

**THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
IN REDUCING EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE TO
ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE: THE CASE OF
SAUDI TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANY**

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SAUDI TELECOMMUNICATION COMPANY**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACD	Automatic Call Distributor
ADKAR	Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AR	Augmented Reality
BSC	Balanced Scorecard
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DARE	Digitisation, Acceleration, Reinvention, Expansion
GOSI	General Organisation of Social Insurance
ICMS	Integrated Customer Management System
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISPs	Internet Service Providers
IoT	Internet of Things
IT	Information Technology
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
OHI	Organizational Health Index
OPRs	Organisation–Public Relationships
PIF	Public Investment Fund
PR	Public relations
ROI	Return on Investment
STC	Saudi Telecommunications Company
TQM	Total Quality Management
VR	Virtual Reality
VRP	Vision Realisation Programs
WTO	World Trade Organization

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**SUMBANGAN PERHUBUNGAN AWAM DALAM MENGURANGKAN
RINTANGAN PEKERJA TERHADAP PERUBAHAN ORGANISASI:
KES SYARIKAT TELEKOMUNIKASI SAUDI**

ABSTRAK

Penentangan terhadap proses perubahan organisasi boleh merosakkan sesebuah organisasi dan pekerjaanya kerana penentangan dianggap sebagai punca utama kegagalan dalam pelaksanaan proses tersebut. Kajian ini meneroka tentang penentangan pekerja terhadap perubahan organisasi dalam Syarikat Telekomunikasi Saudi (STC) di Arab Saudi dan inisiatif perhubungan awam untuk menjayakan perubahan. Kajian ini mempunyai tiga objektif. Objektif pertama adalah untuk memahami peranan perhubungan awam dalam STC mengikut prinsip teori pengurusan perhubungan. Objektif kedua adalah untuk menganalisis isu-isu penentangan pekerja terhadap perubahan organisasi di STC berdasarkan aspek teori pengurusan perubahan Lewin. Objektif ketiga adalah untuk mencadangkan kerangka perhubungan awam yang berkesan untuk menguruskan penentangan pekerja terhadap perubahan organisasi dalam STC. Kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk kajian kualitatif; data telah dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam. Dua belas orang pekerja perhubungan awam STC dari ibu pejabat syarikat di Riyadh dan lima orang lagi dari cawangan STC di Jeddah, Mekah, Al-Madinah, Dammam, dan Abha telah terlibat dalam wawancara mendalam. Kaedah pensampelan bertujuan digunakan untuk memilih informan. Para peserta kajian terdiri daripada pengarah PR dan pengamal di jabatan perhubungan awam di setiap enam buah cawangan STC yang terlibat secara aktif dalam pengurusan perubahan. Selain itu, para peserta ini mempunyai kepakaran yang relevan untuk menangani cabaran dalaman yang mungkin memberikan impak

kepada imej syarikat, seperti penentangan pekerja. Data dianalisis dan diatur dengan menggunakan kaedah analisis tematik. Kajian menunjukkan bahawa perubahan organisasi boleh menyebabkan sesetengah pekerja mempunyai perasaan negatif seperti ketakutan, kehilangan identiti, kekurangan motivasi dan tekanan yang tinggi yang mendorong kepada penentangan pekerja bertambah terhadap perubahan. Oleh itu, perhubungan awam dapat membantu sistem pengurusan dan pekerja untuk mengatasi penentangan ini dengan melibatkan pekerja dalam proses perubahan, mencipta persekitaran positif, membina hubungan baik, dan mewujudkan komunikasi yang berkesan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa jabatan perhubungan awam berperanan penting dalam meningkatkan prestasi organisasi melalui komunikasi berkesan, pengurusan reputasi, penglibatan pihak berkepentingan, respons krisis, dan pembuatan keputusan strategik. Kajian ini mengemukakan beberapa implikasi dan cadangan untuk kajian masa depan tentang peranan perhubungan awam di Arab Saudi dalam mengendalikan penentangan pekerja.

