

# “Organizational conflict as a predictor of employee resistance to change: Evidence from Saudi public-sector transformation”

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# ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT AS A PREDICTOR OF EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE TO CHANGE: EVIDENCE FROM SAUDI PUBLIC- SECTOR TRANSFORMATION

## Abstract

Public-sector transformation initiatives often generate organizational tensions that influence employees' reactions to change. Despite the growing importance of public-sector transformation programs, empirical evidence on the relationship between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change remains limited, particularly within the context of Saudi Vision 2030. This study examines the association between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change in Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing transformation. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was employed using data collected from 384 employees across Saudi public-sector organizations. The questionnaire was developed based on the organizational conflict and resistance-to-change literature and adapted to the Saudi public-sector context. Data were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, and simple linear regression. The findings reveal a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change ( $r = 0.612, p < .001$ ). Regression analysis indicated a statistically significant positive association between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change ( $\beta = 0.612, p < .001$ ), explaining 37.5% of the variance within the analytical model employed in this study. Significant differences in resistance levels were also observed across gender, age, years of experience, and job level. The findings suggest that organizational conflict represents an important factor associated with employee resistance during large-scale transformation initiatives. The study highlights the importance of effective conflict management, transparent communication, and employee involvement in supporting successful public-sector transformation.

## Keywords

organizational conflict, resistance to change, public-sector transformation, Saudi Vision 2030, public-sector employees

## JEL Classification

D23, O15, H83

## INTRODUCTION

Government institutions worldwide face increasing pressure to modernize their structures, processes, and service delivery systems in response to rapid technological advancements, rising citizen expectations, and increasingly complex regulatory environments. Large-scale public-sector transformation initiatives, particularly those tied to national development agendas, require substantial organizational change that often disrupts established routines, working relationships, and institutional stability.

In Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 has accelerated comprehensive public-sector transformation through several strategic programs, most notably the National Transformation Program (NTP). These initiatives seek to improve institutional performance, enhance service quality, increase operational efficiency, and strengthen public-sector gover-



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nance. However, implementing large-scale reforms requires employees to adapt to new policies, structures, technologies, and operational practices within relatively short timeframes, creating significant organizational and behavioral challenges.

Organizational conflict is a common phenomenon during periods of transformation and frequently emerges from competing priorities, communication breakdowns, role ambiguity, resource constraints, and perceived inequities among employees and departments. Although conflict can sometimes stimulate constructive dialogue, creativity, and organizational learning, unmanaged conflict may also generate negative emotional and behavioral consequences that undermine organizational effectiveness (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). During periods of organizational change, conflict often intensifies as employees attempt to reconcile new organizational expectations with existing routines and work practices (Cameron & Green, 2020). Furthermore, differences in interests, responsibilities, authority structures, and communication patterns may increase anxiety and tension, ultimately contributing to organizational conflict (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

Organizations continuously strive to develop employee capabilities and strengthen support for organizational change initiatives. Employees are generally more willing to support change when they perceive that such initiatives contribute positively to organizational and personal outcomes (Choi, 2011). According to Herscovitch and Meyer (2002), employee commitment to change is reflected through both compliance-oriented and discretionary behaviors that facilitate successful implementation. Consequently, organizations seeking long-term sustainability and competitiveness must regularly adapt their management systems, organizational structures, cultures, and strategic objectives to accommodate changing internal and external demands (Burnes, 2015; Cameron & Green, 2020).

Resistance to change is widely recognized as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components. Employees may acknowledge the necessity of change while simultaneously experiencing uncertainty, stress, fear, or reluctance to adopt new practices. In public-sector organizations, where structures are often highly formalized and hierarchical, these reactions may be amplified by concerns about job security, procedural rigidity, and limited participation in decision-making. Based on Lewin's (1947) change model, organizational change requires disrupting the existing equilibrium and overcoming forces that oppose transformation. Consequently, resistance may emerge at both individual and organizational levels whenever employees perceive change as threatening or disruptive (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). In contemporary organizations, leaders therefore face increasing responsibility for managing both conflict and resistance to ensure successful transformation outcomes (Issah, 2018; Rahaman et al., 2020).

