider change, as part of a sense of obligation to the commitments of their profession. Those who hold the portfolio for diversity might come into the role with awareness of certain dimensions of diversity, perhaps sexism and racism, and their professionalism compels them to learn and speak up about other dimensions such as LGBTQ+ issues (DeJordy et al., 2020). Occupational commitment to sustainability can motivate alignment between mandates and tasks, such as working on green chemistry or reducing automobile emissions (Augustine, 2021; Howard-Grenville et al., 2017; Rothenberg & Levy, 2012). Commitment to one's occupational identity can be an important anchor in insider social change agents' efforts (DiBenigno, 2018).

A final element of identity is a person's degree of privilege to do the work, such as their socioeconomic status. It might be easier to take the risks of working "against the grain" with the cushion of a decent livelihood, and riskier for people of lower socioeconomic standing engaged directly in the fight for wages (Rosile et al., 2021). Privilege affords freedom to speak up and even to amplify the voice of less privileged others who attempt to speak up (Satterstrom, Kerrissey & DiBenigno, 2021). While privilege may leave a person uninterested in changing the status quo from which they have systematically benefitted, some "privileged insiders" may "commit to transformative change when they acknowledge their complicity in the perpetuation of institutional injustices" (Feront, 2021: 1). The privilege of a high and visible level of talent might open opportunities for impactful disruptions, while not completely buffering from consequences (Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe, 2023). Privilege may confer vital material and psychological resources for being able to take on insider social change agent commitments, with less fear that reprisals will threaten material well-being.

***Motivation: Life experience, calling, emotion.*** Life experiences may link to the development of an insider social change agent identity. Turning points in the life course provide new narratives and the possibility of identifying as a leader in arenas like CSR

(Hemingway & Starkey, 2018). Over time, change agents may gain more experience in receiving and maintaining power (Kellogg, 2019). Some insiders may take a more expansive view of their role over time, through accumulated experience or being lobbied by others. Employees who have engaged in activism outside the workplace, in civic or movement spaces, may tap this life experience and channel it toward insider activism (Courpasson et al., 2016). Life experiences can matter earlier in the life course as well (Tannock, 2001), with younger people identifying as activists and finding sites and mentors for activism, especially if they face growing employment precarity and climate anxiety.

As followers of a calling, some change agents deeply embody a sense that they must take action. Ministers pursuing LGBTQ+ inclusion from inside their church “experienced their roles as a calling, both deeply meaningful and emotionally charged,” referring to both their ministerial and change agent roles (Creed et al., 2010: 1359). People who identify strongly with an organization they are trying to change may experience “split identification” in order to balance both a faithful calling and a dissident identity (Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville & Scully, 2010; Katzenstein, 1998). While having a calling is directly pertinent for faith-based settings, the metaphor of a calling to action also arises in other settings, such as change agents thinking about human suffering or planetary crises in a spiritual or philosophical way. A deep calling animates indigenous peoples’ adaptive strategies for resilience in facing climate changes, by drawing upon native knowledge and language (Athayde & Silva-Lugo, 2018). A sense of the deep stakes for future generations imbues the work of some insiders worried about the environment: “As an existential threat not only to our economic, social and physical well-being, but to our identities, climate change challenges our understanding of ourselves as individuals and as a species within a broader ecosystem” (Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012: 1492).

Emotions can play a role as motivations for insider social change agents. These could be a “sense of passion and possibility generated by feminist activism” (Bendl, Danowitz & Schmidt, 2014: 322), hope in the human ingenuity to address climate change (Easter et al., 2021; Wright & Nyberg, 2012), or feelings of organizational pride around gender equity policies (Wang, Whitson, King, & Ramirez, 2021). If positive emotions can fuel the spark of insider social change agency, so can negative emotions (Zietsma & Toubiana, 2018). Feelings of despair, fear, and guilt are often internalized, but may reach a threshold that prompts insiders to take action (Blomfield, Troth, & Jordan, 2016; Crane, 2000; Piderit & Ashford, 2003; Wright & Nyberg, 2012). Insiders at the New York and New Jersey Port Authority, for example, acted on their feelings of embarrassment and anger after receiving negative press coverage on the organization’s response to homelessness, by forming a Homeless Project Team (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).

Emotions can also constrain individuals. Fear can raise risk calculations that silence potential insider social change agents (Ashford et al., 1998). The anger that often propels social movement action outside organizations can play out differently inside organizations, translating into fear about potential negative consequences that may stall action (DeCelles, Sonenshein, & King, 2020). Insiders may receive a variety of nicknames that raise feelings of stigma (Creed et al., 2010), such as beads and brains, cranks, or hippies (Augustine, 2021; Crane, 2000; Wright et al., 2012). They can even encounter threats. Despite open hostility toward them, highly motivated LGBTQ+ activists moved their work inside organizations in the 1990s, and “it is gay employee activists who deserve credit for the entire first wave of corporate adoptions [of domestic partner benefits] and for a significant portion of policy extensions even still” (Raeburn, 2004: 11). Fear of reprisal and physical harm, and even deep feelings of discouragement, can be kept in perspective by keeping an “eye on the prize,” as

the U.S. civil rights refrain goes (Elbach & Erlinger, 2006); a sense of chasing a bigger and longer term goal is motivating.

*Tensions and questions.* We find that persons are generally committed to, rather than alienated from, their organization and are inspired to push it to change, from a variety of standpoints, including being motivated to realize personal values and to hinge them onto organizational values (Bansal, 2003; Hemingway, 2005). They are motivated by enacting the histories and stories of a social identity (Bell et al. 2003) or holding a formal mandate (e.g., Augustine, 2021). As these persons with different capacities and motives mobilize to deliver change and ultimately generate outcomes, it is worth considering some of the tradeoffs and connections. There can be tradeoffs between having the mandate of a formal role versus operating independently behind the scenes, perhaps between having more power or having more informal leeway. There are connections between having a visible social identity related to a cause, such as a Black woman being the Chief Diversity Officer, which may legitimize holding a formal role, or may cause some stakeholders to marginalize it. Strong moral motivations for a cause may be an asset for perseverance, or a tax when issues are made transactional. Whatever motivations individuals have for an issue, their level of privilege may shape how much or how safely they can get involved. Opportunities for less privileged workers to address urgent labor issues, which they are well-poised to see and explain, may require privileged allies, or a fresh consideration of how emotions may influence the courage to mobilize against the odds.

Motivation, identity, and role are also dynamic facets. While social identities may seem given, their enactment and social construction can vary across settings. Motivations can be relational and may change as individuals encounter one another during the change effort, which is ultimately a collective of persons who are each pursuing, but also exchanging, motivations and ideas. Roles also continue to change, with any given person not fixed in

having or not having a role with a social mandate, or indeed a fixed position within organizations (e.g., Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022). Beyond that simple duality, there is room to explore how persons may create a new role for themselves (Augustine & King, 2022), resign from a role to escape from silence and be more of a free agent (Creed, 2003), exit to be more fully part of a social movement (Segal, 1996), or move to another organization to take on a related role and thereby build a tie across an ecosystem (DeJordy et al., 2020). The places in which individuals enact their change efforts will shape these opportunities and constraints.

## **Place**

Including the importance of place in studies of insider social change agents provides an understanding of context. It uncovers factors that either enable or constrain their efforts depending on where they are situated. Place appeared in our review of the literature in four ways: predominantly as the organization and structures that insiders navigate precisely by working from the inside, and additionally as networks, as the field, and as the embeddedness of these different levels. See Table 5 for more details on the multiple aspects of place.

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***Organizational characteristics.*** Studies that focus on organizational characteristics emphasize how change efforts start and grow with the availability of relational spaces, and physical space for organizing (e.g. Kellogg, 2009; Heinze & Weber, 2016). Offline physical spaces in the workplace allow insiders to connect in ways that are less structured, safer, and alongside but not necessarily part of their everyday work. Relational spaces, “arenas insulated from the control of elites in organizations” (Rao & Dutta, 2012: 625), give insiders a place away from blockers of change who defend the status quo (Kellogg, 2009). The idea of micro-

mobilization spaces from the social movements literature appears as a resource for insiders, where they can discover they are not alone and instead make attributions about what are systemic issues rather than personal challenges (Scully & Segal, 2002) and create collective empowerment (Rao & Dutta, 2012).

Position in the organizational hierarchy affects insider social change agents. Having the support, or at least perceived support, of higher-level managers is an important resource. One's direct superior within the organization can catalyze greater efforts by change agents through signaling sustainability values and rewarding performance (Juravle & Lewis, 2009; Raineri & Paille, 2016). From the middle of the hierarchy, attention turns upward and relative positional power is significant in trying to have influence. Sometimes it can be difficult to gauge whether there is upper-level support for an issue, and over-stepping on a controversial issue, from a position of less power, can have career costs (Ashford et al., 1998). Upward influence is often necessary but difficult for insiders pushing alternative ideas. Spaces that provide even brief moments of opportunity for access to those in power can make a difference in pushing for changes (DiBenigno, 2020). Upper management can be an impediment, setting limits upon attempted changes, even when insiders are entrepreneurial, well-connected, and skilled in stewarding change over time (Halme et al. 2012; Courpasson et al., 2016).

While the role that an insider may hold can matter, so too does the department in which they operate and the mandates given to departments. Insiders tap different opportunity structures within organizations, which can open or close avenues for social change (e.g. Briscoe, Chin & Hambrick, 2014; Easter et al., 2021). If an issue such as sustainability is embedded widely across departments in an organization, change agents may have more latitude and legitimacy to operate (Hargreaves, 2011) as the organization's more open opportunity structure expands insiders' ability to engage others (Schifeling & Soderstrom,

2022). Further, a CEO's support surrounding an issue was found to be important in shaping opportunity structures, especially when the workforce is generally conservative and the social change effort is in an early stage (Briscoe et al., 2014). The organization's political ideology as reflected across leaders and co-workers can influence the extent to which the action of insiders is seen as disruptive of workplace norms (Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe, 2023).

A defining aspect of place for insider social change agents is that they operate in organizations that have profit-maximizing purposes and corporate logics. In this context, it can be difficult to mobilize around certain issues that are hard to locate as business relevant, such as using slack resources set aside for product development to create products for the poor (Halme et al., 2012) or using voice channels that are open but not receptive to issues that deviate from customers and profits (Kessinger, 2023). If an organization has incentives and policies around social change efforts, like mandates to address sustainability (Sandhu & Kulik, 2019), environmental policies (Raineri & Paille, 2016) or performance incentives (Sarvaiya, Eweje & Arrowsmith, 2018), insiders may be more likely and able to mobilize change.

The organizational pressure towards profitability is influenced by where in an organization an insider social change agent operates. Being closer to the core organizational operations, for example in terms of protecting labor as outsourcing grows, can bring closer and more problematic scrutiny (Courpasson et al., 2016), while being in the periphery may be a place where more experimentation is possible. However, when an insider is located more closely to the core, there might be more slack resources and voice opportunities (Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022). Fundamentally, many organizations in which insiders seek to operate are commercial contexts, with a strong culture and ideology focused on profitability, and as such, the conditions in the market will broadly affect insider options. Depending upon whether the organization faces a strong market or a market in crisis, moves that insiders might make to



bridge to external political contexts may be more or less possible, effective, or joined collectively by allies (Barron, 2023).

**Networks.** Insider social change agents are situated with access to networks both within and beyond their organization as well. Insiders draw upon personal and professional networks to generate cross-organizational connections (e.g. Drechsler, Reibenspiess, Eckhardt & Wagner, 2021; Howard-Grenville, 2007). Those in organizations of greater scale can push changes ahead through a network of organizations working to address social issues (Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022). Their connections may be beyond the business domain, to scientists, policymakers, or activists, giving them a place at the boundaries between different worlds (DeJordy et al., 2020; Rothenberg, 2007; Rothenberg & Levy, 2012).

Networks can provide insider social change agents access to resources, both funding and people, that can support the change efforts (Soderstrom & Weber, 2020); DiBenigno, 2020). Further, network connections help transmit knowledge and information about exemplars, new technology, and new skills that can support change efforts as well as lessons around previous successes and failures (Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022; Buchter, 2020). Importantly, as insider social change agents often navigate isolation, burnout, or failure, access to these networks enables them to gain social support, reassurance, and motivation to persist (Pamphile, 2022; Soderstrom & Weber, 2020).

**Field.** The field often manifests straightforwardly as the source of the “social” change issues that form the focus of what insider social change agents do. However, there is room for the field to be explored as a factor that enables, constrains, or shapes the change effort. Regulatory environments influence how different issues are considered and what efforts are required by corporations (Edelman et al., 1991) or expected within certain industries or fields (Hoffman, 1999). Further, conventions and norms affect how issues are perceived and more or less accepted across societies (Girschik, 2019). While initially work on social movements

and issue selling tended to have a US focus, work has since showcased insiders in other societal contexts, including environmentalists in Australia (Wright et al., 2012), diversity professionals in the UK (Kirton et al., 2007), and spiritual leadership across organizations in African nations (Ngunjiri, 2010). In multinational organizations, insiders may be jolted into action when they observe human rights being violated (Batruch, 2014) in face of regulatory differences across the corporate footprint. Thus far this research has mostly been focused on developing generalized insights, however, and not on offering transnational comparisons of societal context.

***Embeddedness.*** Networks, organizations, and fields do not exist independent from each other. Rather, our review highlights that they are embedded across multiple levels: Individuals or organizations are embedded in various interconnected levels, such as networks, organizations, and larger societal contexts. Cultural and political opportunities in the field facilitate organizational toolkits (Kellogg, 2011). An organization's embeddedness in the social system can amplify or dampen the efforts of insider social change agents. Girschik (2020a) shows how Novo Nordisk embedded itself in the local society as part of the solution to addressing a social ill. This embeddedness enabled insiders to redefine the roles and responsibilities of the organization. The way embeddedness surfaces in research to date is mostly through the lens of a focal firm or organization in which the insider social change agent is active. For example, Summers and Dyck (2011) showed how insider social change agents took external roles in professional boards and associations to gain status and amplified 'extra-organizational' changes because of the Civil Rights movement and Equal Employment opportunities to advocate for the hiring of a cadre of African-American management trainees.

One lens at this embedded consideration of place is the open polity perspective, which has origins in the stream of work on how social movements impact organizations (Zald, Morrill & Rao, 2005). This perspective recognizes how organizations are porous to external groups

and how insights flow between the organization and society (e.g. De Jordy et al., 2020; Heyden, Wilden, & Wise, 2020). For example, Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022) explore how social change agents expand focus on climate change and show that organizational characteristics of scale (organizational characteristics) and preparedness and prior commitments (opportunity structures) are important, but also that external resources via networks combine with these to provide different pathways for change.

Even in the face of greater embeddedness across types of place, boundaries between them, in the form of demarcations or limits, influence the realms in which insider social change agents are active. Boundaries can be physical, meaning the actual organizational site and its building or property boundaries. However, boundaries can also be socially-constructed through agreements and societal rules. Rothenberg (2007) shows how environmental managers span boundaries to manage technical and institutional pressures, recognizing different pressures and motivations across different spheres and aligning efforts to best fit across boundaries.

***Tensions and questions.*** The open questions related to place come from relative silences in the data, three of which we focus upon here. First, the organizations studied are those where access is possible and insiders can broach change, which creates some selection bias. The most severe societal issues to be addressed may occur in organizations embedded in oppressive or crisis contexts, for example where child labor is exploited. Insiders might take on an issue such as enforcing voluntary standards for the treatment of labor in sweatshops, and political context will shape the degree to which these can succeed, and even be observed (Locke & Romis, 2010). The profit-maximization imperative creates a wide array of organizational contexts, some seemingly impervious to oversight and activism.

Second, the very notion of being an “insider” is shifting as employment and careers take new forms. At the core, insider social change agents are insiders, but from within what

boundaries of place? With employee attachment to any particular organization waning, they may only be insiders to an organization for a short period of time. The essence of “insiderness” was to learn the ropes over a sometimes rather long period of observing practices and waiting for moments of opportunity. However, that long-term insider identity has grown rare in current labor markets. Those bonds of connection to some kind of place as an insider may be remade through digital platforms, which can connect insiders within and across places, and are indeed becoming new types of places in their own rights. Insiders may instead become insiders to an industry, a profession, a regional ecosystem, or even a platform, but less so to a single organization.