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ABSTRACT

Resistance to the process of organisational change is damaging to an organisation and its employees as it is regarded as a significant reason for failure in executing the process. This study explored employee resistance to organisational change in Saudi Arabia's Saudi Telecommunications Company (STC) and how public relations (PR), can act as one of the initiatives to implement changes successfully. This research had three objectives: to understand the role of public relations in Saudi Telecommunications Company based on the principles of relationship management theory, to analyse employee resistance issues during organisational change in Saudi Telecommunications Company based on aspects of Lewin's change management theory, and to recommend a public relations framework to manage employees' resistance to organisational change in Saudi Telecommunications Company. The study adopted a qualitative research design, and the data were collected using in-depth interviews, which were conducted with 12 public relations Saudi Telecommunications Company employees at the company's headquarters in Riyadh and five other Saudi Telecommunications Company branches in Jeddah, Mecca, Al-Madinah, Dammam, and Abha. The informants, who comprised public relations directors and practitioners in the public relations departments of each of the six Saudi Telecommunications Company branches actively engaged in change management, were selected using the purposive sampling method. These individuals possess relevant expertise in addressing internal challenges that have the potential to impact the company's image,

such as employee resistance. The obtained data were analysed and organised using the thematic analysis method. Findings revealed that organisational change can leave some employees with negative emotions of fear, a lack of identity, a lack of motivation, and elevated stress levels, which can lead to increased levels of employees' resistance to change. Thus, public relations can help the management system and employees reduce this resistance by involving employees in the change process, creating a more positive environment, and building better relationships and effective communication. The findings also indicate that the public relations department plays a crucial role in augmenting organisational performance through effective communication, reputation management, stakeholder engagement, crisis response, and strategic decision-making. Ultimately, the study offered several implications and recommendations for future studies on the role of public relations in Saudi Arabia in response to employee resistance.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The present chapter explains the background of the study and the problem statement that led to it, along with the research objectives and research questions that provide the focus of the study. Moreover, this chapter also presents the significance of the study and the definitions of key terms to provide context.

1.2 Research Background

In the digital era, organisations have experienced constant change due to the exponential rise in computer processing power, significantly impacting a constantly changing global economy (Raeder, 2023). Thus, organisational change is essential at individual and organisational levels (Kim & Kim, 2023) as it enables a company to adapt to its environment and improve its market position. Further, organisational change denotes the readiness of relevant parties to accept and operate within an alternative system (Hvidsten et al., 2023). This change also assists firms in introducing more productive ways of producing or generating products (Albrecht & Roughsedge, 2022).

The need for organisations to introduce change stems from external pressures and the requirement for internal alignment of structural defects (Mansaray, 2019), which could be caused by economic, political or social pressures. Among the various reasons for implementing organisational change, the chief ones involve maintaining organisations' dynamics while improving their success and personnel performance. Beyond this, organisational change aims to prevent or remove organisational crises

and allow the company to endure the competition and instability of the environment. Companies that do not adapt to environmental pressures risk their survival in the industry (Arifin, 2020). Thus, organisational change is crucial for them to continue the success and existence of their companies.

However, despite the constant presence of organisational change, it poses certain challenges. In reality, many organisations fail to make the required reforms to survive, and change management is one of the biggest obstacles for most organisations worldwide, remaining an essential element in facilitating organisational changes (Arifin, 2020). Naveed et al. (2022) argued that employee opposition is the most challenging aspect of adapting to change. Other issues include creating a change-friendly organisational culture and allocating enough resources. Transformation advocates frequently blame opposition from employees and middle managers for implementation difficulties, which is often true. Besides, senior leaders and managers frequently overestimate their ability to influence the organisation, and some of them misunderstand the challenges of leading and implementing change because they may be overly focused on the technical and organizational aspects of change without considering its psychological and social impacts on employees.

Furthermore, observing from the perspective of the Saudi Arabian government, stakeholders must be educated and motivated through financial incentives, advancement, and training as the region is currently undergoing major changes in its economic and political aspects (Zaidan et al., 2019), which are expected to influence almost every entity in the region. Recently, the Saudi government unveiled Vision 2030, a national reform plan guided by Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (Communications and Information Technology Commission, 2021), which aims to liberalise the economy and relieve strain on the public and private sectors. There are

13 Vision Realization Programs (VRP) in the plan, including the Financial Sector Development Program, the Human Capital Development Program, and the National Transformation Program (Grand & Wolff, 2020). Every VRP contains a detailed delivery plan including targets, initiatives, timeline, and budget. For instance, the National Transformation Program involves several ministries, including the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, and aims to incorporate change to the ministries and, thus, to organisations under the ministries by targeting operational excellence, identifying and overcoming challenges with engagement from stakeholders, and implementing the programme's many initiatives. The new reforms also aim to eliminate the complexities and flaws in the present system. Hence, the new structure should be more dynamic and service-oriented in terms of quality. Thus, examining Saudi employees' acceptance of change is crucial to support the vision. This necessitates studies on suitable approaches to managing organisational changes and employee resistance (Alsubaie, 2022).