Although resistance to change has received considerable attention in the organizational change literature, previous studies have primarily focused on leadership styles, organizational commitment, employee attitudes, communication strategies, and change management practices as determinants of employee reactions to change. Comparatively less attention has been devoted to examining organizational conflict as a direct organizational factor influencing employee resistance, particularly within large-scale public-sector transformation environments.

Furthermore, empirical evidence regarding the relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change remains relatively limited within the context of developing countries and public-sector reform programs. The Saudi public sector provides a particularly relevant setting due to the unprecedented scope of reforms introduced under Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program. Understanding how organizational conflict shapes employee resistance within this context may provide valuable insights into the human and organizational dynamics that influence the success or failure of transformation initiatives.

# 1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

## 1.1. Organizational conflict during transformation

Organizational conflict refers to disagreements, tensions, or incompatibilities that arise among individuals, groups, or departments within an organization due to differences in goals, values, interests, resource allocation, communication patterns, or role expectations. Although conflict is a natural component of organizational life, its frequency and intensity often increase during periods of organizational transformation when established structures and routines are challenged.

In public-sector organizations, hierarchical structures, procedural complexity, and cross-functional coordination requirements may further intensify conflict during reform initiatives. Conflict frequently emerges from competing priorities, unclear responsibilities, communication breakdowns, and procedural misunderstandings, particularly when organizations undergo significant structural or administrative changes (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Furthermore, the effectiveness of conflict management practices plays a critical role in determining whether conflict generates constructive outcomes or contributes to organizational dysfunction (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008).

Individual differences, including variations in personality, professional background, values, and work experiences, may further contribute to organizational conflict when appropriate communication and collaboration mechanisms are absent (Issah, 2018). Similarly, structural adjustments, changes in authority relationships, and accelerated decision-making processes associated with transformation programs often increase uncertainty and ambiguity, making conflict more likely to emerge and escalate (Cameron & Green, 2020). Accordingly, organizational conflict should be viewed not merely as an isolated organizational problem but as a predictable consequence of transformation processes requiring proactive management.

## 1.2. Resistance to change as a multidimensional reaction

Resistance to change has long been recognized as one of the most significant challenges facing organizations undergoing transformation. Contemporary perspectives conceptualize resistance as a multidimensional phenomenon rather than simple opposition to change. Piderit (2000) proposed that resistance has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, acknowledging that employees may recognize the need for change while still feeling anxiety, uncertainty, or reluctance about its implementation.

This multidimensional perspective suggests that resistance is shaped by employees' interpretations of change, perceptions of risk, and trust in organizational leadership rather than by inherent opposition to reform. Consequently, resistance varies across individuals and organizational contexts depending on perceived consequences, uncertainty, fairness, and organizational support (Burnes, 2015).

Subsequent research has emphasized the importance of leadership credibility, communication quality, and employee participation in shaping responses to change. Inadequate communication and limited involvement in decision-making processes significantly increase resistance levels, particularly during large-scale organizational transformation initiatives (Oreg et al., 2011; Vakola, 2013). Furthermore, concerns related to job security, loss of status, increased workload, and disruption of established routines may intensify resistance, especially when change objectives and expected outcomes are not clearly communicated (Oreg et al., 2011; Burnes, 2015).

Conversely, transparent communication, employee engagement, and participative leadership practices have been shown to reduce dysfunctional resistance by increasing perceptions of fairness, legitimacy, and ownership of change initiatives (Appelbaum et al., 2017). Therefore, resistance should be understood as a context-dependent reaction influenced by organizational conditions and employees' evaluations of change processes.

### 1.3. Linking organizational conflict to resistance to change

The relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change can be explained through several complementary theoretical mechanisms. Organizational conflict may signal procedural unfairness, unclear decision-making processes, ineffective communication, or inadequate employee involvement, all of which can undermine trust and reduce employees' willingness to support organizational change.

Justice-based perspectives suggest that employees are more likely to accept change when they perceive organizational processes as fair and transparent. Conversely, perceived inequities and unresolved conflicts may weaken confidence in management and increase resistance to organizational initiatives (Georgalis et al., 2015). Similarly, empirical research indicates that unmanaged conflict contributes to uncertainty, emotional strain, and reduced trust in leadership, which in turn intensify resistance during periods of organizational change (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; Ford et al., 2008).