Third, organizations are embedded in the political sphere, which impacts insiders’ options. Other insiders working for corporations act as lobbyists, who pursue the repeal of regulations, legislation that is weak, or rules that favor powerful interests and the status quo. There is a paradox that some insiders work for corporate change, while others work to create the political sphere conditions that would impede change (Reich, 2007). Corporate spokespersons for CSR loudly tout corporate change initiatives, while a possibly much larger cadre of lobbyists steadily pushes for legislation that would diminish or undermine those very initiatives. New legislation is often hard won by external activists and then serves as the impetus for change agents who seek to shape how it is implemented and to keep its spirit and letter intact (Edelman, 2020; Kellogg, 2011x). The political sphere is an overarching aspect of place, studied separately in its own right, but worth connecting to the parameters of insider efforts. The dimension of place sets the context for examining how activities are undertaken.

### **Activities**

One of the challenges for researchers working in this area is connecting across the disparate and multi-faceted findings about social change agency activities to uncover patterns. We note that many articles offer verbs to describe their findings about the actions of

insider social change agents, using some common terms such as framing, but also many original terms that emerge as labels of detailed qualitative data coding. Assessments of how the efforts of insider social change agents might link to one another, aggregate to greater impact, or peter out require a common template for the activities they perform. In our iterative reading about the multiple moves of insiders, we found that their activities converged into seven categories: preparing, motivating, connecting, resourcing, implementing, evaluating, and coping (see Table 6). These seven categories derive from an extensive and detailed coding of the literature and offer a shared lexicon of activities. Taken together, they comprehensively capture the types of activities observed by researchers, and more broadly, they map the conceptual landscape of what insiders actually do. Using this lexicon, we examine the content of insiders' work, offering specific insight not only on their routine practices, but also on their more creative and occasionally illegitimate moves.

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***Preparing.*** To initiate action, the most primal activity of insider social change agents is identifying a social issue that can be addressed from within the organization, or a potential solution to an issue that may or may not yet be relevant in that context (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Hedman & Henningsson, 2016; Rothenberg, 2007). To this end, insiders develop expertise on social issues, as well as on internal data, systems, and processes (Rothenberg & Levy, 2012). The work of preparing, however, not only characterizes the beginnings of change agency, but also the periods of introspection that equip insiders between periods of action, as they learn from their efforts, reflect upon experiences, and make adjustments (Howard-Grenville, 2007). Such learning may lead insiders to minimize the threats of social change efforts, taking care to maintain cooperative relationships and affirm jurisdictional boundaries (Clune & O'Dwyer, 2020; DiBenigno, 2020), or alternatively

narrowing their focus to avoid associations with contentious or politicized issues (Augustine, 2021).

***Motivating others.*** To advance positive social change initiatives, insider social change agents must motivate others to act by developing a vocabulary that inspires that action, typically through framing activities. Extant research shows that transferring moral motives to framing activities is a natural impetus for many insiders (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Bansal, 2003; Carrington et al., 2019). Nonetheless, most studies examining moral framing activities also include their instrumental counterpart: the framing of social issues in terms of financial opportunities, economic efficiency, workforce retention, and quality issues, among other corporate objectives (e.g., Creed et al., 2002; Howard-Grenville & Hoffman, 2003; Sonenshein, 2006). Although moral and instrumental framing can coexist in corporations, studies show that the primacy of the latter is clear: moral framing activities seldom stand on their own, whereas instrumental framing activities do, requiring insider social change agents to align frames with business concerns. Research on insiders shows that frame alignment is a central component of their work. When insiders align, framing is not so much a matter of revealing the moral underpinnings of the required change, but a matter of saying what audiences want to hear to get the job done (e.g., Bansal, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Rothenberg, 2007; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018; Sonenshein, 2006). However, some studies have recently observed that insider social change agents may need only to give the impression of alignment, seeking instead to appropriate business frames—such as accounting (Ball, 2007; Rodrigue & Picard, 2022)—to insert moral motives into the corporation like the mythical Trojan horse (Carrington et al., 2019; Girschik, 2020)

Alternatively, other motivating activities can take a more transparent and authentic pathway for both insiders and their audiences. The activity of creating shared meanings, for example, enables insiders to meet their audiences halfway, by putting social issues in familiar

terms, while promoting desired interpretations (Creed et al., 2002; Howard-Grenville, 2007; Girschik, 2020b). On the other hand, a focus on appealing to the differences among occupational roles in addressing social issues (instead of commonalities) can also serve some insiders (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017).

The motivating repertoire of insider social change agents does not stop at the intersection of morality and instrumentality. To bring the gravity of social problems closer to audiences, insiders deploy emotional framing—tapping into the positive or negative emotions of audiences and emphasizing the opportunity to advance the well-being of potential beneficiaries (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Geradts et al., 2022; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018). Conversely, the emphasis can shift from benefit attainment to harm avoidance, when insiders use compliance frames and appeal to policies and regulatory threats to mobilize others (Howard-Grenville, 2007; Rothenberg, 2007).

Beyond the content of the motivating activities of insider social change agents, some studies draw attention to the form of insiders' messages, as well as the channels through which they are delivered, as stressed in the issue selling tradition (Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Social issues framed in instrumental terms, for example, may require a more formal presentation style, whereas those framed in emotional terms may require the use of graphic content and media such as an existing film about the issue (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; Carrigan et al., 2011; Geradts et al., 2022). While most motivating activities covered in extant research show insider social change agents choosing a route of persuasion and consensus building, insider action can also take a disruptive turn. Soule (2009), for example, documented how Polaroid employees protested against the firm's stance on South African apartheid in the seventies. More recently, Rheinhardt and colleagues have shown how NFL players have used their organizations as a platform to demonstrate solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, through symbolic protest ("taking a knee") targeting external

stakeholders instead of their organizations (Rheinhardt, Briscoe, & Joshi, 2023; Rheinhardt, Poskanzer, & Briscoe, 2023).

Importantly, studies show that motivating is a continuous effort beyond individual initiatives. Insider social change agents may well have their careers terminated or decide to leave, but nonetheless “exit with a bang,” inspiring others to continue the action (Courpasson et al., 2016; Kessinger, 2023). Even when stagnation and complacency might loom over social change efforts, insiders strive to keep their stories of incomplete change alive, and avoid settling on small wins (DeJordy et al., 2020).

***Connecting.*** As insider social change agents go about motivating others, a range of connecting activities is set in motion, developing the relationships and the relational spaces that enable positive social change initiatives to flourish. On many occasions, connecting activities start with the purpose of learning from outsiders who have expertise on social and environmental issues, such as setting up guest speaker series and reaching out to scientists (e.g., Rothenberg & Levy, 2012). It is the building of coalitions, however, that stands out as the backbone of insiders’ social change efforts, be it through internal coalitions—such as employee resource groups (Briscoe et al., 2014; Scully, 2009; Seegars, 2021), or external partnerships and cross-organizational efforts, including worker coalitions (Andersson & Bateman, 2000; DeJordy et al., 2020; Rosile, Boje, Herder, & Sanchez, 2021).

While extant research is unequivocal on the importance of bringing people together to enact change, relatively less is known about how insider social change agents can foster effective coalitions. Kellogg’s extensive ethnographic work on insiders pushing for patient safety and reduced hours in hospitals provides two foundational insights into what characterizes such coalitions: developing a collective feeling across hierarchical positions, and talking to colleagues beyond work issues (Kellogg, 2009, 2011, 2012). Subsequent research crystallized this development of collectivity around positive social change efforts in



two interconnected activities: intentional convening and promoting quality interactions. Intentional convening raises attention around who—across gender, race, function—and how to convene—fostering engagement through participatory devices (Heinze & Soderstrom, 2023). Promoting quality interactions, in turn, deepens attention to the mode of convening, with insiders facilitating connections that leave traces of attention, motivation, knowledge, and relationships, thus lasting beyond the moment (Soderstrom & Weber, 2020). Such interactions might even start in one-on-one interactions, as when insiders trying to reach different occupational groups strive to treat others as individuals rather than group representatives (DiBenigno, 2018).

In addition to bringing together the voices of different groups, connecting activities can also include various forms of expressing these voices and connecting them with different audiences. Lower-power and underrepresented insider social change agents, for example, have a better chance of being heard if higher-power insiders and leaders vouch for the importance and the feasibility of their ideas (Bain, Kreps, Meikle, & Tenney, 2021; Satterstrom, Kerrissey, & DiBenigno, 2021). Ensemble storytelling (Rosile et al., 2021), on the other hand, shifts connecting activities from a hierarchical to a heterarchical form. Drawing on an indigenous sense of collectivity (Rosile, Boje, & Claw 2018), ensemble storytelling brings together the voices of many workers as well as non-human life, fostering solidarity without the “tyranny of consensus.”

**Resourcing.** While forming connections, insider social change agents also typically set out to resource their initiatives. Even though resources in corporations may be plentiful, resourcing approaches to insiders’ social change initiatives may require bricolage (e.g., using one’s own free time, repurposing technologies), as well as the acquisition of external resources and grant funds (Halme et al., 2012; Molloy et al., 2020). Acquiring external resources enables insiders to gain jurisdiction over the resources needed to advance their

efforts—such as offices and salaries to formalize free spaces (Heinze & Weber, 2016). Media coverage, another key external resource, can also aid insiders seeking legitimacy and attention, for example, through positive coverage of social change initiatives (Grayson et al., 2014). Furthermore, assuming representative or external roles (e.g., union representative, professional board member) can endow insiders with unique access to resources, such as restricted documents and high status (Courpasson et al., 2016; Heinze & Weber, 2016).

When insider social change agents cannot access needed resources and disagree with organizational decisions, they may resource initiatives with methods for organizing dissent. A study of tech workers advocating for social issues shows how insiders co-opted internal voice mechanisms—such as town hall meetings and digital chat tools—to air grievances and mobilize collective action, before making grievances public through petitions, walkouts, and other contentious forms of action (Kessinger, 2023). In a similar vein, insiders may also seek to empower external partners and other insiders by providing implementation resources. Some insiders design trainings and templates to assist other industry insiders with their change initiatives (Buchter, 2020; DeJordy et al., 2020), or help organizations identify the best external resources to advance social change (e.g., Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022).

***Implementing.*** To put plans into operation, insider social change agents perform a range of implementing activities, which typically require innovation, collaboration, and adaptation, as positive social change initiatives often do not align with corporate systems. Well-connected and resourced insiders tap into their organization’s political toolkit, using and shaping organizational systems and structures to enable and include insiders and their actions (Daudigeos, 2013; Kellogg, 2011; Wang, Whitson, King, & Ramirez, 2021).

If connecting activities revolve around bringing together different groups of people and their voices, implementing activities require consideration of when and how to involve others in taking action. Extant research shows insider social change agents involving others as co-

creators of projects, strategies, and solutions to conflict (Barron, 2023; Faccer, 2020; DiBenigno, 2020), as well as implementers of initiatives, requiring actions to facilitate collaborations across occupational identities and organizational silos (DiBenigno & Kellogg, 2014). Successful insiders also enlist support by managing the cost-benefit of participating in social change initiatives, such as designing features that benefit participants or taking on tasks for others (e.g., Bode et al., 2019; Carrigan et al., 2011). This is particularly important for change agents implementing intrapreneurial strategies, as they experiment with social issues through products, services, and business models (Summers & Dyck, 2011; Halme et al., 2012; Heinze & Weber, 2016), which require the support of other organizational members.

Delivering social change, however, does not always require novel initiatives: some insiders may accomplish it by adapting global strategies to fit local contexts (e.g., Gutierrez-Huerter O, 2023; Shin, Cho, Brivot, & Gond, 2022), or by resisting pushback, either in covert or overt ways—such as working underground on projects that leaders ordered terminated, or openly challenging antagonists (Courpasson et al., 2016; Halme et al., 2012; Kellogg, 2011).

Even when insiders' actions achieve success, recent evidence raises attention to the importance of not taking results for granted and maintaining the effort. Success in free organizational spaces does not guarantee success when insiders break into the organizational core (Heinze & Weber, 2016; Kimsey et al., 2023). Social change initiatives require continuous work to renew or expand efforts in the face of new waves of pushback (Schüßler et al., 2023).

***Evaluating.*** A key aspect of the human ability to exercise agency is the capacity for practical evaluation, not only of projects but also of the self (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Research on insider social change agents shows that evaluating activities are not limited to specific project stages, but an ongoing feature of social change efforts. The optimism with which insiders evaluate their chances of success might influence how to deliver change

efforts (Kellogg, 2011), as well as the extent to which they reflect on the tensions and paradoxes that emerge along the way (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Heucher, 2021). Turning attention to the self, insiders engage in self-evaluations of their effectiveness as change agents or social issue supporters (Sonenshein et al., 2014; Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017; Tams & Marshall, 2011), and they reflect on the privileges and challenges of promoting social change when one's career benefits from the very system that engenders social problems (Feron, 2021).

**Coping.** The tensions and emotions that surface in evaluating activities typically elicit a range of coping activities for insider social change agents. While some insiders might craft roles and career narratives that affirm their agency for social change, others might instead deprioritize their social aspirations (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Fontana et al., 2023; Feron, 2021; Wright et al., 2012). As emotions arise during the process of pursuing social change, insiders engage in emotional regulation, choosing when to suppress or express their passion and frustration (Blomfield, 2020; Piderit & Ashford, 2003). Tensions might be explained away—taking insiders to a dangerous territory of normalizing undesirable behaviors (Sendlhofer, 2020; Shin et al., 2022a), or alternatively, relieved with the support of peers—enabling the expression of solidarity and suppressed emotions (Courpasson et al., 2016; Pamphile, 2022).

**Tensions and questions.** Across the seven categories of insider social change agents activities, we note key tensions around adjusting initiatives versus adjusting organizations, sharing meanings versus appealing to differences, taking cooperative versus disruptive approaches, and coping with tensions versus justifying tensions. These tensions highlight important questions regarding the potential effectiveness of insiders.

First, how can insider social change agents effectively navigate the need of adjusting initiatives to fit their organizations, while simultaneously shaping organizational systems and

structures to fit such initiatives? Insiders are often encouraged to align initiatives to corporate strategy, and in so doing, to develop the business case for positive social change. Such alignment, while seemingly effective and low risk for insiders in corporations, has been found to carry rather insidious risks: the risk of muting moral inclinations and of preventing substantive action (Crane, 2000). Appropriating business resources, processes, and concerns might be one answer, but where does alignment end and transformation start? Insiders may appropriate the business case and infuse it with new meanings, or alternatively succumb to the traditional business case in the process of aligning.

Bringing people together and gathering support requires insider social change agents to appeal to the differences of diverse groups while converging on actions. A deeper understanding of the intentionality and quality of connecting activities in social change initiatives demands consideration of how to share meanings without imposing consensus, and how to sustain differences without impeding action. Importantly, certain differences cannot be sustained in positive social change efforts. How can insiders best deal with others who discriminate against marginalized groups or ignore the material realities of climate change? The question of who to bring together also requires further attention. How can insiders enact heterarchical forms of engagement in the corporate context? Inclusiveness may be at the heart of many positive social change initiatives, but require exclusive periods of connection to protect and recharge participants. How do insiders navigate the inclusion and exclusion dynamics of social change efforts?

Alas, antagonists may also inadvertently be brought into the fold of safe spaces for connection, or use their authority to curtail such spaces. The literature is relatively silent on antagonists, and more research is needed to understand their activities and countertactics (Kellogg, 2012). The actions of antagonists may be more visible in studies of insiders using disruptive approaches to positive social change, but are also present in stories of cooperative

efforts. When should insiders circumnavigate or cooperate with antagonists? And when should insiders cooperate or disrupt? Outside of labor movements, we still know little about the disruptive activities of insiders seeking positive social change, such as corporate walkouts over climate goals (Davis & Kim, 2021).

The literature shows that dealing with discomfort is a key ability of insider social change agents, as reflected in many of their activities. We have increasingly gained insight on how insiders can cope with the challenges of change agency, but also on how they can become delusional and self-serving. At which point does justifying tensions become a coping mechanism for insiders? When insiders disengage from initiatives—by need or choice—how can they contribute to keeping alive the motivation of the bigger project of positive social change?

## **Outcomes**

How the activities coalesce toward delivering outcomes is the ultimate interest, but outcomes can be challenging to define, gauge, and measure, both for insider social change agents and for researchers. The outcomes used in research studies have been quite varied (see Table 7). Organizations have been viewed as political systems, cultures, and strategic designs (Ancona, Kochan, Scully, Maanen, and Westney, 2004), and the substance of the desired changes can be political, cultural, or structural. Some outcomes are extra-organizational and affect new market practices, standards, or partnerships. Sometimes the outcome is simply to fuel the change effort itself with momentum. That may be common as an outcome, because it is feasible to measure it within the site of the studied change effort and its subgoals. While such an outcome might seem like a classic instance when the means become the ends (Selznick, 1953), it is nonetheless important to nurture the change effort. It is the scaffolding for future change. Finally, we observe that change efforts can have unintended outcomes, whether positive or negative, for the individuals involved or for the social change effort itself.