As the Saudi information and communications technology (ICT) sector is rapidly growing and regularly witnessing constant and sudden changes due to Vision 2030, along with other external and internal pressures, it is not surprising that the industries are trying to keep up with the changes since Saudi Arabia's economy relies on telecommunications services and technologies as they contribute to the country's GDP growth. The impact of the information and communications technology sector is evident as the Public Investment Fund (PIF) under Vision 2030 seeks to invest 18% of their funds in the information and communications technology sector after investing 39% in petrochemicals (Grand & Wolff, 2020). The remaining funds are distributed among other sectors such as financial services, utilities, and mining. The use of modern technology and the availability of applications give the impression that other economic

sectors will also benefit from it. Saudi Telecommunications Company is among the companies in this sector expected to keep up with the changes since the information and communications technology sector in this nation changes periodically.

According to Alshahrani (2022), the executives at Saudi Telecommunications Company are constantly expected to take initiatives to ensure that the organisation's activities are up-to-date with the dynamic nature of the sector as Saudi Telecommunications Company's success relies heavily on its capability to align its internal activities with external changes. Nonetheless, it is one thing for an organisation to recognise the necessity for change and quite another for the change to be managed efficiently. If a well-proposed change is not properly managed, it will negatively impact the organisation's overall performance. Although many specialists suggest that the process of change must be conducted for efficiently coping with the ever-changing business environment, the majority of organisations performing organisational change often experience resistance, which is considered a challenging factor causing negative effects on the growth of the organisations.

Evidence from previous literature has revealed that organisational changes have higher chances of failure and resistance from employees (Ahmad & Huvila, 2019). The resistance will probably create a significant gap in the way organisations establish suitable strategies to achieve a successful change process and enhance organisational growth. Workers tend to resist the process of change when it occurs suddenly, unexpectedly, or radically from their perspective. Research shows that exposure to organisational change negatively impacts employees' well-being, which entails an increased risk of mental health issues and poor self-rated health (Cameron & Green, 2019). Moreover, employee burnout can be exacerbated by job stresses and demands such as psychological uncertainty about how the shift would influence their

position, role ambiguity (unclear expectations), and increasing workload. Thus, understanding employees' perspectives of organisational transformation is critical, and considerations should also be given to finding a suitable approach to managing changes to ensure that the company's performance is not being jeopardised.

Some studies in the past have highlighted several approaches to managing organisational changes and employee resistance; however, several areas still need to be explored to ensure successful management of changes. One of the areas that has gained interest among scholars is the role of public relations in facilitating changes, and they have urged for additional research on how public relations as a function and public relations professionals as strategic communication managers take the lead in directing and enabling organisational change processes (Men et al., 2020; Theaker, 2020).

Public relations fulfils many roles in an organisation apart from its well-known marketing role. For instance, it is in charge of managing the reputation and relationships of organisations (Theaker, 2020), which involves the management of issues, public affairs, corporate communications, stakeholder relations, risk communication, and corporate social responsibility. In addition, public relations seems to converge on a process of attending to employees' emotional changes, acknowledging their emotions, assisting them in channelling their emotions, and directing them in dealing with the changes. Unfortunately, little information is available regarding the role of public relations in organisational change management (Men et al., 2020).

In the current turbulent environment, organisations cannot continue to rest on their successes and rejoice in previous achievements; instead, they must search for new opportunities by challenging the status quo. Therefore, the potential of public relations in change management is not to be missed. Various organisations fail to transform despite the changes in their business and market environments; such organisations are generally pleased with the status quo, where they remain active with their organisational practices (Lewis, 2019). As change has become a fundamental element of the standard practices of business, organisations need to remain active in this competitive and constantly changing environment by focusing on a suitable approach to managing the changes, such as public relations elements. By looking at the potential of public relations in change management, this study aimed to explore the contribution of public relations in reducing employee resistance to organisational changes in Saudi Telecommunications Company in Saudi Arabia.