Conflict may also influence resistance through psychological mechanisms. Increased tension and disagreement can generate negative emotional reactions, strengthen threat perceptions, and reduce employees' sense of psychological safety. Under such conditions, employees may become more inclined to preserve existing routines and resist organizational transformation (Issah, 2018). Leadership practices emphasizing ethical conduct, transparency, participation, and effective communication can mitigate these effects by strengthening trust and enhancing the perceived legitimacy of change initiatives (Sharif & Scandura, 2014; Rahaman et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the quality of information provided during change processes plays a central role in shaping employee reactions. Employees who receive clear explanations regarding the purpose, benefits, and implementation of organizational change are generally more willing to support transformation efforts, whereas uncertainty and ambiguity often reinforce resistance (Shrivastava & Pazzaglia, 2022). Collectively, these findings

suggest that organizational conflict may function as an important organizational factor associated with employee resistance to change.

### 1.4. Saudi public-sector transformation context

Saudi Arabia has experienced unprecedented public-sector transformation under Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program. These initiatives seek to improve institutional performance, strengthen governance, accelerate digital transformation, enhance service quality, and increase public-sector efficiency. Achieving these objectives requires substantial changes in organizational structures, management systems, work processes, and employee roles.

Such large-scale reforms inevitably create organizational pressures that require employees to adapt to new expectations, technologies, and operating procedures. Consequently, government institutions face increasing challenges related to employee engagement, readiness for change, communication, and conflict management. Sector-specific evidence highlights the importance of leadership effectiveness, organizational readiness, and coordinated implementation strategies in supporting successful transformation initiatives (Alharbi, 2018).

Given the scale and strategic importance of ongoing reforms, understanding the organizational factors that influence employee reactions to change has become vital. In particular, examining the relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change may provide valuable insight into the human and organizational dynamics that affect transformation outcomes within Saudi public-sector institutions.

### 1.5. Hypotheses development

Although previous studies have examined organizational conflict and resistance to change extensively, relatively limited empirical evidence has investigated the direct relationship between these constructs within large-scale public-sector transformation programs associated with national reform agendas. Drawing on organizational change theory and prior empirical findings, organization-

al conflict may increase uncertainty, weaken trust, reduce perceptions of procedural fairness, and intensify negative emotional responses toward change initiatives. Consequently, employees in conflict-prone environments may be more likely to resist organizational transformation efforts.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the relationship between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change within Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing transformation. Specifically, the study investigates the extent to which organizational conflict is associated with employee resistance to change and whether resistance levels differ by selected demographic characteristics. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to the growing literature on public-sector transformation and provide practical insights for policymakers and organizational leaders seeking to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of large-scale reform initiatives. The hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: Organizational conflict is positively associated with employee resistance to change.*
- H2: Resistance to change differs significantly across demographic groups (gender, age, years of experience, and job level).*

### 1.6. Conceptual framework

Based on the literature reviewed and the hypotheses developed, this study proposes a conceptual framework that examines the relationship between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change within Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing transformation. Organizational conflict is treated as the independent variable, while resistance to change represents the dependent

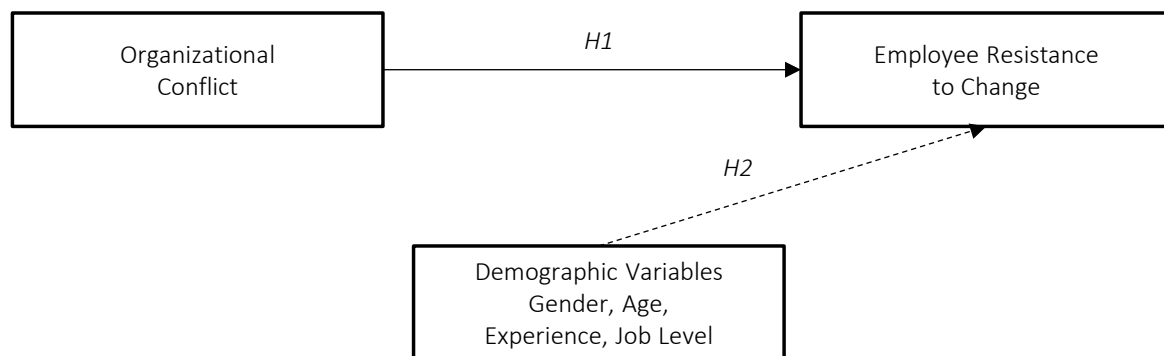
variable. Demographic characteristics, including gender, age, years of experience, and job level, are examined as contextual factors that may be associated with differences in resistance levels.