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***Political changes.*** Organizations are political systems in which the insider social change agents vie for attention, resources, and allies. Particularly in the issue selling and championing domain, scanning for an issue and packaging it so that it appears tractable is the pathway to the desired outcome of gaining top management attention (Andersson & Bateman, 2000). Choosing a moral approach to sell an issue is a tactical pathway to the outcome of managerial support if managers anticipate feeling guilty of inaction (Mayer et al., 2019). Insiders navigate organizations as places where multiple influence attempts are flowing through networks, so establishing a set of motivated allies is an important political outcome (Wichman et al., 2016). Through a social movement lens, more politically astute insiders mobilize different collectives with targeted motivating messages to achieve the political outcome of a multi-faceted base of allies (Wang et al., 2021). Political gains are achieved both within and across organizations. For example, in the face of highly politicized market practices like paying low wages to farm workers, indigenous groups' organizing practices such as "ensemble leadership" can retain mobilization across time and place, inspiring others outside the collective (Rosile et al., 2021).

***Cultural changes.*** The legitimation of a change effort as culturally appropriate in an organization, especially if the issue or approach seems counter-normative, can be one of the first results a change effort pursues (Girschik, 2020a; Passetti & Rinaldi, 2020). In the CSR literature, CSR transparency is often treated as an important outcome, and can be generated through organizational cultural practices of employee sense-making and engagement (Sendlhofer & Tolstoy, 2022). The idea that human behavior has shaped the environment can propel new organizational citizenship behaviors; some of which become new cultural norms, especially with managerial role-modeling, whether taking the stairs, using less paper, recycling, or experimenting with eco-innovations (Kim et al., 2017; Raineri & Paille, 2016;

Robertson & Barling, 2013; Skoglund, & Böhm, 2020). A cultural shift in ideas about identities and who is to be included in workplace rewards, rituals, and practices is a valued outcome (Buchter, 2020; Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002; Hargreaves, 2011). In the cultural realm, new stories, or even ritually retold facts, may be outcomes that help break the silence on an issue, such as gender equity, so that others can speak up and join the cause (Piderit & Ashford, 2003). Cultural symbols can be outcomes, sometimes of surprising significance. For example, creating a diversity-themed T-shirt in a casual high-tech culture may sound small but actually represents a meaningful win for insiders familiar with that culture and pursuing a sense of belonging (Scully & Segal, 2002).

***Structural changes.*** Structural outcomes shift the formal roles, informal groups, policies, operations, and practices of an organization. While holders of an oversight role might be those who launch a change, the creation of new occupational or accountability roles, such as green chemist or chief sustainability officer, can be enabling outcomes for broader social change (Augustine, 2021; Augustine & King, 2022; Howard-Grenville et al., 2017). Informal groups, such as employee resource groups created to give voice to people from historically excluded or stigmatized groups, can gain formal recognition and resources, reshaping the structural landscape (Briscoe, Chin, & Hambrick, 2014; Scully & Segal, 2002; Seegars, 2021). Policy and agenda changes are often the explicit goals of insiders, who may further link these to improved organizational performance (Alt, Diez-de-Castro, & Llorens-Montes, 2015; Andersson & Bateman, 2000). In the environment domain, a wide range of technical changes can be designed, pitched, and implemented from an insider's specific standpoint, which may lead to improved operational efficiency, for example through leaner production, recycling of materials and equipment, or turning off power in down times (Corbett, Webster, & Jenkin, 2018; Hedman & Henningson, 2016; Rothenberg, 2007). Structural changes such as product innovations or new corporate ventures may occur on the periphery, while others



occur in core operations, such as changes to procedures or movement of pilot programs into mainstream functions (Geradts, Jansen, & Cornelissen, 2022; Grisard, Annisette, & Graham, 2020; Soderstrom & Weber, 2020). Social intrapreneurial initiatives help organizations develop a responsible innovation capability that can extend or substitute traditional activities (Ambos & Tatarinov, 2022). When a structural initiative can be aligned with organizational values, the scale and speed of organizational responses may be greater (Bansal, 2003). While structural outcomes often bring the most desired material results for making a difference, they can be intertwined with and supported by political and cultural outcomes as well, particularly to create scaffolding for the next round of changes.

***Extra-organizational changes.*** Outcomes of insider efforts may reach beyond organizational boundaries. Changes sparked by insiders' efforts can ripple through the value network and into changes on the input side, whether more sustainable materials or more just labor practices in the supply chain, to changes in outputs such as waste (Glavas & Fitzgerald, 2020; Rosile et al., 2021, Schüßler, Lohmeyer, & Ashwin, 2022). The scale of the problems that insiders seek to address is at the societal level, and sometimes outcomes that are generated have a wider reach at the industry, regional, or legislative levels, including new acceptable standards, reforms such as banning plastic bags, solutions to meeting energy goals, or new rules or diffusing norms for implementing diversity goals (Buchter, 2020; Carrigan, Moraes, & Leek, 2011; DeJordy et al., 2020; Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022). Outcomes such as improvements in patient care, through the efforts of insiders to make changes or get their voices heard, can bring broader health improvements (Kellogg, 2009, 2012, 2019; DiBenigno & Kellogg, 2014). Ending labor sourcing abuses, such as “enslavement practices, including abuses such as wage theft and peonage indebtedness” (Rosile et al., 2021:376), can send life-changing positive ripples across supply chains and regions. Insiders in extra-organizational spaces such as investment firms can push for

sustainable investing, giving an organization's change efforts a wider arena of recognition (Juravle & Lewis, 2009). Extra-organizational outcomes can become differentiators for organizations in competitive markets or where stakeholders watch for environmental and societal gains and select organizations that practice them.

***Momentum for further activity.*** Keeping the change initiative itself alive is an immediate outcome, necessary to generate further outcomes. It is particularly relevant where the activities have been geared toward preparing for change and motivating others. Insiders work on capacity building for prospective issue champions by identifying candidates for targeted leadership development programs (Taylor, Cocklin, & Brown, 2012). Champions trained in transformational, distributed, and complexity models of leadership can craft the kinds of efforts needed to address complex issues such as providing sustainable water sources for urban areas (Taylor, Cocklin, Brown, & Wilson-Evered, 2011). The emergence of champions is an intermediate outcome that supports further strategic efforts (Bansal, 2003).

Employee voice is an asset for insiders, and approaches to cultivating it so that it is heard and not ignored in upward influence attempts provide resources to a change effort (Satterstrom, Kerrissey, & DiBenigno, 2021). Employees are central to sustainable innovation, so work practices that support employees to, in turn, keep the effort going are important, using intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in tandem (Delmas & Pekovic, 2018). Employees with pre-existing commitments to environmental issues can be supported to turn those passions into innovations, which, for example in the hospitality industry, generated impacts for both change efforts and more general business effectiveness (Palmié, Rügger, Holzer, & Oghazi, 2023). Coping activities help employees avoid burnout, or persevere through connections to others so that change efforts do not fizzle (DeJordy et al., 2020).

The outcome of keeping momentum for the change effort itself can also be supported by resourcing and connecting activities. Insiders create the building blocks for legitimacy.

Intermediate steps such as resourcing are done deliberately, for example in a setting where improved home health care is the longer-term goal being supported (Verleye, Perks, Gruber, & Voets, 2019). Issue selling capabilities are a resource that develops over time, for example, in a high-tech manufacturing facility where redesign to meet environmental standards was guided by a series of insiders' moves, which were adapted over time as a group coalesced and learned from past moves (Howard-Grenville, 2007). Ensemble leadership, which built and shared a multiplicity of resources, enabled an agricultural workers' collective to agitate from 1993 to 2017, against the growers for whom they worked, for improved wages, conditions, and human rights (Rosile et al., 2021). Complex societal problems require taking a long view, with the outcome of maintaining the change effort necessary for longer-term gains.

*Unintended consequences for the effort.* Unintended consequences occur for the change effort itself and can undermine the effort through traps and detours. Invoking multiple frames, to appeal to varied stakeholders, can lead to framing incompatibilities and can generate tensions, which divert advocates' attention to reconciling or managing these tensions (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017) rather than toward the proximal change issue. Environmental activists who aim to sell solutions by aligning to technical capabilities risk the "amoralization" of their effort, as seen in some corporate greening initiatives (Crane, 2000). While instrumental moves have value, a change effort risks petering out from a lack of moral verve. When diversity professionals use the business case to sell diversity, they reproduce the everyday operation of neoliberal corporations as "purportedly amoral, and hence, unracial and ungendered" (Carrillo Arciniega, 2021:228). There are risks of accidentally becoming coopted or shoring up the structures they are trying to change. Meetings at which employees are invited to use their voice regarding problematic issues may end up doing more to restrict than encourage voice (Kessinger, 2023), particularly when lower-level employees' ideas are rarely taken up, or only taken up when a higher-level ally reinforces the idea (Satterstrom et

al., 2021). Place matters, and less hierarchical settings may be more likely to honor employees' bottom-up intentions about matters like CSR transparency (Sendlhofer & Tolstoy, 2022). Goals can drift, especially if the jurisdiction of those with oversight roles is redefined (Augustine, 2021). Insiders often seek to make their change initiative a regular part of the organization's routines, such as creating employee resource groups to support diversity, but that very routinization can subvert their efforts if all that remains is the language of business imperatives rather than disruptive innovations (Seegars, 2021). Coalitions may fracture over disagreements about goals and actions (Acosta, Acquier, & Gond, 2021; Kessinger, 2023) or over contests for managerial attention, for example, when different social identity groups that should be allies under the "rainbow umbrella" of diversity end up jockeying for managerial resources (Scully, 2009). Some of these detours and traps are what build strength and resiliency for an insider social change effort over time. But these impediments also represent the various ways in which systems are set up to buffer against change and preserve the status quo.

*Individual consequences.* Insider social change agents were originally a fascination in the literature, because making counter-normative moves inside organizations and against entrenched interests was unlikely, risky, and fraught with unknowns. As such, it may not be surprising that we found some unexpected consequences for individuals, some of which were negative but interestingly some were positive. These range from outcomes such as willingness to promote an initiative to becoming influential and gaining status to negative outcomes such as burnout, marginalization and sometimes even exiting the organization.

Studies of why individuals choose to speak up to promote social change initiatives also find reasons why they might choose not to do so, whether from pressures for silence and assimilation, lack of role models or supervisory support, evident or imagined career harm, or debilitating anger from a strong emotional connection to the issue (Ashford et al., 1998;

DeCelles, Sonenshein, & King, 2020; Dutton et al., 2002; Ramus & Steger, 2000). Other negative consequences can be more material, such as permanent or temporary salary reductions, or losing one's job (Bode & Singh, 2018; Cech, 2021). Some of the feared negative consequences for career and inclusion can manifest even more harshly than expected, including delayed promotions, marginalization, racial subordination, and overt or subtle discrimination, exclusion from social and professional networks, devaluation of work, and even harassment and intimidation (Courpasson, Dany, & Martí (2016); Rothenberg & Levy, 2012; Seegars, 2021; Taylor & Raeburn, 1995). Activities related to coping are vital because the risk of burnout is high (Glavas & Fitzgerald, 2020). When these pressures become unbearable, the outcome may be that insiders exit (Kessinger, 2023; Rheinhardt, Poskanzer, & Briscoe, 2023). Exits come at a high cost to the hoped-for potential for insiders to address societal issues.

We also note some unexpected positive outcomes for individuals. Engagement in an initiative can give employees unexpected and affirming attention when they become recognized as innovators and leaders. Insiders acting beyond the parameters of their formal role were sometimes recognized as having valued skills, such as an administrative assistant appreciated for being an adept network builder for diversity efforts (Scully & Segal, 2002). Some insiders also gain an enhanced sense of belonging, as contributors both to the change effort and to the organization, which can confer energy for continuing the work (Bain et al., 2021; Wickert & de Bakker, 2018). Voluntary insider actions toward making a difference for the environment can be their own reward in terms of emotional well-being; they “enhance the sense of warm glow and moral credit for employees while protecting them against emotional exhaustion” (Ren, Tang & Zhang, 2023:72). There can be ongoing rebalancing of what are negative or positive outcomes for individuals. Insiders re-imagine what constitutes meaningfulness for them, especially as they navigate through contested terrain (Mitra &

Buzzanell, 2017). Outcomes for individuals can include making occupational identity shifts as they stick up for professional standards (Rothenberg & Levy, 2012) or developing what constitutes a “resistive” identity across physical or virtual spaces (Güneştepe & Tunçalp, 2023); these may be continuously renegotiated.

***Tensions and questions.*** Outcomes are generated by persons from different standpoints, working in the context of varied places, and engaging in a range of activities. Comparisons of how different combinations of persons, places, and activities net up to outcomes, taking an integrated approach, will advance the field. We note three interesting tensions and questions in considering outcomes: outcomes that ripple across an industry or ecosystem, outcomes that leave the status quo relatively unchanged, and outcomes whose impacts appear additive but may be difficult to gauge.

First, political and extra-organizational outcomes shift practices and standards in a wider field, but studies of the focal organization where they were generated might miss those spillover effects. Firms that write briefs litigating employment discrimination create new flows of precedents and regulations that impact other firms, often leaving it to insiders to make sense of what new change efforts become possible (Edelman, 2020). When a large retailer eliminates environmentally unsound packing materials, seemingly one discrete outcome, there can be spillover effects across several supply chains. Firms can use their R&D capabilities and purchasing power to pursue green initiatives across their supply chain (Chen, Wang & Zhou, 2019). Some outcomes may scale up but do so beyond the scope and time frame of a study of a single firm. A broader view of flows across places and times in ecosystems may help.

Second, insiders may tout some outcomes as very significant, but upon closer look, the outcomes seem quite modest. A lot of insider energy can go into legitimating an issue, recruiting allies, and moreover, answering or dodging antagonists. A reported outcome may

represent a flurry of change work by insiders, hence their testimony about its significance from their standpoint, but the status quo remains stubbornly unchanged. That result is indeed the preference of change blockers, some of whom pursue their own outcomes by exerting an equal and opposite force against change. Dealing with opponents can expend insiders' energy. All this setup work to get a change effort rolling may have eventual dividends, but studies rarely track later outcomes longitudinally. The study of insider social change agents is undertaken at a middle range of potential outcomes. Insiders proceed stepwise. It is rare for studies to report results on either side of this middle space: an impeded change that never launched on the one side or a large-scale change that was eventually "transformational" on the other. A midway locus of change makes sense given the focused scope of the insider change agent phenomenon. However, tracking outcomes that slide toward low significance or escalate toward tremendous significance seems essential, to get a sense of scale, given the vastness and urgency of the societal issues at stake.

Third, locally situated change agents are precisely adept at spotting opportunities for outcomes that might be considered "small wins," which is what makes insiders interesting and effective in contrast to external protesters. A seemingly small win at a major corporation can ripple dramatically through an industry and economy, reinforcing the idea that corporations' engagement with grand challenges is exactly what is needed because of their scale and impact. Linking the local to the global is where the concept of "small wins" (Weick, 1984) comes into play, an enduring call to make large, global, complex problems seem technically feasible and cognitively approachable by breaking them into small wins. The reigning premise holds that multiple small wins, across time and place, will aggregate into the larger changes that make a difference. And the fact that they feel like "wins" will keep mobilized parties going. An open question for the study of insider social change agency is whether and how these small wins add up. The unintended consequences of burnout and

cooptation, combined with systems' resistance to change, could mean that small wins peter out, or become part of the corporate apparatus for window dressing. Understanding waves of insider activism over time might stitch together a broader portrait, where the waning of one effort piques the interest of insiders motivated toward a new effort.

## **Issue**

As we characterized the people, places, activities, and outcomes of insider social change efforts, we observed that there were a variety of issues being addressed. Six main topics appear across the literature, particularly densely in the domains of environmental issues and diversity issues. The architecture of person, place, activities, and outcomes applies across these issues, but we took a closer look to see if a focus on issues revealed other cross-cutting dimensions. Beyond the topic-focus of the issue, we identified the impact on profits, solution-problem fit, the role of temporality and the ebb and flow of external and reputational pressure surrounding an issue, the level to which advocating for it goes "against the grain," and the ambiguity both inherent in the issue as well as surrounding any given issue. Table 8 highlights this approach which sheds light on the issue topics and beyond.