1.3 Problem Statement

According to the Communications and Information Technology Commission in Saudi Arabia (2021), the telecommunications and information technology (IT) sector contributes up to 5.5% of the Kingdom's GDP, being considered the highest growing market in the Middle East and North Africa. Like many other Saudi Arabian telecommunications and information technology sector companies, Saudi Telecommunications Company is also bound to the fast-changing environment. As a major contributor to the Kingdom's economy, the primary activities of Saudi Telecommunications Company include the provision of telecommunications, information, media services, and digital payments (*STC Annual Report, 2021*). In 2021, Saudi Telecommunications Company accomplished remarkable developments

in other areas such as devices, gaming, digital media, smart home services, financial services, eCommerce, and logistics. Further, it also started future growth by expanding its digital services and monetising 5G and fibre investments to provide excellent revenue to its shareholders.

However, in recent years, Saudi Arabia has faced turbulent economic conditions caused by the requirements to accomplish the goals of Vision 2030 and the desire to decrease the country's reliance on oil (Al Shamlan, 2023). When a country's economy becomes unpredictable, with complicated and clashing trends as well as unexpected impacts and adjustments in direction, it can cause difficulties for managers to fully comprehend what is happening outside the organisation and the way the organisation would be affected by it (Al Shamlan, 2023). Thus, various organisations, including Saudi Telecommunications Company, would undergo many changes that need to be adapted quickly and successfully (Alsubaie, 2022). Therefore, organisations need to be flexible to accommodate the changes and perform strategic planning to manage the rapid pace and unpredictable economic situation.

A recent example of this is the 2020 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused massive dislocation of workforces, disrupted supply chains, and large-scale unemployment (Omar, 2022). This has led scholars to reassert the importance of ascertaining whose interests matter and what values should be prominent (Sheffi, 2024).

An external event such as the pandemic influences the system elements differently than organisational changes in a steady state (Lozano & Barreiro-Gen, 2021). This demonstrates that existing organisational designs need to be improved for optimal efficiency or, better yet, the development of new organisational designs so that

the repercussions of sudden changes such as the pandemic are not felt again (Omar, 2022). Organisations are recommended to be more humanistic in their approach, emphasising the people in organisations and societies while being in harmony with technological and managerial techniques, as well as environmental and social needs. The telecommunications industry in Saudi Arabia underwent substantial organisational changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hassounah et al., 2020), which were primarily influenced by changes in consumer behaviour, a surge in demand for digital services, and the necessity for improved connectivity.

Although academics and practitioners advocate for organisational change as a means of effectively adapting to the transforming business environment, most organisations pursuing this transformation frequently encounter opposition to any change in how business activities are conducted (Lewis, 2019). This resistance is viewed as a hindrance to companies' overall growth. Generally, opposition to change should be reduced, while acceptance of change should be facilitated. Workers are prone to rejecting change when the change is unforeseen, abrupt, or radical in their opinion (Alsubaie, 2022). Alsubaie (2022) reported that Saudi Telecommunications Company faced resistance from its employees whenever organisational changes happened due to several obstacles, such as a lack of communication, differences in culture and customs, issues with accepting women as part of Saudi Telecommunications Company employees, and natural resistance to change. This resistance was believed to have led to a decrease in both the productivity and competitiveness of the organisation. This study concluded that the change initiatives in Saudi Telecommunications Company failed, which is supported by studies such as those by Odor (2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in substantial changes, and Saudi Arabia has experienced significant disruptions in a variety of sectors. The pandemic has expedited the adoption of remote and hybrid work models in numerous Saudi organizations, particularly in the technology, finance, and education sectors. In accordance with Vision 2030's objective of establishing a technologically advanced economy, businesses made substantial investments in digital tools and platforms (Al Shamlan, 2023).

The introduction of wellness programs and flexible work policies was a result of the increased emphasis on employee wellness and mental health, so organizations provided employees with the opportunity to enroll in online skill development courses to prepare them for automated and digital workflows. The Saudization program (Nitaqat) was further emphasized, prompting companies to employ and train more Saudi nationals (Lucien et al., 2023).