The framework assumes that higher levels of organizational conflict are associated with higher levels of employee resistance to change through increased uncertainty, reduced trust, and weaker perceptions of procedural fairness during transformation initiatives. Figure 1 presents the conceptual model guiding the study.

## 2. METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive–analytical research design to examine the relationship between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change within Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing administrative transformation. A quantitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic measurement of organizational phenomena and facilitates statistical examination of relationships between variables. Data were collected during the final quarter of 2024 from employees working in Saudi public-sector organizations involved in transformation initiatives aligned with Saudi Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program.

A structured survey questionnaire was distributed electronically using online platforms, allowing respondents to participate voluntarily and anonymously. The survey method was selected because it provides an efficient mechanism for collecting standardized data from a relatively large and diverse group of respondents while ensuring con-



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework

sistency in measurement and facilitating statistical analysis. Furthermore, anonymity encouraged participants to provide honest responses regarding organizational conflict and change-related experiences.

## 2.1. Population and sampling

The target population consisted of employees working in Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing administrative reform and organizational transformation initiatives associated with Saudi Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program. Eligible participants were required to have direct involvement in, or meaningful exposure to, ongoing organizational change initiatives. Employees not affected by these initiatives were excluded to ensure consistency with the research objectives.

A stratified purposive sampling approach was used. Institution type served as the primary stratification criterion, comprising ministries, authorities, and independent government agencies. This approach was adopted to obtain representation from different organizational structures within the Saudi public sector and to capture variation in administrative context, hierarchy, and exposure to transformation programs. Because the study focused on employee-level perceptions rather than institution-level comparisons, the sampling strategy emphasized obtaining representation across the three categories of Saudi public-sector institutions rather than targeting a predetermined number of organizations within each category. Access to participants depended on institutional cooperation and voluntary participation.

Within each institutional stratum, participants were recruited across different demographic and organizational categories, including gender, age, job level, years of experience, and educational qualification. The final sample included 148 employees from ministries (38.5%), 122 from authorities (31.8%), and 114 from independent government agencies (29.7%). The achieved distribution provided relatively balanced representation across the three institutional categories, although it was not based on known population proportions.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically through professional and institutional communication channels. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Screening questions were used to confirm participants' employment in the Saudi public sector and their exposure to organizational transformation initiatives before their responses were retained for analysis.

The final sample consisted of 384 valid responses. The target sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for large populations at a 95% confidence level, a 5% margin of error, and an assumed population proportion of 0.50. The resulting sample was considered adequate for the correlation, regression, independent-samples *t*-test, and analysis of variance procedures employed in the study.

## 2.2. Measurement instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from the organizational conflict and resistance-to-change literature and adapted to the context of Saudi public-sector transformation initiatives.

The questionnaire consisted of two principal constructs. Organizational conflict was measured using 14 items reflecting key dimensions frequently discussed in the conflict literature, including communication breakdowns, competing priorities, role ambiguity, resource allocation issues, and leadership-related conflict (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). Resistance to change was measured using 19 items capturing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of employee resistance, consistent with the multidimensional conceptualization proposed by Piderit (2000) and supported by subsequent organizational change research (Georgalis et al., 2015; Burnes, 2015; Vakola, 2013).

The questionnaire items were not adopted from a single existing scale; rather, they were developed and adapted from dimensions and themes consistently identified in the organizational conflict and resistance-to-change literature (Table 1). The selection of items was guided by the theoretical foundations established by Omisore and Abiodun (2014), De Dreu and Gelfand (2008), Piderit (2000),

**Table 1.** Structure of the measurement instrument

| Construct               | Description                                                   | Items | Literature Basis                                       |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Organizational Conflict | Measures communication, structural, and work-related conflict | 14    | Omisore and Abiodun (2014); De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) |
| Resistance to Change    | Captures cognitive, emotional, and behavioral resistance      | 19    | Piderit (2000); Georgalis et al. (2015); Vakola (2013) |

Georgalis et al. (2015), Burnes (2015), and Vakola (2013), and tailored to reflect the context of public-sector transformation initiatives in Saudi Arabia.