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**Topics.** The issues clustered around six topics. *Corporate social responsibility* includes initiatives to mitigate, and sometimes enhance, the impact of a company on the environment, society, and a range of stakeholders (Muthuri, Matten & Moon, 2009; Glavas & Fitzgerald, 2020). *Environmental issues* focus on how a company's operations affect the environment, with both remedies for harm and anticipation of more environmentally friendly products and processes (Eberhardt-Toth & Wasieleski, 2013; Howard-Grenville et al., 2017). *Equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts* involved recognizing and enhancing opportunities for people from a wide range of historically excluded groups, while also learning from these



groups about potentially different ways to operate (DeJordy et al., 2020; Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe, 2023). *Sustainability*, with early origins in the area of environment, included efforts to address multiple facets of social, environmental, and economic problems with an eye toward creating systems in which the planet and people can endure and even thrive (Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher, 2020; Augustine, 2021). In the domain of *health*, the focus was on the overall physical, mental, and emotional well-being of employees and other stakeholders, with only recently some nods to broader issues of resources to address health disparities revealed in light of the pandemic (Kellogg 2012, 2019; DiBenigno, 2018). The final topical theme, *social issues*, more generally addresses issues that affect societies and their members on a broader scale, often with persistent and endemic inequalities at the root, including labor and human rights issues (Carrington, Zwick & Neville, 2019; Schüßler, Lohmeyer & Ashwin, 2022).

***Impact on profits.*** When considering characteristics of issues, the potential impact on profits cannot be ignored in the context of for-profit organizations. Some issues may affect costs and profits, whether directly (Lampikoski et al., 2014) or more indirectly (Petrucci, 2020). In other words, there are traceable material impacts, whether or not also surrounded by symbolic or discursive approaches. There are typically costs to reducing pollution, retrofitting production lines, reducing pay gaps, or increasing front line worker wages. Despite possible rhetorical strategies indicating that these moves pay off in the longer run, the material aspect for some issues is immediately felt.

***Solution-problem fit.*** The solution-problem fit is essential in identifying and addressing issues within an organization - how easy is it to find a solution to the problem insider social change agents are working to address? Not all problems can be solved through technical solutions alone. Issues can vary in the degree to which technical solutions can be crafted and tied to the proximate problem (Delmas & Pekovic, 2018; Buchter, 2020), in contrast to

whether they require mindset shifts or a bigger reset to an overall organizational approach or logic (Halme, Lindeman & Linna, 2012; Soderstrom & Weber, 2020).

***Temporality and external pressure.*** It is not simply the case that temporal or external pressures remain constant for any issue across organizations, such as climate change being urgent, or diversity being counter-normative. The tenor of any occurrence of an issue in the literature is tied to place and moment, with any given topic being perhaps cost-effective and well-tied to corporate principles in one setting or time while being beyond technical specification and against the grain in another context. The content of the issue at hand and how it is embedded in the setting being studied are useful to know, as it might condition the types of activities that are attempted or generative. The time horizon of issues can vary from having an immediate impetus, such as protests or weather events (Schüßler et al., 2022; Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe, 2023), to being driven by more distant anticipated impacts dependent upon future scenarios (Barling & Robertson, 2012; Wright, Nyberg & Grant, 2012). Issues where there is an immediate threat to reputation or even social license to operate, stemming from societal or competitor or regulatory pressures, will have a greater sense of urgency (Dutton et al., 2002; Clune & O'Dwyer, 2020).

***Level of going “against the grain”.*** Some issues may readily align to current or emerging organizational definitions of purpose or CSR commitments, while others may remain distant or aspirational ideas that align poorly with current organizational conditions and standards (Taylor & Raeburn, 1995; Bansal, 2003). Our review highlights these differences as the level to which issues *go against the grain* and are counter to current norms and trends inside the organization. For example, Rheinhardt, Briscoe, & Joshi (2023) show that activism by insiders in similar roles, around the same issue (in their case racism), can be supported by some organizations and punished by others.

*Ambiguity.* Any given issue being studied might also have more or less ambiguity. An issue that requires innovatively entering a new domain can involve ambiguity about the scope and boundary conditions as well as about any emerging regulatory requirements (Heucher, 2021; Augustine, 2021). The issue itself may be fuzzy if interpretations about what the issue even is remain dynamic and emergent (Howard-Grenville, 2007; Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022), or if rulings on what is legally required are being relitigated. An issue with readily explicable definitions or moral underpinnings may have clear rallying calls or may remain more amorphous than issues with clear technical parameters. Heated issues that call forth emotional claims, such as devastation due to climate change or hunger due to inequality, may be more challenging to tame into a clear issue definition.

*Tensions and questions.* Because insider social change agents take the issues and frame them, what the issues are and how they are defined blends quickly into a discussion of activities. Insiders may socially construct an issue to appear technically feasible, strategically aligned, or morally desirable. That said, we argue that there may be certain features inherent in the issue itself that then condition how mobilization activities occur; for example, some pollution problems have technical remedies. While issues cut across the types of people, places, activities, and outcomes that are studied, it could be useful to consider certain clusters or comparative patterns. Perhaps issues with a practical technical basis are advanced by people in a formal role who attend to implementation. Issues shrouded in ambiguity might be pursued by people with some amount of power who can focus on resourcing. Issues anchored in emerging social identities, such as new attention to ageism and how insiders redefine it (Collien, Sieben, & Müller-Carmen, 2016), originate from the grassroots and may rely upon mobilizing others. Technical issues may more readily generate evaluable outcomes, but they may not scale, whereas emergent and fuzzily bounded issues may struggle for traction but yield discontinuous leaps toward outcomes later. All these postulations are certainly too

simple, but they are meant to open an invitation to consider the intersectionality of issues with persons, places, activities, and outcomes.

In terms of topics, there is a relative scarcity of insider social change agent studies on some of the UN SDGs, such as hunger, peace, or sustainable cities, although surely corporations are implicated in both the problems and the solutions in these arenas. These are studied in related social science areas, such as urban development, public health, and conflict resolution, however not with a translation to what corporate insiders could realistically do. A global view within and across issues will sharpen theorizing about the variety of issues and ways to approach them, particularly when the presenting problem is seen differently. For example, women in African countries may see the nature and balancing of work and family quite differently than do women in the Global North, setting up different possible approaches to insiders' quest for "gender equality." Examples from a review of this literature (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009) suggest that an insider social change effort in an African context might tend more to frame family obligations as positive, rely less on enrolling male allies, and seek outcomes that are more about balance and collective livelihood than careerism and advancement. Overall, siloed studies also silo the issues. Research can take transnational differences into account, surface ignored issues, or look at where the combination of issues more fully captures the complexity, for example, where "environmental" and "diversity" topics come together to understand "environmental racism."

### **INTEGRATIVE MODEL**

With this review we integrate research insights from different literature streams to build an integrative model centered on the role of insider social change agents in catalyzing action on social and environmental challenges. In doing so, the dimensions of person, place, activities, and outcomes guided our review. These elements work dynamically together toward producing changes that are aimed at ultimately addressing social and environmental

challenges. Just as important as the elements in the model are the dynamic arrows that show influences and feedback. The focus here nets up from the insider change agents to the “change efforts” that they steward. Our integrated model allows researchers to locate where the type of change effort they are studying fits into the bigger picture of change efforts, and indeed where the type of study they are conducting fits into the bigger picture of the literature. Any given change effort might fit in a certain place among the many modes of change efforts, then it can be compared to other change efforts, and finally, the simultaneity of all these change efforts can be considered and studied as they together compose a dynamic and growing universe of many change efforts.

There are several advantages to being able to locate any given change effort in a space within an integrative model. Researchers can more precisely explain their phenomenon of interest, and indeed, be aware that their object of study, and the change agents’ own choices, exist within a rich menu of related options. Researchers, especially working across the five streams, can better talk to one another, share and refine concepts, begin to engage in comparative studies, and mindfully curate portfolios of work on varieties of changes and their impacts.

*Looking across a variety of change efforts.* A few examples may show the spirit of using the integrative model shown in Figure 3. An insider social change agent operating with the mandate of a formal sustainability role, within an organization, might focus on the activities of preparing and implementing, and toward producing structural changes in production methods that could scale across production lines. A change agent propelled by their social identity, and the inequalities they experience on that dimension, may focus on motivating kindred folks and allies to join their effort and connecting to mobilized comrades across organizations, working toward making a cultural change that may later yield policy changes. Additionally, they may find coping activities necessary to handle stigma, burnout, or career

risks. A change agent with deep personal motivations about saving the planet from peril might try to resource the change effort with compelling frames and persevere toward evaluating change efforts to make sure there is real change and not greenwashing; they may also seek allies and use coping tactics to channel their passion for their issue, but perhaps with differently spun threads than change agents animated by a social identity. These examples are all narrated as connected flows, following the arrows in the model, across persons in places engaging in activities toward outcomes.

Thereby, we highlight how the elements of a particular change effort can be threaded across the integrative model, to see what is characteristic and distinctive. Any of the illustrative change efforts sketched above could be substantive, but could remain yet another singularity in the literature. That is why locating each effort within a panoply of possible efforts can advance the field. It is important for researchers—and practitioners as well—to understand how their approach to change is part of a broader set of possibilities.

***Making comparisons across change efforts.*** It becomes possible to see from all the dimensions and flows in the integrative model that a vast multiplicity of insider social change agents may be working simultaneously, within and across organizations. Making comparisons and drawing connections among multiple types of change efforts can reveal where they amplify one another or collide, as change efforts may share commitments but compete for allies, resources, and attention. Views across change efforts may reveal where particular strategies are more effective depending upon context and issue. For example, the literature is probing where it might be better to use moral versus instrumental framings, but there are open questions about whether it is better to stay backstage or have a visible role, to try small pilots or aim bigger, to stay within an organization's own logics or reach across industry or sector, and so forth.

*Assessing the simultaneity of multiple change efforts.* In looking across the landscape of change efforts, it may become more feasible to assess whether the sum of efforts is trending toward redress of the major global issues with which we opened this paper. The main idea is that while each change effort is a building block toward positive social change, no building block is an isolated entity. The building blocks can be arrayed together so researchers can better see the overall socially constructed space. Insider social change agents have some skill at surveying a landscape to see where there are gaps, unexpected opportunities, other blocks to build upon, or precariously toppling blocks. Taking this orientation toward scanning the whole playing field can allow research efforts to build upon one another toward greater insights.

There are reciprocal influences across change efforts. Insider social change agents are endogenously impacted by the change activities and may fashion new roles or exit a role. Mobilizing activities can reshape their motivations. Resourcing activities might draw upon, or make possible, new nested levels of place, from immediate department to the ecosystem, which in turn confers different resources for local agents to tap. Change agents are seeking to change the landscape, and their own efforts might change who they are, what they do, and what new outcomes come onto the radar screen. Thus, more research is needed to capture the complex nature of their efforts through an integrated view of insider social change agents catalyzing action on social and environmental challenges.

### **DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Through this review, we uncover that previous research has focused largely on insider social change efforts leading to important but insular small wins. Moving forward, we posit that future research needs to focus on how insider social change agents' efforts can aggregate to catalyze positive social change. We hope to inject energy into scholarship on insider social change agents, generating new insights across multiple disciplines, and propelling the

managers and students we touch with our work to catalyze the chain reactions needed for broader societal transformations. We summarize our calls for future research based on the tensions and questions of each dimension: persons, places, issues, activities, and outcomes and develop future research questions for our integrative model, in Table 9.

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Insert Table 9 about here  
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We visualize this motivation for future research in Figure 4, in which we represent this aim of “catalyzing” social change in waves of small wins. On the left side, we show that, without the catalytic effect of well-situated insider social change agents, opportunities for social change will be missed or will fizzle. We also show that singular efforts can occur but do not suffice. Taking into account new insights about the multiplicity of efforts in ecosystems, a shift in research direction is needed to understand how small wins may aggregate towards societal impact— similar to catalysts amplifying a chemical chain reaction (right side of Figure 4).

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Insert Figure 4 about here  
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Figure 4 reveals pathways and roadblocks that are not fully understood, pointing to areas for further research. This research can be added to the broader conceptual map, to enhance understanding of prospects for tackling high-stakes societal issues. Moreover, this requires building interdisciplinary bridges to natural sciences and other social sciences by attending to the role of insider social change agents, for example, in the transition to a circular economy. New studies will have a way to talk to one another and avoid falling into silos.

Understanding when and how small wins are part of a longer means-ends chain, requires more longitudinal process models in future research. Tackling broad social change issues can be cognitively and strategically overwhelming, so breaking the action into subgoals or small



wins is a time-honored strategy (Weick, 1984). Sometimes small wins aggregate from local pilot experiments into organizational policies with broader social impacts, but that is difficult to gauge. Most of the research we reviewed was conducted either at one point in time or over a short period. Multi-year studies could map the processes of insider social change agents' work with all the ups and downs. Such research could track how activities emerge, fade, and re-emerge and give deeper insight into the journey toward outcomes, including how pitfalls, negative outcomes, and unintended consequences arise and get handled or overwhelm the process. Change is not linear, so understanding the tipping points, punctuated equilibria, and course corrections is necessary.

***Integrating dimensions: Across persons, places, activities, outcomes, and issues.*** We call upon future researchers to consider the generative connections that can be made across studies by taking the integrative approach that we begin here and comparing elements of people, place, activities, outcomes, and issues, as well as the dynamics among them. For example, findings about change agents operating within the remit of their role and findings about backstage change agents without a formal role might both be part of the same overarching insider change effort, and research could consider whether they perhaps form an alliance, or are unaware of one another, or engage in contests for key resources and attention. Doing analyses from this integrative level will allow researchers to see these connections and shape a literature that draws bigger maps. Beyond the call to continue in this integrative vein, we offer three areas for future research, which derive from our observations about tensions, open questions, or even notable silences as we reviewed the literature. These three areas are expanded on below, but in shorthand, they are: understanding agents who are blockers of social change as fully as insider social change agents, mapping ecosystems, and connecting to related literatures. These new directions will support the broad project of understanding how

insider social change efforts might ultimately produce disruptive and transformational change of the scale needed to address the truly urgent and complex issues that motivate them.

***Blockers: Understanding insider social change inhibitors.*** The quest for transformational outcomes may be impeded, not by insufficient use of savvy tactics, but by individuals and groups with vested interests in preserving the status quo. Scanning for transformational outcomes—and finding relatively few documented—serves as a reminder that all insider efforts are, fundamentally, going against the grain and operating on contested terrain. Upper management can be an impediment, setting limits upon attempted changes, even when insiders are entrepreneurial, well-connected, and skilled in stewarding change over time (Halme et al. 2012; Courpasson et al., 2016). While hopeful that small wins can snowball, we also recognize that the whole premise of the insider social change agent literature—that the work is risky, difficult, contested, and slow—rests on the assumption that social change typically gets blocked. Beyond simple inertia, social change is blocked by other organizational processes and players. Just as insider social change agents are part of the microfoundations of organizational and field-level changes (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012)—the agency nested in structures—so too are the blockers active agents. Blocking factors are not just features of structures; they are active, purposeful, targeted agency. Future research can study more about insider social change inhibitors (see also Kellogg, 2012) alongside the enabling factors for insider social change agents. The “counter strategies of institutional defenders” (Levy & Scully, 2007: 984) exist together with institutional entrepreneurial moves. They might be theorized as opposing forces, spurs to mobilization, or opportunities for negotiation.

The inhibitors are not faceless social forces but also agents with power as well as access to politics, worthy of direct study. Sometimes those with power operate undetectably, deeply aligned with the embedded and taken-for-granted way of doing things or fully behind the

scenes, as in Dahl's (1961) classic study of nearly invisible but influential elites. Some studies in the literature we reviewed do detect the blocking moves—proposals subverted, small wins carefully tempered, activists mocked or not promoted, allies in retreat, pilots scaled down or discontinued—and these blocking agents and blocking moves could be shifted from background to foreground in future research. Our call is not to bring structural impediments back as a counterweight to theorizing about agency, but instead to understand blocking moves more precisely as their own kind of agency, particularly among parties for whom preserving the status quo is of interest.