The significance of diversifying away from oil dependence was underscored by the pandemic, which accelerated the initiatives of Vision 2030. A renewed emphasis was placed on the expansion of non-oil sectors, including technology, entertainment, and tourism (Sheffi, 2024). The government initiatives, offered financial assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises that were impacted by the pandemic.

Implementing change in an organisation is not an easy task, which is why nearly two-thirds of organisational changes end in failure (Lewis, 2019). The persistence of organisational change failure rates poses substantial issues for change leaders. Cameron and Green (2019) argued that strategic issues are substantial impediments to implementing change programmes and exert the most adverse effect

on their success. These impediments are primarily related to the organisation's administration and leadership. This category includes inhibitors such as inadequate management, insufficient strategic planning, and ineffective leadership. Moreover, the authors provided personnel shortages, employee resistance to change, and poor human resource management approaches as examples of human resource hurdles. The structural impediments relate to the organisation's resources, structure, and systems needed to undertake the change initiative, such as scarcity of resources and an ineffective organisational structure.

Resistance to the process of organisational change damages an organisation and its employees as it is regarded as a significant reason for failure in its execution (King et al., 2020). This failure is also accompanied by unnecessary costs, with negative consequences for employees' work-related results. A known impact of resistance is the intention to voluntarily abandon the organisation, and employees have a stronger inclination to turnover when they are more resistant towards the process (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020). When employees resist, they are generally irritated by this process; consequently, they develop negative feelings and thoughts about their work and organisation. Certain employees might have difficulty moving on from the old organisation during the change because they experience a sense of loss at having to "let go" of the old and highly valued structures, approaches, and rules that they were used to (Mansaray, 2019).

Besides that, employees may interpret these changes as a loss of status or prestige for the organisation. When an employee believes the reason for the change is contrary to the organisation's specified or implied objectives, they will oppose the change and may even form roadblocks in the change process (Obina & Adenike, 2022). Thus, the significance of observing employees' emotions and their ability to

express and regulate them is emphasised, as these factors can influence their acceptance of a condition, job satisfaction, and intention to leave the organisation. As the resistance to change results in more delays and extra costs which are challenging problems to be expected and considered by organisations, an alternative initiative that results in less burden to the organisations should be put into consideration, such as the public relations team. Even though a considerable number of studies focus on the process of change, little is known regarding the effect of public relations on employees' resistance to organisational change (Men et al., 2020).

Public relations departments are responsible for articulating the objectives and rationale behind organizational changes, ensuring that they are in accordance with broader objectives such as Vision 2030 (Al Shamlan, 2023). Public relations occasionally encounters challenges in customizing messages to the diverse audiences of Saudi Arabia, where cultural, generational, and regional distinctions can influence how changes are perceived. Public relations teams are compelled to respond promptly to public feedback, which can be overpowering during significant changes due to the proliferation of social media platforms (Alsarhan, 2022). Furthermore, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a unique culture that could affect employees' resistance to change and the role of public relations in managing the resistance. An example of this would be the culture of collectivism or *wasta*, which can be defined as connections, network, contact, and nepotism (Alsarhan, 2022). Personal connections are used to achieve their personal and work-related goals. This could affect the process of organisational change according to employees' personal needs and wants. Thus, the Kingdom's culture must be considered when implementing changes and managing the consequences of it to avoid any negative effects on employees' efforts and commitment to reach the organisation's desired goals. This research aimed to fill in such a gap by highlighting

the Saudi Arabian Saudi Telecommunications Company workforce and the way public relations affects resistance to the process of organisational change.

There is a need to conduct prevention studies so that the current problems related to employee resistance to organisational change do not worsen. According to the Communications and Information Technology Commission (2022), telecommunications is a major sector that is a part of the growth plans of Saudi Arabia, along with information technology and post. Thus, research on improvements in Saudi telecommunications company will greatly benefit Saudi Arabia's economy as it is an important sector in the telecommunications and information technology industry.

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore employee resistance to organisational change in Saudi Arabia's Saudi Telecommunications Company and how public relations can act as one of the initiatives to implement changes successfully. Further, this research determined the public relations activities, applied during the execution of change, that reduce employees' uncertainty and increase their support. Thus, this study hopes to make a valuable and applicable contribution to the area of public relations studies. By understanding and implementing public relations' roles in reducing employee resistance to organisational change, Saudi Telecommunications Company would be able to keep up with the fast-changing environment and increase the telecommunications and information technology sector's contribution to the Kingdom's economy.