The instrument development process followed a sequential approach. An initial pool of items was generated through an extensive review of the organizational conflict and organizational change literature to ensure adequate conceptual coverage of the study constructs. Items were then examined for clarity, redundancy, and contextual relevance to Saudi public-sector transformation initiatives before inclusion in the preliminary questionnaire.

The preliminary version of the questionnaire underwent expert review to assess the relevance, clarity, and wording of the items. Feedback from the review process was incorporated into the instrument, followed by pilot testing to evaluate its comprehensibility and practical applicability. Minor linguistic refinements were subsequently introduced prior to the administration of the final questionnaire.

All questionnaire items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The final instrument (Appendix A) was designed to measure the theoretical dimensions of organizational conflict and resistance to change rather than to replicate any single previously published scale. This approach was considered appropriate given the specific institutional context of Saudi public-sector transformation while maintaining consistency with the conceptual foundations established in the organizational behavior and change management literature.

### 2.3. Ethical considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire and were assured that their responses would re-

main anonymous and confidential. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data were used exclusively for academic research purposes. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation.

### 2.4. Reliability and validity

The psychometric properties of the measurement instrument were assessed through reliability and validity analyses.

Construct validity was assessed using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Before factor extraction, sampling adequacy was evaluated using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity (Table 3). The KMO value of 0.89 indicated excellent sampling adequacy, while Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 3246.71$ ,  $df = 1128$ ,  $p < .001$ ), confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis. The exploratory factor analysis provided preliminary empirical support for the underlying two-construct organization of the measurement instrument, with item factor loadings ranging from 0.62 to 0.81 for organizational conflict and from 0.59 to 0.84 for resistance to change. These findings provided satisfactory evidence of construct validity. Consistent with commonly accepted psychometric recommendations, only items demonstrating satisfactory conceptual relevance and acceptable factor loadings were retained for the final measurement instrument.

Items with low conceptual relevance, ambiguous wording, or potential redundancy were refined during the instrument development process prior to the administration of the final questionnaire. The retained items demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties and were therefore included in the final analyses.

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients (Table 2). All

alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating satisfactory reliability and internal consistency of the measurement scales (Nunnally, 1978).

In addition, the dataset was screened for missing values, outliers, and data-entry errors before conducting the statistical analyses. No critical data quality issues were identified, supporting the robustness and suitability of the dataset for empirical investigation.

**Table 2.** Reliability indicators

| Variable                | Number of Items | Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) |
|-------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Organizational Conflict | 14              | 0.87                          |
| Resistance to Change    | 19              | 0.89                          |

**Table 3.** Exploratory factor analysis summary

| Indicator                               | Result             |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO)                | 0.89               |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity           | $\chi^2 = 3246.71$ |
| Degrees of Freedom                      | 1128               |
| Significance                            | $p < .001$         |
| Organizational Conflict Factor Loadings | 0.62–0.81          |
| Resistance to Change Factor Loadings    | 0.59–0.84          |

The EFA results demonstrated satisfactory construct validity (Table 3). All retained items exhibited acceptable factor loadings above the commonly recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating adequate convergence with their intended constructs and supporting the suitability of the measurement instrument for subsequent statistical analyses.

## 2.5. Data analysis procedures

Before hypothesis testing, the dataset was screened for completeness, consistency, missing values, outliers, and data-entry errors to ensure its suitability for statistical analysis. Descriptive analyses were first conducted to summarize participant characteristics and study variables. Pearson correlation analysis was then employed to examine the association between organizational conflict and resistance to change, followed by simple linear regression to further examine the relationship between the two constructs.

Independent-samples *t*-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were subsequently used

to examine demographic differences in resistance to change. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level. Table 4 presents the demographic profile of participants.