*Ecosystems: From a focal firm to an ecosystems view.* The recent focus on embeddedness, which we highlight in our characterization of place, brings attention to larger systems—which we here call ecosystems—that may dampen or amplify change efforts. The macro environment of an organization is often considered through the concept of embeddedness, with nested layers of industry, field, sector, polity, and society. An ecosystem view is more about multiple organizations with reciprocal ties and even interdependencies and flows among them. The role of ecosystems in supporting change within and across organizations is gaining attention (e.g., DeJordy et al., 2020; Schifeling & Soderstrom 2021). These ecosystems are often characterized as cross-sector partnerships, which might involve non-profits, social movement organizations, and corporations, or as industry or regional networks. We want to expand this approach while urging a different angle on ecosystems, which is across the different change efforts themselves. The value of our integrative model is to consider the simultaneity of multiple different kinds of change efforts, which may have linkages already among them that merit exploration. Taken together, there is a pluralism of activities happening all at once, each one seeking opportunities and allies. The idea of an ecosystem raises the concept of a niche, in which there are synergies from existing together but also competition for limited resources. This simultaneity of efforts could be theorized at a

higher level, with feedback, leverage points, flows, niches, synergies, and even competition among what might have seemed to be potential allies.

To this end, it is crucial for future research to uncover how multiple issues and efforts help or hurt each other. An ecosystem might interestingly include the pursuit of many different issues, not just activities within the domain of a single issue, as has been examined thus far (DeJordy et al., 2020). While the UN SDGs map a set of issues whose intersections can readily be seen at a societal and global level, when translated into local insider change efforts, they tend to be addressed one at a time by different advocates. For example, some insiders work on climate change while others work on diversity. However, there may be occasions when issues intertwine, such as the creation of new corporate offices to address “environmental racism,” where the climate change issue and the structural racism issue come together (Alt et al., 2022). A range of connecting activities might be examined to look for linkages not just across advocates and allies, but across issues. An ecosystem lens can provide insight into how the small wins aggregate and how catalysts may drive transformational change, by focusing on questions such as: When do change efforts cascade? When do insider social change efforts reach tipping points? What role do different types of organizations play in this process?

***Integrating and extending across literatures.*** Our integrated model provides a systematic way to consider the issue, person, place, activities, and outcomes when provocative types of change linked to societal issues are undertaken. Related literatures could benefit from using the typologies in this review to locate the kind of activity they consider and see how it relates to other change efforts in type and efficacy. Studies of individual change efforts, such as whistleblowers (Culiberg & Mihelič, 2017) and ethical voice (Chen & Treviño, 2023), would be neighboring literatures that may benefit from our approach or be combined into interdisciplinary research. Studies of whistleblowers could start with whether a whistleblower

is in a formal compliance role or acting autonomously, whether they mobilize allies to join their complaint or tender it anonymously to an ethics hotline, and whether their issue is fully internal, such as a safety matter, or linked to societal issues, such as illegal dumping. In taking this approach, studies can scan for whistleblowing types of action among a multiplicity of social change actions and perhaps make some useful comparisons and linkages. In the study of “ethical voice,” there can similarly be an analysis of whether voice is raised toward internal grievances or societally motivated issues. The distinction is made in this literature between moral and instrumental approaches to voice (Chen & Treviño, 2023), which we found to be a blurry boundary in our analysis of activities, as insider social change agents tactically evoked instrumental language to advance a moral concern, or conversely, expanded the significance of an instrumental move by adding moral arguments. The focus on the ways in which ethical voice remains solo or joins a choir of other voices is an area that can reciprocally inform work on insiders.

The growing body of literature on social-symbolic work (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019) maps onto the three broad types of such work on the self, on organizations, and on institutions, which is highly related to the activities we find in our review. Preparing, motivating, connecting, resourcing, implementing, evaluating, and coping are verbs that synthesize the wide gamut of activities revealed in studies of insider social change agents. Understanding activities across these dimensions allows comparisons of different strategies as they combine, compete, or evolve. These activities illustrate not only the social-symbolic notion of work as “the purposeful expenditure of effort toward a goal” (Lawrence & Phillips, 2019: 37), but also how similar activities can serve different types of work: the creation of free spaces for social change, for example, can feature in boundary, strategy, and identity work. Importantly, a more fine-grained view of what insiders do illuminates the intricate ways in which self, organization, and institutional work may interact in social change efforts. Insiders’ activities

interconnect through introspective and communal periods of action, and understanding their effects requires a deeper understanding of these interconnections.

Much of the work to be done on the UN SDGs that relate to work, poverty, livelihood, and economic development is being advanced in the labor movement. We did not include labor activism in our review, because it is at once inside and outside organizations, but it is often the source of best practices for how to mobilize for substantive change. As wider swaths of laborers, from frontline service workers to gig workers to high-tech workers, begin to mobilize purposefully to seek better wages and conditions, there will be new lessons about persons, places, activities, outcomes, and issues. Potential insider allies who can advance economic justice by improving pay may be able to use their insider savvy to link to external and cross-organizational issues as part of an ecosystem. For example, some restaurant managers support higher hourly pay and less reliance on tips. Pay is an issue at the core of the social contract of business with society, but it can be difficult to translate into a discrete project to pursue as an insider. Studies of changes inside organizations and changes via the labor movement are often quite separate, but with a shared typology of how to think about the components of change and its outcomes, both can benefit.

Related to the UN SDGs, we also see future research pathways that build and expand bridges to the natural sciences. For example, whether and how insights from natural sciences on topics such as circular economy or the planetary boundaries, can enable and support insider social change agents to be innovative in new ways has the potential to enlighten social change research further. The natural sciences are not only relevant to environmental issues. Indeed, we call for researchers to explore interdisciplinary research collaborations that are needed to address the complex societal and environmental challenges that the insider social change agents we study are trying to address. Among the many social sciences, we still need to draw upon scholarship from political science and sociology to understand how regulatory

negotiations and external protests will continue to shape the landscape in which insiders pick up their part of social change work.

Overall, future research directions include connecting among singular instances, filling in gaps and silences, adding new topics, and making connections to other literatures. The shared aim is broadening our understanding of how urgent environmental and societal issues can be remedied by and through businesses and organizations with business logics.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

To address societal and environmental challenges, organizations need to move beyond symbolic gestures and greenwashing. The key is to integrate change across all aspects of the organization (Aguinis & Glavas, 2013; Laszlo & Zhexembayeva, 2011). Insider social change agents play a vital role in making this happen. They extend social change efforts to all functions, including finance, human resources, innovation, marketing, operations, and beyond.

***Empowering Insider Social Change Agents.*** In today's workforce, employees seek positions that align with their personal values. The opportunity to contribute to positive social change can also counter the rising trend of job resignations, such as "climate quitting" (Augustine & Soppe, 2023). To retain talent and drive meaningful change, companies should create roles that allow employees to "climate persist" and make a positive impact on society and the environment.

***Finding a Role as an Insider Social Change Agent.*** Insider social change agents can come from various roles, not just those with formal mandates in sustainability. With organizational support and resources, sustainability and social change can become integral to all jobs. Even those in compliance roles can go above and beyond (Edelman et al., 1991). When job hunting, professionals should consider organizations that genuinely embrace environmental and social concerns as part of their purpose, rather than simply meeting

minimum requirements. External pressures, like changing regulations, can also signal opportunities for insider social change efforts.

***Building Networks for Social Change.*** While it is tempting to view insider social change agents as “heroes” who single-handedly crack the organization’s code to drive transformation (Walls, Salaiz & Chiu, 2021), this hero narrative can be isolating and constraining. Instead, insiders should work collaboratively as facilitators and network members. Building connections and creating “network contagion” helps support various projects and fosters collaboration. Efforts should be intentional in connecting diverse perspectives for comprehending problems and co-creating solutions. Furthermore, attention should be given to protecting groups that require a safe space to connect. Intersectional approaches to positive social change are indispensable, but they demand careful consideration of when and how to intersect motives and audiences.

***Finding and Sharing Resources in Communities.*** Insider social change agents and their work require sufficient resources, and communities of practice—often facilitated by non-profits, professional associations, and business schools—offer valuable support for insiders to connect. Platforms like the Aspen Institute Business & Society Program’s First Movers Fellowship provide ideation and design resources, as well as the space for sharing strategies for overcoming challenges. These platforms allow insiders to access best practices, learn from failures, and mutually inspire one another in their efforts to drive positive social change from within organizations.

***Redefining the Business Case.*** Insider social change agents can use their business expertise to redefine what is “business relevant” and drive social impact. They can do this with greater precision than external activists. While aligning with the business case is often recommended, it should be done cautiously to maintain a bold approach. Business acumen is crucial for embedding social and environmental change into regular operations. However,



insiders should look for champions at higher levels who can adjust organizational incentive structures and systems. Instead of subscribing to the existing business case, insiders can seek opportunities to redefine it around making positive social change financially viable.

***Staying True to Values.*** We recommend that insider social change agents maintain their commitment to their values without resorting to moralizing others (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017). Moralizing can often come across as alienating or threatening, hindering the effectiveness of change efforts. Attempting to overlook undesirable corporate behaviors while focusing on more approachable issues may enable insiders to compartmentalize and continue their work. However, this approach can also be risky if it leads to the normalization of unethical behavior (Sendlhofer, 2020; Shin et al., 2022a). While quitting may be a valid option under certain circumstances, it is not always feasible or desirable. When faced with such a decision, social change agents can seek to maintain their motivation for action among like-minded insiders (Courpasson et al., 2016; Kessinger, 2023).

***Connecting Small Wins.*** Small wins serve as a valuable strategy for breaking down formidable and complex challenges into manageable, less overwhelming tasks (Weick, 1984), but come with both advantages and disadvantages. While small wins might remain symbolic and potentially divert attention from more significant issues, their value lies in their purpose and intentionality. To effectively leverage small wins, it is essential to begin with a well-defined strategic roadmap. This roadmap outlines how these incremental successes can culminate in the achievement of larger, overarching positive social change goals. Along the way, celebrating these small victories not only maintains momentum but also sustains high levels of engagement. Utilizing evaluation tools is key to monitoring the cumulative impact of various experiments and initiatives across a network. Beyond an individual organization's confines, connecting small wins within the broader industry or value network can significantly amplify their influence (Glavas & Fitzgerald, 2020). Sharing experiences of

failures is just as crucial as celebrating successes. Failures can serve as the seeds of small wins in other organizations or act as signals for assistance within an expansive “ecosystem” of change initiatives (DeJordy et al., 2020).

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE**

Academia plays a distinctive role in preparing students as future leaders, empowering them with the skills required to engage in the strategic activities that insider social change agents demand. There is a wealth of educational resources available to support change agents in this endeavor. For instance, Lertzman’s (2022) Project InsideOut toolkit (<https://projectinsideout.net/tools/>) or the Embedding Project (<https://embeddingproject.org/resources/>) offer practical resources for initiating change. Moreover, an increasing number of books supply valuable narratives, case studies, cautionary tales, and best practices (Bulloch, 2018; Budak, 2022; Cech, 2021; Davis & White, 2015; Grayson et al., 2014; Ferreras, Battilana, & Méda, 2022).

Despite these resources, a significant gap remains in educating students about how to effectively pursue insider social change initiatives within organizations, while navigating the complex landscape of workplace politics and culture. Many students are unaware that they have the capacity to drive change from any position within an organization. Even though this generation of business school students exhibits a growing passion for addressing social and environmental challenges, they often lack the confidence to venture beyond the boundaries of their anticipated job roles. As the number of insiders continues to rise, and their approaches become more routine and less extraordinary, there is a growing need for enhanced support. This support is essential to ensure that the work of insider social change agents becomes impactful and sustainable in the face of evolving challenges.

### **CONCLUSION**

We open with the observation that many more corporations are referring to societal issues in their annual reports, often by referencing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Corporations can facilitate as well as impede the fulfillment of these goals, and this review has considered the ways in which the change agents working inside these corporations can leverage their resources, influence, and scale to push corporations toward delivering positive social change. That said, the 2023 report on progress toward fulfillment of the goals by the target of 2030 is quite sobering (United Nations, 2023). UN Secretary General António Guterres is quoted as saying, "Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been." Reframing of social issues can involve a temporal element, and taking a future-oriented standpoint like the one here might motivate actions beyond quarterly reports and immediate bottom lines. The need for insider social change agents' work to have efficacy is great, but the road ahead is still long and steep. The time for "tempering" the radicalism of critiques and solutions is past, and "untempered" approaches are needed.

The relatively new legitimacy of studying insider social change agents as business school scholars, and teaching it to future managers, may be one heartening instance of early small wins aggregating to a robust and legitimated discussion of the social impacts of business. This research has flourished as scholars in business schools who tackle this topic have moved, to a good extent, from mavericks to the mainstream. We hope to inject energy into scholarship on insider social change agents, generating new insights across multiple disciplines, and propelling the managers and students we touch with our work to catalyze the chain reactions needed for broader societal transformations. An emphasis on "common humanity" motivates the UN SDGs and may even motivate formerly reluctant change agents, as we together begin to see the possibly dire consequences for future generations if we do not do this insider change agent work.

## AUTHOR BIOS

**Katrin Heucher** ([k.s.heucher@rug.nl](mailto:k.s.heucher@rug.nl)) is a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Change Management and Sustainability at the Department of Innovation Management and Strategy, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Groningen. Katrin's research lies at the intersection of sustainability management and organization studies. Katrin obtained her PhD from Loughborough University and held a postdoctoral fellowship at the Erb Institute, University of Michigan. Before obtaining her PhD, Katrin held management roles in the chemical industry in Germany and China.

**Elisa Alt** ([elisa.alt@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:elisa.alt@kcl.ac.uk)) is Assistant Professor in Entrepreneurship at King's Business School, King's College London. Elisa studies individual and organizational approaches to social intrapreneurship, with a focus on how individuals can become entrepreneurial change agents for positive social change. Her research has been published in the Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Business Venturing, and Journal of Management Studies, among other outlets. Before obtaining her PhD from the University of Seville in Spain, she worked as a creative in the advertising industry in Brazil.

**Sara Soderstrom** ([capasb@umich.edu](mailto:capasb@umich.edu)) is Associate Professor in Organizational Studies & Program in the Environment at University of Michigan. Sara studies how individuals within organizations mobilize others, develop coalitions, and access key decision makers when they are trying to implement sustainability initiatives. She has published in numerous management journals including Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, Journal of Business Ethics, Organization & Environment, and Organization Studies.

**Maureen Scully** ([maureen.scully@umb.edu](mailto:maureen.scully@umb.edu)) is Professor of Management and the Sherry H Penney Chair in Leadership in the Organizations and Social Change program in the College of Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston. She studies how "tempered radicals, working from inside traditional corporate and workplace locations, can mobilize change efforts in pursuit of social justice. Her research has appeared in multiple outlets including Academy of Management Journal, Administrative Science Quarterly, Human Relations, Organization Science, Organization Studies, and Stanford Social Innovation Review.

**Ante Glavas** ([Ante.Glavas@uvm.edu](mailto:Ante.Glavas@uvm.edu)) is Associate Professor at the Grossman School of Business, University of Vermont. Ante studies the microfoundations of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and has published in numerous journals including Business Ethics Quarterly, Business & Society, Information Systems Research, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Management, and Journal of Management Studies. His professional experience includes a senior executive role in a Fortune 500 company, consulting engagements with over 100 organizations, and the founding of three social enterprises.