1.4 The Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this current study was to explore the contribution of public relations roles to reducing employee resistance to organisational change in the context of Saudi Telecommunications Company. The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To understand the role of public relations in Saudi Telecommunications Company based on principles of relationship management theory.
2. To analyse employee resistance issues during organisational change in Saudi Telecommunications Company based on aspects of Lewin's change management theory.
3. To recommend a public relations framework to manage employee resistance to organisational change in Saudi Telecommunications Company.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the role of public relations in Saudi Telecommunications Company based on the principles of relationship management theory?
2. How significant are the employee resistance issues during organisational change in Saudi Telecommunications Company based on the aspects of Lewin's change management theory?
3. What is recommend public relations framework to manage employee resistance to organisational change in Saudi Telecommunications Company?

1.6 Scope of the Study

When considering efforts to overcome resistance to organisational change, the potential of public relations in change management must not be overlooked. This study explored employee resistance to organisational change in Saudi Arabia's Saudi Telecommunications Company and the contribution of public relations' role in

reducing employee resistance to organisational change in Saudi Telecommunications Company. The opinions of 12 public relations employees in Saudi Telecommunications Company were gathered to meet the research objectives. However, as this study did not include the opinions of employees from other departments or leaders of Saudi Telecommunications Company, the generalisability of its findings is limited and only applicable to Saudi Arabia's Saudi Telecommunications Company and its public relations department.

1.7 Research Significance

The fast-growing competitive market is one of the main challenges affecting the operations and businesses of the Saudi telecommunications sector while existing operators are struggling to maintain and develop their market share. Customers have a wide range of alternatives where customer service handles issues better than before. Therefore, for an organisation to survive the competitive market and flourish when the environment permits, the management and employees must be willing to accept and be ready to adopt the change process (Arifin, 2020). To support the preparation of change, the leaders of an organisation should be aware of the its cultural factors and strive to use them to the advantage of its management and staff. This research was based on the assertion that organisations perform the managerial process of change without any input from the affected management or employees, which could harm employees' behaviour and function as they resist the overall process.

The outcome of this research is expected to be applied in the operation followed during organisational change, which guides the administration to actively engage the organisation's employees at all levels of the system and encourage positive behaviours and perceptions regarding change. Helping the establishment in the success

of its operations adds a sense of worth and value for the employees. Moreover, the outcome of this research is also expected to make the staff feeling worthy and valued enough to be engaged in a fundamental process that affects their attitude and jobs, which can, in turn, affect their behaviour in supporting the change process.

Although various studies have been conducted on the importance of public relations in organisational change (Li et al., 2021; Smith, 2020; Lewis, 2019; Fernandez & Rainey, 2017; Khaw et al., 2023), there is a dearth of studies on the contribution of public relations in reducing employee resistance to organisational change, especially in the context of Saudi Arabia.

This study's findings are also expected to assist the management of Saudi Telecommunications Company, as they present a thorough comprehension of the challenges, issues, and factors behind the resistance to change and, thus, can help the management realise that resistance is an ordinary gesture and reaction that can be effectively managed. Even though this study is focused on public relations and employee resistance in the context of Saudi Telecommunications Company, which is an important organisation in the telecommunications and information technology sector, the findings of this study can be useful to other organisations in other sectors that have experienced employee resistance to organisational change and have a public relations department. An important aspect of this study was the cultural influence of Arabic culture in Saudi Telecommunications Company, which can be generalised to the whole sector in Saudi Arabia. The choice of this study allowed for an in-depth look at the relationship between public relations and employee resistance in Saudi Arabia's culture, which can be adapted to other organisations in the telecommunications and information technology sector. The theoretical implications provided by this study highlight the prevalence of perspectives about strategic communication management

and public relations for smoother organisational change that are compatible with the plans of Saudi Telecommunications Company as well as Saudi Vision 2030.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

The key terms used throughout this study are defined below.

1.8.1 Organisational Change

According to Mansaray (2019), organisational change refers to an organisation's movement from a known current state to an unknown desired future state.

Cameron and Green (2019) state that organisational change entails changes to an organisation's mission, vision, and/or processes, which affects both the individual and the organisation. It is argued that organisations will accept the change if it is believed to be necessary and will quickly adapt to it.