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**TABLE 1**

**Academic Terms used to Define Actors Promoting Social Change Inside Established Organizations<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Terminology</b>	<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Author(s) and Year</b>
<b>Bottom-up CSR by Employees</b>	Employees who adopt “a bottom-up and inside-out approach to CSR [that] begins with understanding how employees make sense of CSR, their work, and what is meaningful and valuable for them” (Aguinis & Glavas, 2019: 1078).	Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, & Ganapathi (2007); Aguinis & Glavas (2019), Carrington, Zwick, & Neville (2019); Girschik (2020b); Girschik, Svystunova, & Lysova (2022); Sendlhofer (2020); Sendlhofer & Tolstoy (2022)
<b>Champions for Environmental/ Social issues</b>	Individuals who “convince and enable organization members to turn environmental [and social] issues into successful corporate programs and innovations” (Andersson & Bateman, 2000: 548)	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Gattiker & Carter (2010); Jenkins (2006); Taylor, Cocklin, & Brown (2012); Walley & Stubbs (1999)
<b>Employee Advocates/Advocacy Groups</b>	Employees who publicly support a cause (e.g., sustainability initiatives, non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation) “between and through organizations” (DeJordy et al., 2020: 2)	Creed, Scully, & Austin (2002); DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed, (2020); Soderstrom & Weber (2020)
<b>Environmental/ Sustainable Intrapreneurs</b>	“...individuals and groups working within the corporation to: (1) identify ideas for new products or services that reflect a concern for the environment (e.g., recycled materials, reduced pollution, efficient use of resources); and (2) turn these ideas into profitable products and services” (Hostager et al., 1998: 11-12).	Hostager, Neil, Decker, & Lorentz (1998); Schaltegger, Lüdeke-Freund, & Hansen (2016)
<b>Insider/Employee (Social) Activists</b>	“...individuals or groups of individuals who lack full access to institutionalized channels of influence [and who] engage in collective action to remedy a perceived social problem, or to promote or counter changes to the existing social order” (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016: 674), on a spectrum from insiders to outsiders, where the employee is the quintessential insider.	Briscoe & Gupta (2016); Briscoe & Safford (2008); DeCelles, Sonenshein, & King (2020); Scully & Segal (2002); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022); Skoglund & Böhm (2020); Zald & Berger (1978)
<b>Institutional Entrepreneurs</b>	“...change agents who initiate divergent changes, that is, changes that break the institutional status quo in a field of activity and thereby possibly contribute to transforming existing institutions or creating new ones... They can be organizations or groups of organizations... or individuals or groups of individuals” (Battilana et al., 2009: 67-68).	Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum (2009); Déjean, Gond, & Leca (2004); Heinze & Weber (2016); Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Sine & David (2003)
<b>Internal Reformers</b>	Individuals who seek to effect change in institutionalized work practices (Kellogg, 2009).	Kellogg (2009, 2011, 2012, 2019)

<b>Issue Sellers (Social and Environmental Issues)</b>	Individuals who seek to affect “others’ attention to and understanding of issues” within firms (Dutton & Ashford, 1993: 398)—in this case social and environmental issues.	Alt & Craig (2016); Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton (1998); Bansal (2003); Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino (2002); Howard-Grenville, (2007b); Sonenshein, (2006, 2012), Wickert & de Bakker (2018)
<b>Outsider Within</b>	Professionals anchored in Black feminist thought, whose work “suggests that it is impossible to separate the structure and thematic content of thought from the historical and material conditions shaping the lives of its producers” (Collins, 1986: S16).	Carrillo Arciniega (2021); Collins (1986, 2000); Holvino (1996); Melaku & Beeman (2022)
<b>Social Change Agents (Inside Firms)</b>	“...employees without formal power,” specifically individuals who “act as a catalyst in convincing their firms to support a social issue” (Sonenshein, 2016: 350)	Branzei (2012); Sonenshein (2012, 2016); Steckler & Waddock (2018); Wickert & de Bakker (2018)
<b>Social Intrapreneurs</b>	“...individuals or groups of individuals [who] seek to identify and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities that address social problems from within established organizations” (Geradts & Alt, 2022: 198)	Alt & Craig (2016); Austin, Leonard, Reficco, & Wei-Skillern (2005); Besharov (2022); Geradts & Alt (2022); Glavas & Willness (2020); Halme, Lindeman, & Linna, (2012); Hemingway (2005)
<b>Tempered Radicals</b>	“...individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995: 586)	Kezar, Bertram Gallant, & Lester (2011); Kirton, Greene, & Dean (2007); Mayock (2016); Meyerson & Scully (1995); Swan & Fox (2010); Westerman & Huey (2012)

<sup>a</sup> For the purpose of our review, we choose the term *insider social change agent* to integrate knowledge on individuals or groups of individuals inside organizations who are seeking to propel their organization toward contributing to positive social change.

**TABLE 2****Five Streams of Literature that Inform our Review**

<b>Stream</b>	<b>Early Works and Recent Examples</b>	<b>Discipline Anchors and Key Concepts</b>	<b>Themes and Insights</b>
Employee activism	Zald & Berger (1978) Scully & Segal (2002) Buchter (2020) Soderstrom & Weber (2020)	Sociology: social movements, mobilization, risk-taking against entrenched power, framing, allies, diffusion, networks.	Committed insiders can advance social movement aims in the workplace; organizations are a critical locus for advocacy work to advance societal aims.
Issue selling and championing	Dutton & Ashford (1993) Bansal (2003) Heucher (2021) Wickert & de Bakker (2018)	Organization studies, strategy: attention allocation, upward influence, framing, impression management.	Insiders can influence organizational attention through practices that affect others' attention to and understanding of social issues from the bottom up.
Tempered radicalism	Meyerson & Scully (1995) Kirton et al. (2007) Swan & Fox (2010) Kezar et al. (2011)	Feminist theory, Black feminist scholarship: ambivalence, assimilation pressure, cooptation.	Insiders have to balance being too provocative with the pull to assimilate and "sell out."
Social intrapreneurship	Austin et al. (2004) Hemingway (2005) Davis & White (2015) Alt & Craig (2016)	Entrepreneurship, CSR: entrepreneurial opportunity, hybrid organizing, innovation, issue selling, resource mobilization.	Insiders can address social issues through market means by creating novel products, services, and processes in their firms.
Micro CSR (corporate social responsibility)	Glavas & Piderit (2009) Aguinis & Glavas (2019) Girschik (2020b) Gond et al. (2017)	CSR, business ethics – embedded CSR, employee engagement, values-based action, meaningful work	Employees drive local changes from the inside to enact alternative approaches to CSR



**TABLE 3**  
**Search String Structure**

<b>Concept A Person</b>	<b>Concept B Activity</b>	<b>Concept C Outcome</b>	<b>Concept D Place</b>
employee* OR manager* OR internal OR insider OR micro* OR individual	“employee involve*” OR “employee engage*” OR activis* OR “institutional entrepreneur*” OR “corporate entrepreneur*” OR “organizational entrepreneur*” OR intrapreneur* OR “tempered radical*” OR “agen*” OR “champion* issue” OR “issue champion*” OR “issue selling” OR “selling issues” OR influence OR advocacy OR transformation* OR change	“social innovation” OR “social movement” OR “social change” OR “social entrepreneurship” OR “social responsibility” OR “corporate responsibility” OR CSR OR “corporate responsibility” OR “corporate social responsibility” OR “sustainability” OR “sustainable development” OR “social intrapreneurship” OR “social impact” OR environment*	organization* OR institution* OR firm OR company OR corporat*
<b>Search String</b>			
TS=((employee* OR manager* OR internal OR insider OR micro* OR individual) AND (“employee involve*” OR “employee engage*” OR activis* OR “institutional entrepreneur*” OR “corporate entrepreneur*” OR “organizational entrepreneur*” OR intrapreneur* OR “tempered radical*” OR “agen*” OR “champion* issue” OR “issue champion*” OR “issue selling” OR “selling issues” OR influence OR advocacy OR transformation* OR change) AND (“social innovation” OR “social movement” OR “social change” OR “social entrepreneurship” OR “social responsibility” OR “corporate responsibility” OR CSR OR “corporate responsibility” OR “corporate social responsibility” OR “sustainability” OR “sustainable development” OR “social intrapreneurship” OR “social impact” OR environment*) AND (organization* OR institution* OR firm OR company OR corporat*)) AND IS=( [selected journals] )			

**TABLE 4**  
**Characteristics of Person: Who are Insider Social Change Agents**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example of Studies</b>
<b>Role</b>	Official role or social mandate: Having an explicit job title or mandate that directs one's attention to work that can have societal relevance.	Edelman, Petterson, Chambliss, & Erlanger (1991); Creed & Scully (2000); Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Hedman & Henningsson (2016); Sandhu & Kulik (2018); Wickert & de Bakker (2018); Hunoldt, Oertel, & Galander, 2020; Augustine & King (2022); Ramirez & Islam (2022), Darcis, Hahn, & Alt (2023); Gutierrez-Huerter O (2023)
	No official role or mandate: Not holding a formal role with a social mandate, one acts as an insider social change agent, beyond their regular work duties.	Ramus & Steger (2000); Bell et al. (2003); Cranford (2007); Kellogg (2009); Creed, DeJordy, & Lok (2010); Hargreaves (2011); Halme, Lindeman, & Linna (2012); Courpasson et al. (2016); Easter, Ceulemans, & Lynn (2021); Darcis et al. (2023); Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe (2023)
<b>Identity</b>	Personal values and identity: One's general sense of self and the moral norms and values one strives to follow.	Bansal (2003); Hemingway (2005); Wright, Nyberg, & Grant (2012); Summers & Dyck (2011); Eberhardt-Toth & Wasieleski (2013); Sonenshein, DeCelles & Dutton (2014); Courpasson et al. (2016); Wickert & de Bakker (2018); Carrington et al. (2019); Skoglund & Böhm (2020); Shin, Vu, & Burton (2022)
	Social identity: Elements of the social identity such as race, gender, or sexual orientation.	Bell & Nkomo (1998); Creed & Scully (2000); Creed, Scully, & Austin (2002); Scully & Segal (2002); Bell et al., (2003); Briscoe & Safford (2008); Petrucci (2020); Seegars (2021); Prengler, Chawla, Leigh, & Rogers (2023)
	Occupational identity: Individual's sense of self associated with their work role or job.	Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Daudigeos (2013); DiBenigno & Kellogg (2014); Howard-Grenville et al. (2017); Augustine (2021); Augustine & King (2022); DiBenigno (2018; 2022)
	Privilege: Belonging to a socially advantaged vs. a socially disadvantaged group; degree of socioeconomic status.	Kellogg (2012, 2019); Feront (2021); Rosile, Boje, Herder, & Sanchez (2021); Satterstrom, Kerrissey & DeBenigno (2021); Dang & Joshi (2023); Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe (2023)
<b>Motivation</b>	Life experience: Turning points in the life course given new narratives.	Tannock (2001); Courpasson et al. (2016); Hemingway & Starkey (2018); Kellogg (2019)
	Calling: Deeply embodying a sense that one must pursue their efforts.	Katzenstein (1998); Creed, DeJordy & Lok (2010); Gutierrez, Howard-Grenville & Scully (2010); Wright, Nyberg, & Grant (2012); Athayde & Silva-Lugo, (2018); Fontana, Frandsen & Morsing (2023)
	Emotions: feelings that emerge as a reaction to social and environmental issues.	Dutton & Dukerich (1991); Bendl, Danowitz, & Schmidt (2014); DeCelles et al., (2020); Easter, Ceulemans, & Lynn (2021); Wang, Whitson, King, & Ramirez (2021)

**TABLE 5**  
**Characteristics of Place: Where Insider Social Change Agents are Situated**

Type	Definition	Example of Studies
<b>Organization</b>	Relational (free) spaces: Physical spaces where participants are co-located or online spaces where participants engage synchronously from different locations.	Kellogg (2009); Heinze & Weber (2016); Soderstrom & Weber (2020); Güneştepe & Tunçalp (2023)
	Supervisory support: Presence of supportive superiors within the organizational hierarchy.	Ramus & Steger (2000); Scully & Segal (2002); Juravle & Lewis (2009); Raineri & Paillé (2016); Kim, Kim, Han, Jackson, & Ployhart (2017)
	Opportunity structure: Ambition or fuzzy goals that open doors for people to pitch initiatives--"prior history of engagement with an issue and its accumulation of issue-specific resources, which shape the terrain for activists to use persuasion to expand reforms" (Schifeling & Soderstrom, 2022: 1778).	Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton (1998); Bansal (2003); Briscoe & Safford (2008); Sandhu & Kulik (2018); Sendlhofer & Tolstoy (2022)
	Organizational incentives and corporate policy: Explicit performance indicators and rewards that align with overarching goals of the change effort.	Raineri & Paille (2016); Sandhu & Kulik (2018); Sarvaiya, Eweje & Arrowsmith (2018); Kimsey, Geradts & Battilana (2023)
	Culture: Perception of organization as aligned with social goals (e.g. ethical; socially responsible).	Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino (2002); Grisard et al. (2020); Gullifor, Petrenko, Chandler, Quade, & Rouba (2023); Kurki & Lähdesmäki (2023); Palmie, Ruegger, Holzer, & Oghazi (2023)
	Ideology: Organizational values; deeply embedded philosophy and convictions.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Bansal (2003); Briscoe, Chin, & Hambrick, 2014; Hedman & Henningsson (2016); Dang & Joshi (2023); Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe (2023)
<b>Networks</b>	Resources: Availability of funding and time to allocate to the change effort.	Taylor, Cocklin, Brown, & Wilson-Evered (2011); Soderstrom & Weber (2020); DiBenigno (2020)
	Knowledge and information: Availability of learning opportunities, technologies, and skills; development of shared understanding of the issue and approach.	Wickert & De Bakker (2018); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022)

	Social support: Availability of assistance and reassurance from others.	Bode, Rogan & Singh (2019); Petrucci (2020); Pamphile (2022)
	Boundary spanning: Connections beyond the business domain into other areas (e.g policy, science, movements) that align around the issue.	DeJordy et al. (2020); Rothenberg (2007); Rothenberg & Levy (2012)
<b>Field</b>	Regulatory environment: Laws, rules, and regulations established by governing entities.	Edelman et al. (1991); Hoffman (1999); Juravle & Lewis (2009); Shin et al. (2022a)
	Conventions and norms: Usual or accepted way of behaving.	Juravle & Lewis (2009); Girschik (2020a)
<b>Embeddedness</b>	Multilevel embeddedness: Individuals or organizations are embedded in various interconnected levels, such as networks, organizations, and larger societal contexts.	Bolton, Kim, O'Gorman (2011); Summers & Dyck (2011); Halme, Lindeman, Linna (2012); Girschik (2020a)
	Boundaries: The demarcations or limits that distinguish social entities or systems from one another.	Rothenberg (2007); Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Augustine & King (2022)
	Open polity: external environments flow into the internal dynamics of organizations, and internal politics influence organizational responses to external pressures (Weber & Waeger, 2017).	Heyden, Wilden, & Wise (2020); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022)

**TABLE 6**  
**Activities of Insiders Social Change Agents**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Examples of Studies</b>
<b>Preparing</b>	Identifying issue/idea: Identifying a social/environmental issue or idea that can be addressed from within the organization, including the management of technical and institutional pressures.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Ramus & Steger (2000); Bansal (2003); Rothenberg (2007); Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Hedman & Henningsson (2016); Molloy, Bankins, Kriz, & Barnes (2020)
	Accessing and reinterpreting expertise: using expertise on internal data, systems, and processes to prepare issues.	Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino (2002), Piderit & Ashford (2003); Grisard, Annisette, & Graham (2020); Kessinger (2023)
	Adjusting from experience: adapting based on reflections and learnings from previous experiences.	Howard-Grenville (2007)
	Minimizing threats: affirming the authority of potential supporters, and maintaining jurisdictional boundaries; cautious and gradual introduction of more probing forms of institutional work, showing effort to maintain cooperative relationships.	Kellogg (2019); Clune & O'Dwyer (2020); DiBenigno (2020)
	Narrowing focus to avoid contentious issues: eliminating tasks related to contentious or politicized issues after confronting jurisdictional ambiguity, in the pursuit of “neutrality.”	Edelman, Petterson, Chambliss, & Erlanger (1991); Augustine (2021)
<b>Motivating others</b>	Moral framing: framing social/environmental issues in terms of moral obligations, values, fairness, equity, and equality.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Crane (2000); Creed, Scully, & Austin (2002); Bansal (2003); Howard-Grenville, Hoffman, & Wirtenberg (2003); Sonenshein (2006); Howard-Grenville, Nelson, Earle, Haack, & Young (2017), Carrington, Zwick, & Neville (2019); Mayer, Ong, Sonenshein, & Ashford (2019)
	Instrumental framing: framing social/environmental issues in terms of financial opportunities, economic efficiency, technical and quality issues, brand identification.	
	Frame alignment: aligning framing with the preferences of both internal and external audiences, by for example promoting congruence with organizational values, occupational concerns, or embellishing/subtracting language from frames.	Crane (2000); Creed et al. (2002); Bansal (2003); Sonenshein (2006); Howard-Grenville (2007); Rothenberg (2007); Howard-Grenville et al. (2017); Wickert & de Bakker (2018); Girschik (2020a)

	Appropriating business resources, processes, and concerns: Using reputational/commercial risks, and financial/market data to legitimate and disguise ethical/sustainable motives and insert them as ‘Trojan horses’ in corporations.	Ball (2007); Carrington et al. (2019); DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed (2020); Girschik (2020b); Rodrigue & Picard (2022); Kessinger (2024)
	Creating shared meanings around what constitutes supporting or opposing a social/environmental issue: providing data and explanations that put issues in familiar terms to audiences, while promoting desired interpretations (e.g., affirming impact) and questioning the meaning of dominant accounts.	Acosta, Acquier, & Gond (2021); Creed et al. (2002); Howard-Grenville (2007); Girschik (2020a); Schüßler, Lohmeyer, & Ashwin (2023)
	Sustaining differences in frames: appealing to heterogeneity of occupational roles in addressing social issues, instead of commonalities.	Howard-Grenville et al. (2017)
	Emotional framing: tapping into emotions of audiences (e.g., their national pride, excitement, guilt, and remorse); drawing attention to the significance and urgency of the social problem, and emphasizing the opportunity to advance the well-being of potential beneficiaries.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Wickert & de Bakker (2018); Geradts, Jansen, & Cornelissen (2022)
	Compliance framing: appealing to internal policies and external regulatory commitments or threats.	Howard-Grenville (2007); Rothenberg (2007)
	Presenting and packaging: formal and businesslike, using powerful, meaningful, and clear metaphors, graphic content, demonstrating industry-specific skill and humor.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Carrigan, Moraes, & Leek (2011); Geradts et al. (2022)
	Protesting in the workplace: disruptive protests targeting the organization; or alternatively using the organization as a platform for activism targeting the organization’s external stakeholders (e.g., taking a knee).	Soule (2009); Rheinhardt, Briscoe, & Joshi (2023); Rheinhardt, Poskanzer, & Briscoe (2023)
	Avoiding stagnation and complacency: circulating stories of incomplete change efforts to avoid settling on small wins.	DeJordy et al. (2020)
<b>Connecting</b>	Learning from outsiders: interacting with experts on issue (e.g., scientific community) both informally and formally (e.g., inviting external speakers to the workplace).	Howard-Grenville, Hoffman, & Wirtenberg (2003); Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Carrington et al. (2019); DeJordy et al. (2020)

	Coalition building: forming internal and external partnerships centered on addressing a social problem, launching cross-organizational efforts, task forces, employee resource groups.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Scully (2009); Briscoe & Safford (2008); Briscoe, Chin, & Hambrick (2014); Carrington et al. (2019); DeJordy et al. (2020); Girschik (2020a); Petrucci (2020); Rosile, Boje, Herder, & Sanchez (2021); Seegars (2021)
	Intentional convening: enabling contact between diverse participants—across gender, race, hierarchical positions, value frames; promoting engagement through participatory devices.	Kellogg (2009, 2011, 2012); Heinze & Weber (2016); Clune & O'Dwyer (2020); Heinze & Soderstrom (2023)
	Promoting quality interactions: interactions characterized by attention, motivation, knowledge, relationships, resources, and that endure over time; often involving conversations beyond work issues, and treating others as individuals rather than group representatives.	Kellogg (2009); DiBenigno (2018); Soderstrom & Weber (2020); Heinze & Soderstrom (2023)
	Endorsing the voices of lower power/underrepresented employees: vouching for the importance and feasibility of their ideas (with or without personal attribution).	Bain, Kreps, Meikle, & Tenney (2021); Satterstrom, Kerrissey, & DiBenigno (2021)
	Ensemble storytelling: a heterarchical form of storytelling that connects the stories of multiple workers as well as non-human life, drawing on an indigenous sense of collectivity.	Rosile, Boje, Herder, & Sanchez (2021)
<b>Resourcing</b>	Intrapreneurial bricolage: utilizing means at hand (e.g., one's own time), and bundling scarce resources in creative ways inside existing organizations (e.g., repurposing existing technology), to support social innovation.	Halme, Lindeman, & Linna (2012); Molloy et al. (2020)
	Acquiring external resources: obtaining resources from external partners and funders—such as grants (often to complement internal resources); or media coverage.	Halme et al. (2012); Grayson et al. (2014); Heinze & Weber (2016)
	Taking representative or external roles: becoming a union representative, or assuming positions in professional boards, associations.	Courpasson et al. (2016); Heinze & Weber (2016)
	Organizing dissent: co-opting internal voice mechanisms, such as townhall meetings, digital chat tools, internal online forums, etc. to air grievances; publishing petitions, leaks, walkouts, calls to boycott, etc. to mobilize action.	Soule (2009); Courpasson, Dany, & Martí (2016); Kessinger (2023)

	Providing implementation resources: offering resources that enable external partners and other insiders to address social problems, by designing resources (e.g., trainings, communication tools, systems, manuals, templates) voluntarily and for free, or by matching external resources with organizational contexts.	Buchter (2020); DeJordy et al. (2020); Girschik (2020a); Acosta et al. (2021); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022)
<b>Implementing</b>	Using the organization's political toolkit: using and shaping organizational systems, structures, and reward systems to enable and include insiders and their actions.	Kellogg (2011); Daudigeos (2013); Wang, Whitson, King, & Ramirez (2021); Kimsey et al. (2023); Dang & Joshi (2023)
	Involving partners as co-creators: including internal and external partners in the co-construction of solutions and strategic decision-making; facilitating collaboration across occupational identities and organizational silos.	Summers & Dyck (2011); Halme et al. (2012); Heinze & Weber (2016); Sandhu & Kulik (2018); Pinchot (1986); Ambos & Tatarinov (2022); Kimsey, Geradts, & Battilana (2023)
	Managing the cost-benefit of participation: Increasing the perceived benefits and reducing the perceived costs for participation (through business model features or taking on tasks for others).	Carrigan et al. (2011); Bode, Rogan, & Singh (2019)
	Experimenting with social issues: developing capacity to address social issues innovatively, often through new products, services, business models.	Summers & Dyck (2011); Halme et al. (2012); Heinze & Weber (2016); Sandhu & Kulik (2018); Pinchot (2019); Ambos & Tatarinov (2022); Kimsey, Geradts, & Battilana (2023)
	Adapting global strategies: Negotiating and adapting global strategies (e.g. regulatory or multinational corporate strategies) to fit local contexts.	Acosta et al. (2021); Shin, Cho, Brivot, & Gond (2022); Gutierrez-Huerter (2023)
	Resisting pushback: refusing to execute orders to terminate projects, including working underground and raising collective and overt challenges to antagonists; renewing or expanding change effort in the face of pushback.	Kellogg (2011); Halme et al. (2012); Courpasson et al. (2016); Schüßler et al. (2023)
	Breaking into the core: pushing innovations around social issues from free spaces into the organizational core.	Heinze & Weber (2016); Ambos & Tatarinov (2022); Kimsey et al. (2023)
<b>Evaluating</b>	Interpreting likelihood of successful action: evaluating chances of success in optimistic or pessimistic ways.	Kellogg (2011)



	Reflecting on tensions and paradoxes: Identifying tensions and paradoxes, and reflecting on approaches to these, individually, and in teams.	Carollo & Guerci (2018); Heucher (2020)
	Self-evaluations: evaluating oneself as a change agent or issue supporter.	Sonenshein, DeCelles, & Dutton (2014); Mitra & Buzzanell (2017); Feront (2021)
	Reflecting on roles and careers: (re)evaluating one's privilege, challenges, and aspirations in promoting social change.	Tams & Marshall (2011); Wright, Nyberg, & Grant (2012); Feront (2021)
<b>Coping</b>	Reframing roles and careers: extending or transforming roles to affirm agency for social change; crafting career narratives of achievement, epiphany, adversity, etc.; bridging identities; (de)prioritizing social aspirations.	Wright et al. (2012); Carollo & Guerci (2018); Augustine (2021); Feront (2021); Fontana, Frandsen, & Morsing (2023)
	Regulating emotions: suppressing or expressing passion and frustration during change efforts.	Piderit & Ashford (2003); Blomfield (2020)
	Explaining away tensions: compromising among motives, actions, and outcomes; normalizing and routinizing unethical behavior; delaying visions of change.	Sendlhofer (2020); Shin et al. (2022a)
	Relieving tensions with peers: connecting with peers inside and outside the workplace to relieve tensions, express solidarity, and emotion.	Courpasson et al. (2016); Pamphile (2022); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022)

**TABLE 7**  
**Outcomes of Insider Social Change Agent's Efforts**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example of Studies</b>
<b>Political changes</b>	Attention: Focus on the issue from top management and other organizational members.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Bansal (2003); Mayer, Ong, Sonenshein, & Ashford (2019)
	Internal support: Gaining allies, resources, and commitments for initiatives.	Wichmann, Carter, Kaufmann, & Wilson (2016); Wang, Whitson, King, & Ramirez (2021); Barron (2023)
	Mobilization: Cultivating and animating groups of insiders across organizations.	DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed (2020); Petrucci (2020); Rosile, Boje, Herder, & Sanchez (2021)
	Cross-sector partnerships: Ties between business, non-profits, government organizations, etc. working together to address the issue.	Bode, Rogan, & Singh (2019); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022)
<b>Cultural changes</b>	Legitimacy of initiative: Resulting acceptability and perceived appropriateness of an individual or group taking action to advance a particular cause or bring about change.	Girschik (2020a); Passetti & Rinaldi (2020)
	Organizational citizenship behaviors: Voluntary employee behaviors such as using stairs and reusing paper.	Robertson & Barling (2013); Raineri & Paille (2016); Kim, Kim, Han, Jackson, & Ployhart (2017); Skoglund, & Böhm (2020)
	Shared identities among insiders: Social and cultural connections between individuals who belong to a particular group or community.	Creed, Scully, & Austin (2002); Scully & Segal (2002); Hargreaves (2011)
<b>Structural changes</b>	Occupational roles and activities: Changes such as new job titles and mandates or new tasks within existing roles.	Howard-Grenville, Nelson, Earle, Haack, & Young (2017); Augustine (2021); Augustine & King (2022)
	Employee resource groups: Voluntary, employee-led groups within organizations that are created to support and advocate for specific communities or groups.	Scully & Segal (2002); Briscoe, Chin, & Hambrick (2014); Seegars (2021)
	Policies and agendas: Changes to organizational policies or adding new or removing items to the organizational agenda.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Alt, Diez-de-Castro, & Llorens-Montes (2015)

	Operational efficiency: Internal organizational process and product development changes that improve efficiency to reduce negative impacts on an issue (e.g., recycling of materials and equipment, switching off computers).	Rothenberg (2007); Hedman & Henningsson (2016); Corbett, Webster, & Jenkin (2018)
	Peripheral structural changes: Changes to structure such as new solutions to meet climate goals, free spaces, product innovations, corporate ventures.	Summers & Dyck (2011); Halme, Lindeman, & Linna (2012); Heinze & Weber (2016); Mirvis & Googins (2018); Soderstrom & Weber (2020); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022); Geradts, Jansen, & Cornelissen (2022); Kimsey, Geradts, & Battilana (2023)
	Core structural changes: Changes in organizational and business practices, moving from free spaces into the mainstream business.	Heinze & Weber (2016); Mirvis & Googins (2018); Girschik (2020b); Grisard, Annisette, & Graham (2020)
<b>Extraorganizational changes</b>	Changes in the value network: Operational changes across supply chains and value networks that address the issue (e.g., reducing waste, advancing sustainable products, eradicating enslavement practices in corporate supply chains).	Glavas & Fitzgerald (2020); Rosile, Boje, Herder, & Sanchez (2021); Schüßler, Lohmeyer, & Ashwin (2022)
	Catalyzing internal reforms across organizations: Reform efforts occurring across multiple organizations in a coordinated and aligned way (e.g., solutions to meet energy goals, implementation of diversity programs, banning use of plastic bags).	Carrigan, Moraes, & Leek (2011); Buchter (2020); DeJordy, Scully, Ventresca, & Creed (2020)
	Achieving social change goal: Meeting the outcomes for the social change efforts that address the initial issue (e.g., improving patient care and safety).	Kellogg (2009, 2012, 2019); DiBenigno & Kellogg (2014)
<b>Momentum for further activity</b>	Proposing initiative: Coming up and pitching a new initiative for change.	Taylor, Cocklin, Brown, & Wilson-Evered (2011); Delmas & Pekovic (2018); Palmié, Rügger, Holzer, & Oghazi (2023)
	Implementing initiative: Taking the necessary steps to put a change idea into action.	Dutton & Dukerich (1991), Howard-Grenville (2007); Satterstrom, Kerrissey, & DiBenigno (2021)
	Recruitment of champions: Process of identifying and enlisting individuals or groups who are committed to supporting a cause or implementing a particular change.	Bansal (2003); Taylor, Cocklin, Brown, & Wilson-Evered (2011)

<b>Unintended consequences for the effort</b>	Cooptation of goals and/or dismissal of concerns: When those in power adopt the language, goals or ideas of social movements or marginalized groups in an attempt to win their support, while ultimately working towards a different agenda.	Crane (2000); Howard-Grenville & Hoffman (2003); Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Seegars (2021); Sendlhofer & Tolstoy (2022)
	Disagreement on goals and actions: Fractured coalitions or jurisdictional drift.	Acosta, Acquier, & Gond (2021); Augustine (2021); Kessinger (2024)
<b>Individual consequences</b>	Willingness (or lack of) to promote initiative or support social issue: An individual or group's readiness or reluctance to take action in support of a particular cause or issue.	Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton (1998); Ramus & Steger (2000); Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino (2002); DeCelles, Sonenshein, & King (2020)
	Becoming influential: Insiders gaining status within their organization.	Scully & Segal (2002); Wickert & de Bakker (2018); Bain, Kreps, Meikle, & Tenney (2021)
	Dynamic and contested experiences of meaningful work and commitment to organizations.	Mitra & Buzzanell (2017); Ren, Tang, & Zhang (2023)
	Identity shifts: Significant changes in how individuals see themselves and their role in the world.	Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Güneştepe & Tunçalp (2023)
	Individual disengagement from moral responsibility: People finding ways to justify actions that go against their own moral codes.	Crane (2000); Sendlhofer (2020)
	Negative effects on insiders' health, such as burnout or physical symptoms.	Sonenshein, DeCelles & Dutton (2014); Glavas & Fitzgerald (2020)
	Negative effects on insiders' careers such as marginalization, racial subordination, discrimination in hiring and career progression, exclusion from social and professional networks, devaluation of work, harassment and intimidation, constraining promotions.	Taylor & Raeburn (1995); Rothenberg & Levy (2012); Courpasson, Dany, & Martí (2016); Seegars (2021)
	Exit: Insider social change agent exits the organization out of protest.	Kessinger (2023); Rheinhardt, Poskanzer, & Briscoe (2023)

**TABLE 8**  
**Characteristics of Issues**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Example of Studies</b>
<b>Topic</b>	Corporate Social Responsibility: Initiatives and activities undertaken by a company to mitigate their impact on the environment, society and stakeholders.	Muthuri, Matten & Moon (2009); Glavas & Fitzgerald (2020)
	Environment: Environmental issues refer to any challenges or concerns that emerge as a result of or context of a company's operations that affect the environment.	Eberhardt-Toth & Wasieleski (2013); Howard-Grenville et al. (2017)
	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: The recognition and inclusion of individuals from different races, genders, ethnicities, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds.	DeJordy et al. (2020); Satterstrom, Kerrissey & DiBenigno (2021); Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe (2023)
	Sustainability: Integrating multiple facets of social, environmental, and economic problems and challenges.	Carollo & Guerci (2018); Gallagher, Porter & Gallagher (2020); Augustine (2021)
	Health: The overall state of physical, mental, and emotional well-being.	Kellogg (2012, 2019); DiBenigno (2018)
	Social issues: Problems that affect society and its members on a large scale, often resulting from inequalities and injustices.	Parkes, Scully, Anson (2010); Courpasson, Dany & Martí (2016); Carrington, Zwick & Neville (2019); Schüßler, Lohmeyer & Ashwin (2022)
<b>Impact on profits</b>	Direct: Efforts around the issue that explicitly impact (positively or negatively) profits.	Lampikoski, Westerlund, Rajala & Moller (2014); Carollo & Guerci (2016)
	Indirect: Efforts around the issue that impact (positively or negatively) profits in a less explicit way, such as workplace safety and community engagement.	Petrucci (2020); Pamphile (2022)
<b>Solution-problem fit</b>	Technical/operational: A solution to a problem that is primarily based on the use of technology, engineering, or other practical tools.	Corbett, Webster & Jenkin (2018); Delmas & Pekovic (2018); Buchter (2020)
	Socio-technical: Considering both technical and social aspects when designing and implementing systems, processes, and policies.	Halme, Lindeman & Linna (2012); Soderstrom & Weber (2020)
<b>Temporality and external pressure</b>	Issue is connected to recent event, such as disasters related to human rights or extreme weather events.	Schüßler et al. (2022); Rheinhardt, Poskanzer & Briscoe (2023)