1.8.2 Employee Resistance

Employee resistance to organisational change is an individual characteristic demonstrating a negative attitude towards change, with a disposition to evade and even fight against it (Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020). Coetsee (1999), as cited in Damawan and Azizah (2019), stated that forms of resistance from employees range from boycotting, decreased interest, blocking, opposing views, and strikes to negative perceptions and attitudes. They argued that most forms of resistance have resulted from the employees' specific aims and objectives for the management. Thus, employee's resistance to change is a vital factor to consider when developing organisational change programmes.

1.8.3 Public Relations

The Public Relations Society of America (2022) described public relations as a strategic communication process that develops mutually advantageous associations between organisations and both their internal and external audiences. It is in charge of managing the reputation and relationships of organisations (Theaker, 2020). This involves managing issues, public affairs, corporate communications, stakeholder relations, risk communication, and corporate social responsibility.

1.8.4 Two-way Symmetrical Model

A model that is seen as “ideal” in public relations practice is the two-way symmetrical model as it is more balanced – that is to say, there is mutual understanding and each party is willing to change to accommodate the needs of others (Theaker, 2020). This involves a change in attitude, awareness or behaviour by incorporating dialogue instead of monologue-type communication.

1.8.5 Relationship Management

Relationship management revolves around the expected goals of public relations practice, which is public relationships. Thus, management of the relationships is defined as the effective management of organisation–public relationships (OPRs) around common interests and shared goals over time, which results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organisations and public (Ledingham, 2003).

1.8.6 Saudi Telecommunications Company

Saudi Telecommunications Company is the largest telecommunications company in Saudi Arabia and a leading provider of integrated mobile, fixed-line, and

broadband services in the country (Alqahtani, 2018). As a major player in the telecommunications industry, Saudi Telecommunications Company has a significant role in shaping and providing communication infrastructure and services within Saudi Arabia and beyond (AlWahashi & Medjedel, 2022).

1.9 Structure of the Study

Chapter 1 presents the study's background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, scope, and significance, along with the definitions of relevant terms. Then, Chapter 2 explains the background of Saudi Telecommunications Company, which consists of the history, mission, branches, and role of Saudi Telecommunications Company and Saudi Telecommunications Company subsidiaries. It also includes a discussion on organisational change, public relations, and Saudi Telecommunications Company in the present and future. Afterwards, Chapter 3 provides a review of the studies conducted by previous researchers on the current research topic as the theories used in this study that form its theoretical framework. This is followed by Chapter 4, which explains the details of the employed research design methodology, encompassing the research design, sample, instrument, procedure, and qualitative method of data collection and analysis. Next, Chapter 5 reports the findings of the analysis. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings and concludes the research.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the background of the research along with the problems that have led to the research. This study's objectives and research questions were also presented in the chapter. Besides, this chapter explained the significance of

this research for the industry and theory as well as the definition of key terms relevant to this research. The following chapter in this qualitative research provides further information on Saudi Telecommunications Company.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF SAUDI TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY

2.1 Introduction

Organisational transformation is crucial for a company's expansion and flexibility in a changing business environment as it enables organisations to maintain competitiveness, adapt to market fluctuations, and foster innovation. Nevertheless, the reluctance of employees to embrace change can impede the advancement of goals. However, employee resistance can have a cascading influence on productivity, morale, and, eventually, the overall success of the organisation.

Public relations may effectively reduce opposition by openly discussing the rationale for the change, resolving any concerns, and actively including employees in the process. Resistance can be reduced by involving employees in the process of change, offering them support, training, and chances to provide feedback. The public relations initiatives should emphasise the advantages of change and cultivating an atmosphere of transparent communication to establish trust and comprehension among employees.

In essence, well-executed public relations tactics during times of change can transform opposition into collaboration, leading to seamless transitions and allowing organisations to fully leverage the opportunities presented by organisational change for expansion and achievement.

2.2 History

Saudi Telecommunications Company was established in 1998 following the Royal Decree No. M/35 and decision No. 135 from the Council of Ministers, which was directed to transfer the telecommunications sector to a joint-stock company in the Kingdom. In the following months, the company's basic regulation was approved according to decision No. 213 by the Council of Ministers, allowing it to begin its work by offering telecommunications services throughout the nation (Franklin & Aguenza, 2016).