	Issue is connected to the prevention of something happening in the near future, for example, related to climate change.	Barling & Robertson (2013); Wright, Nyberg & Grant (2012)
	Extent to which there is pressure from outside stakeholders or competitors to address the issue, or there is an image risk associated.	Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence & Miner-Rubino (2002); Clune & O'Dwyer (2020); Schüßler et al. (2022)
	Extent to which the issue is politicized in the societal context.	Augustine (2021); Barron (2023)
	Physical proximity of issue to organizations or insiders.	Dutton & Dukerich (1991)
<b>Level of "against the grain"</b>	Extent to which issue is counter to the status quo or perceived as misaligned with organizational culture.	Taylor & Raeburn (1995); Wickert & De Bakker (2018); Gullifor, Petrenko, Chandler, Quade & Rouba (2023)
	Issue connects with organizational commitments (e.g. CSR, sustainability, or climate goals).	Bansal (2003); Hunoldt, Oertel & Galander (2020)
<b>Ambiguity</b>	Issue ambiguity: A situation where multiple different interpretations or views exist about a particular issue or topic. It can also refer to a lack of clarity or agreement on the definition, scope, or boundaries of an issue.	Andersson & Bateman (2000); Howard-Grenville (2007); Schifeling & Soderstrom (2022)
	Legal or regulatory ambiguity: A situation where laws or regulations are unclear, vague, or inconsistent, making it difficult for individuals or organizations to understand their rights and obligations or to comply with the law.	Edelman et al. (1991); Heucher (2021); Augustine (2021)

**TABLE 9**  
**Directions for Future Research**

Dimension	Example Research Questions per Dimension
<b>Person</b>	<p>What thresholds of contradiction between personal and organizational values can insider social change agents cope with?</p> <p>What are the differences among insiders who persist, who quit, and who turn to the "dark side"?</p> <p>Under which conditions should insiders seek to act as social change agents through formal vs. informal roles?</p> <p>Under which conditions do the social identities of insiders help or hinder the advancement of social and environmental issues?</p> <p>How do insiders evaluate their impact on social change throughout the career span?</p> <p>How do emotions influence the courage to act on social change for less privileged insiders?</p>
<b>Issue</b>	<p>How do issue characteristics influence the process and outcomes of insider social change agency?</p> <p>When and how does issue ambiguity influence change outcomes?</p> <p>How do dynamics of interdependent issues influence insider social change agents and their efforts?</p> <p>What characteristics are more or less inherent in an issue? How do these characteristics condition how mobilization activities occur?</p> <p>Under what circumstances can issue-specific activities – e.g., regarding anti-racism, climate, poverty – inform one another?</p> <p>When do issues compete with each other for attention from insider social change agents and when do they synergize?</p>
<b>Place</b>	<p>When and how do physical characteristics of place enable or constrain change efforts?</p> <p>When and how do new forms of employment dampen or catalyze change efforts?</p> <p>When and how do spaces such as digital platforms dampen or catalyze change efforts?</p> <p>How do insider social change agents navigate oppressive contexts?</p> <p>How do characteristics of embeddedness influence social change efforts?</p> <p>How can insider social change agents leverage embeddedness to catalyze positive social change?</p>
<b>Activities</b>	<p>How can insider social change agents avoid cooptation in the process of aligning initiatives with business concerns?</p> <p>How do insiders promote quality relationships in social change initiatives under increasing societal polarization?</p> <p>How can insiders develop collective identities around issues that are attached to specific social identities?</p> <p>How can activities be combined to effectively mobilize collective action?</p> <p>When and how are disruptive approaches to insider action more effective for positive social change?</p> <p>How can insiders avoid the trap of moral disengagement when social change initiatives become difficult to continue?</p>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<p>What are the material outcomes of the work of insider social change agents, and how do these material outcomes trigger positive social change?</p> <p>How can insider social change agents deal with or recover from individual consequences?</p> <p>How can positive outcomes, such as political, structural, and cultural organizational changes, be scaled for transformational impact (as part of ongoing activity)?</p> <p>When and how do extra-organizational changes spark change efforts in other organizations?</p> <p>When and how do outcomes slide toward low significance or escalate toward tremendous significance?</p> <p>How do waves of insider social change efforts relate to each other over time?</p>

**Moving to Transformational, Societal Impact;  
Example Research Questions**

**Integrating dimensions across persons, issues, places, activities, and outcomes.**

How can the dimensions of insider social change agents enable the aggregation of small wins over time?

When may internal change efforts be coopted to cover for corporate environmental and/or social harms?

What factors lock change agents' efforts in recurrent patterns of small wins?

**Blockers: Understanding insider social change inhibitors.**

When do powerful inhibitors squash change efforts?

When do powerful inhibitors catalyze internal responses that potentially cause positive chain reactions?

To what extent are the activities of blockers the same or different from those of insider social change agents?

**Ecosystems: From a focal firm to an ecosystems view.**

What happens as change agents and processes align and join forces – can they aggregate toward broader change?

Do change agents and issues compete for limited corporate resources, legitimation, and attention?

When and how do insider social change efforts reach tipping points?

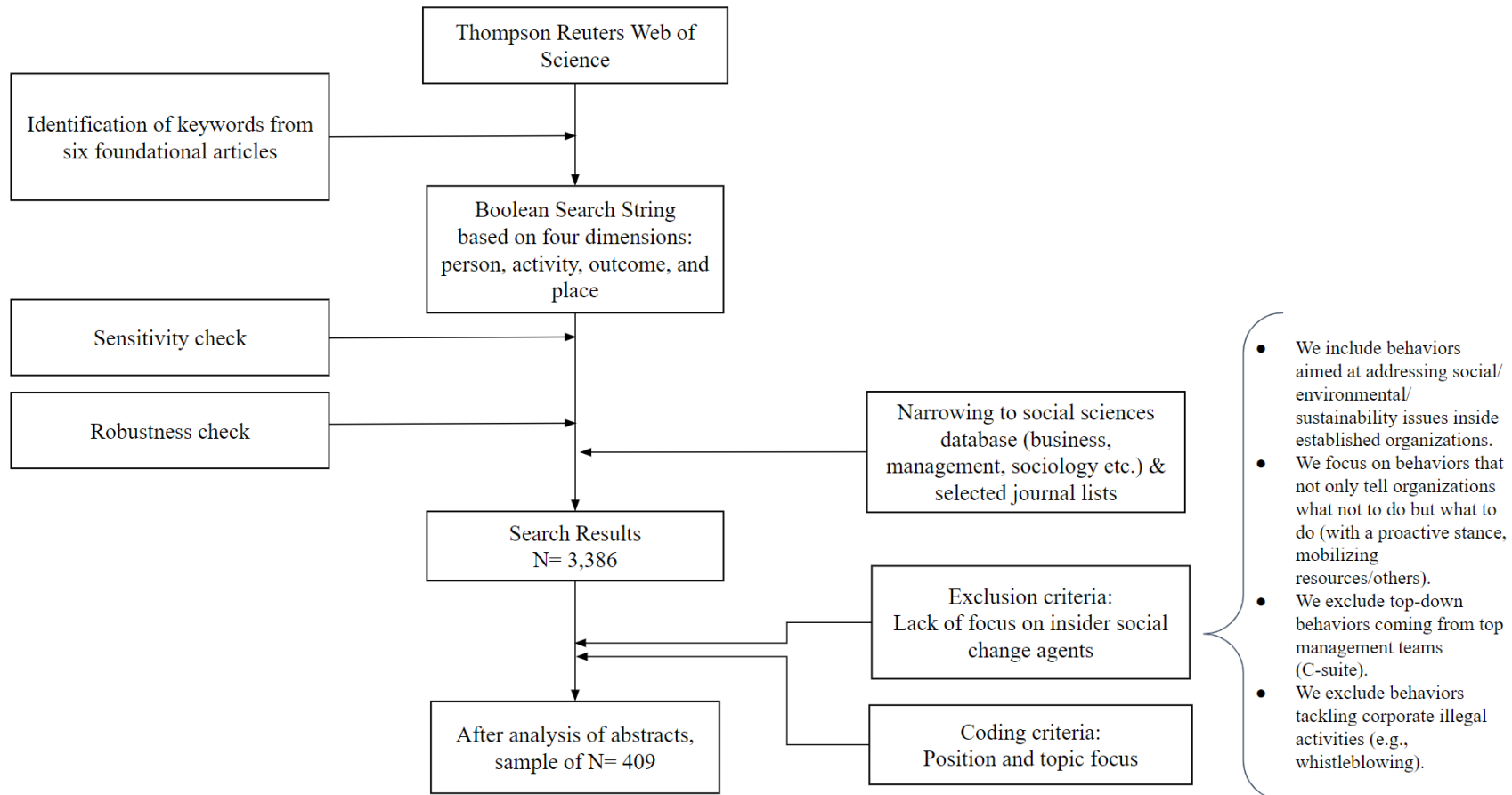
**Integrating and extending across literatures.**

How can the insights from our review enrich other literatures focusing on individual change efforts, e.g., ethical voice or whistleblowing?

How can insights from social-symbolic work inform research on the ways in which self, organization, and institutional work may interact with social change efforts?

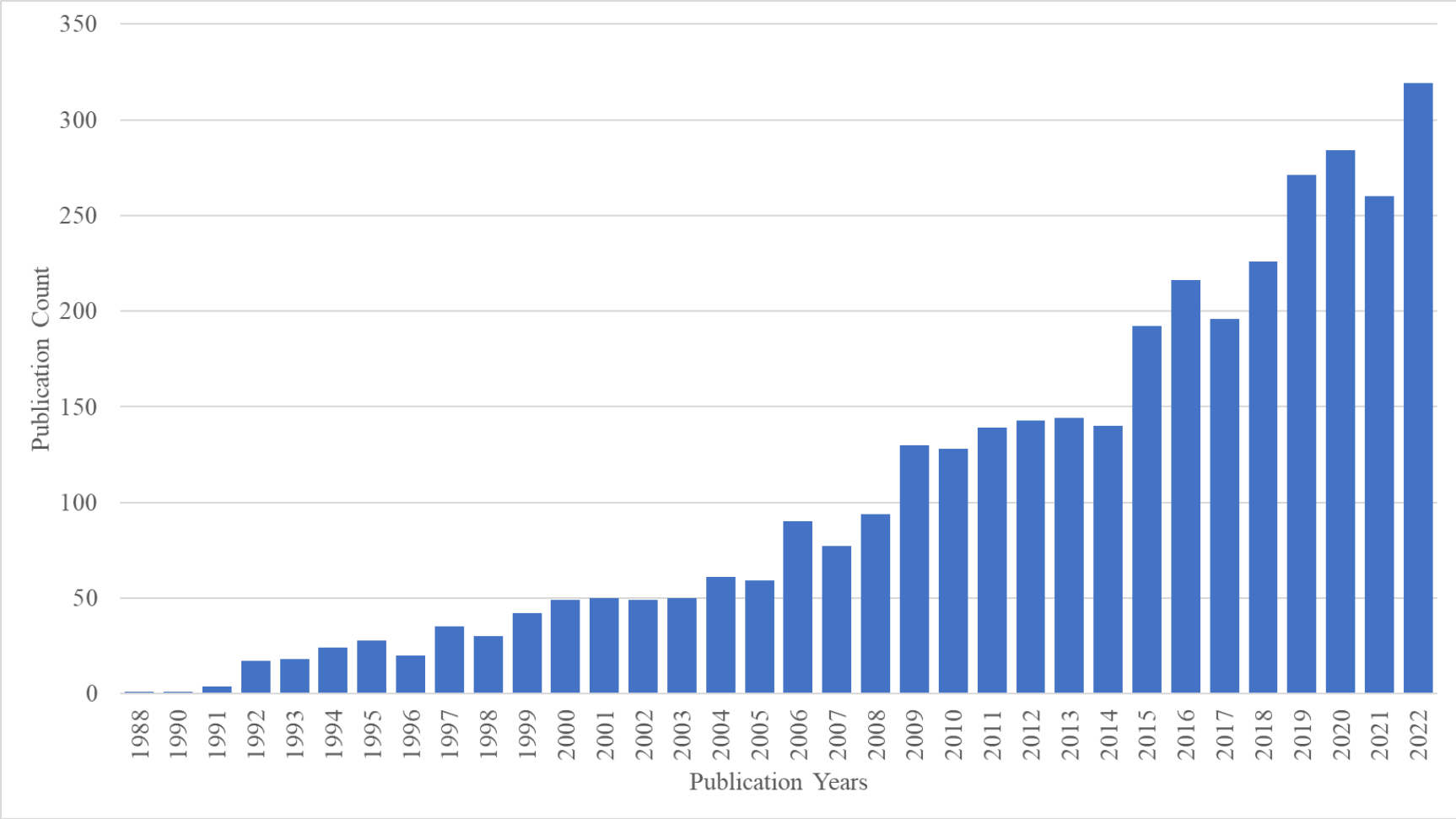
How can issue-specific insights from other disciplines (e.g., natural sciences on circular economy or planetary boundaries) inform insider social change agency?

**FIGURE 1**  
**Article Selection Process**





**FIGURE 2**  
**Development of Reviewed Literature over Time**



**FIGURE 3**  
**Integrative Model of Insider Social Change Agents**

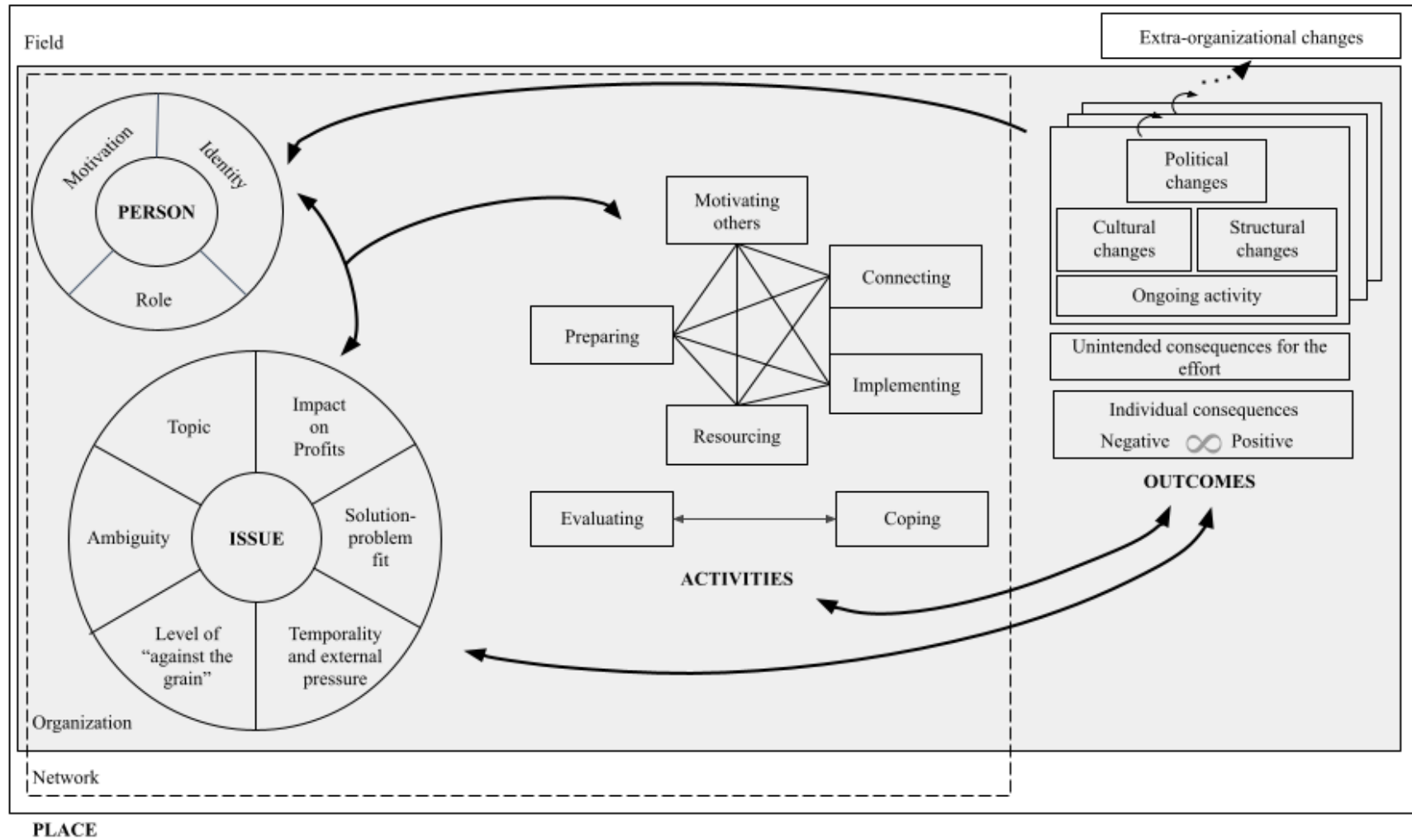


FIGURE 4

Shift in Research Direction Towards Efforts that Catalyze Positive Social Change