This company provides a chain of information and communications technology services, such as landlines (national, local, and international), mobile telephones, telegraphs, telex services, rental lines, data transfer, public net services, public telephones, and internet and wireless services (Franklin & Aguenza, 2016). The creation of this company was one of the most important steps in the development and privatisation of the telecommunications industry and market opening in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In 2002, the government of Saudi Arabia stated that 30% of the shares in Saudi Telecommunications Company would be presented for sale to organisations and citizens, with Saudi citizens getting 20%, the Pension Fund Organisation 5%, and the General Organisation of Social Insurance (GOSI) 5%. The company began its operations with a clear vision and mission to deliver integrated and prompt telecommunications solutions that offer the best value to every stakeholder. Furthermore, the company holds more than 50% of the telecommunications market as the leading provider in the Kingdom and the second-largest revenue source. By 2016, Saudi Telecommunications Company achieved a net revenue of over \$13 billion, which supports the Saudi GDP (Alsubaie, 2022).

The company leads the region in its telecommunications operation, which operates from its headquarters in Riyadh, as it offers various services focused primarily on evolution and innovation. The company strives to remain ahead of the competition by presenting a diverse range of pioneering applications and solutions, and it is commonly recognised for its role in the digital transformation of Saudi Arabia. Although mainly operating in the Kingdom, the company remains a multinational communication structure with subsidiaries around the globe (*STC Annual Report, 2021*).

Thus far, Saudi Telecommunications Company operates and maintains the infrastructure of the Kingdom's telecommunications services as it offers connections between customers and internet service providers (ISPs), with the international network structured in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). During 2018–2019, the company performed significantly well by becoming the main provider of digital services in the Kingdom. Its revenues increased by nearly 5%, which accounts for SR 54,368 million. Additionally, the company's system of data centres is among the biggest in the world (Al-Muqren, 2021). Saudi Telecommunications Company is providing telecommunications services to its customers using customer service offices, contact centres, and the Saudi Telecommunications Company website. Further, to fulfil the growing demand and confront the competition-related challenges, Saudi Telecommunications Company has increased the role of contact centres, which encompasses customer support services such as inquiries and technical services, to include all telecommunications services such as the provision of services and inquiry-related services.

The largest Saudi Telecommunications Company department is the contact centres, which are distributed across the Kingdom to serve customers and continue to be in charge of servicing customers while the retail office space handles most of the client care. Because the task of serving Saudi Telecommunications Company customers is complex, an efficient employee engagement strategy has been created that involves providing centres with competent workers and equipping them with the latest technology, including Integrated Customer Management System (ICMS), Interactive Voice Response (IVR), and the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD).

2.3 Mission

The mission of Saudi Telecommunications Company is to improve people's personal lives and contribute to their business success by providing high-quality communications services that reflect their true requirements (STC, 2022a). According to Saudi Telecommunications Company, the company has always operated based on innovation focused on the Kingdom's digital future to transform this future into a developed structure of telecommunications services. The company offers a variety of information and communications technology solutions and data services in many categories that cover information technology, telecommunications, digital media, financial technology, cybersecurity, and several other developed data solutions. These categories have helped the company become a leading force in digital development in the Kingdom and the region (STC, 2022a). Moreover, the company aims to establish a world-class digital leadership that offers innovative platforms and services to the company's customers, which has helped the digital transformation of the Middle East and North Africa region. Furthermore, Saudi Telecommunications Company has also brought and developed advanced digital dimensions and richness to customers'

professional and personal lives (STC, 2022a). Their mission also involves providing cutting-edge telecommunications services and innovative solutions to meet the evolving needs of their customers and enhance their economic impact. Additionally, Saudi Telecommunications Company strives to offer high-quality and reliable communication services, contributing to the advancement and digital transformation of Saudi Arabia while also expanding its services globally (STC, 2022a). Besides, it aims to enhance shareholder value and empowerment while maintaining a commitment to corporate responsibility and sustainability.

In short, Saudi Telecommunications Company's mission is to conduct business with integrity, enhance its economic impact, enrich lives and experiences, expand access to technology and connectivity, advance innovative and digital opportunities, care for the environment, and empower people (STC, 2022a). Figure 2.1 illustrates this mission.