**Table 4.** Demographic characteristics of participants

| Variable                  | Category             | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender                    | Male                 | 270       | 70.3           |
|                           | Female               | 114       | 29.7           |
| Age                       | 24–34 years          | 92        | 23.9           |
|                           | 35–44 years          | 110       | 28.6           |
|                           | 45–54 years          | 88        | 22.9           |
|                           | 55–64 years          | 94        | 24.6           |
|                           | 65+ years            | 10        | 2.6            |
| Job Level                 | Employee             | 152       | 39.6           |
|                           | Supervisor           | 102       | 26.6           |
|                           | Manager              | 82        | 21.4           |
|                           | Senior Leader        | 48        | 12.5           |
| Years of Experience       | Less than 5 years    | 80        | 20.8           |
|                           | 5–10 years           | 126       | 32.8           |
|                           | More than 10 years   | 178       | 46.4           |
| Educational Qualification | Diploma              | 54        | 14.1           |
|                           | Bachelor's           | 190       | 49.5           |
|                           | Master's             | 104       | 27.1           |
|                           | Ph.D.                | 36        | 9.4            |
| Institution Type          | Ministries           | 148       | 38.5           |
|                           | Authorities          | 122       | 31.8           |
|                           | Independent Agencies | 114       | 29.7           |

## 3. RESULTS

The results are presented in accordance with the study objectives and hypotheses. Descriptive statistics were first examined to assess the levels of organizational conflict and resistance to change among employees working in Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing transformation. Subsequently, correlation and regression analyses were conducted to test the relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change. Finally, demographic comparisons were performed to examine differences in resistance levels across selected participant characteristics.

The descriptive findings indicate moderate levels of both organizational conflict and resistance to change within the sampled organizations. These findings suggest that while transformation initiatives have generated noticeable organizational tensions, employee reactions remain within a manageable range. Nevertheless, concerns related to

**Table 5.** Descriptive statistics of organizational conflict (N = 384)

| Item                                                                                                 | Mean | SD   | Relative Importance (%) | Rank |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-------------------------|------|
| Poor communication between departments leads to misunderstandings and increased tension              | 3.94 | 1.05 | 78.8                    | 1    |
| Conflict occurs between departments due to conflicting priorities and goals                          | 3.89 | 1.02 | 77.8                    | 2    |
| Lack of clarity regarding change strategies increases disagreements between employees and management | 3.82 | 1.04 | 76.4                    | 3    |
| There are frequent disagreements among employees about how tasks are carried out                     | 3.72 | 0.98 | 74.4                    | 4    |
| Competition for promotions or rewards causes conflicts among colleagues                              | 3.69 | 1.00 | 73.8                    | 5    |
| Employees feel unfairly distributed tasks or resources                                               | 3.65 | 0.95 | 73.0                    | 6    |
| Conflict arises due to ambiguity in roles and responsibilities                                       | 3.58 | 0.93 | 71.6                    | 7    |
| There are allied groups within the organization vying for influence                                  | 3.54 | 1.01 | 70.8                    | 8    |
| Employees disagree with leaders about the core values and principles of the business                 | 3.43 | 0.97 | 68.6                    | 9    |
| Senior management imposes decisions without considering the opinions of executive teams              | 3.41 | 0.99 | 68.2                    | 10   |
| Divisional priorities within the organization differ, leading to conflicting goals                   | 3.37 | 0.96 | 67.4                    | 11   |
| Ineffective methods are used to resolve employee conflicts                                           | 3.32 | 0.89 | 66.4                    | 12   |
| Management deals with conflicts passively, such as avoiding or ignoring them                         | 3.28 | 0.92 | 65.6                    | 13   |
| Disagreement resolution is often left to employees themselves, without clear management intervention | 3.25 | 0.94 | 65.0                    | 14   |
| Overall Mean                                                                                         | 3.58 | 0.88 | 71.6                    |      |

**Table 6.** Descriptive statistics of resistance to change (N = 384)

| Item                                                                                     | Mean | SD   | Relative Importance (%) | Rank |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-------------------------|------|
| I believe the new changes will increase the workload without any clear benefit           | 3.91 | 1.03 | 78.2                    | 1    |
| I believe that change will increase my workload                                          | 3.89 | 1.02 | 77.8                    | 2    |
| I feel uncomfortable with changes imposed by management                                  | 3.86 | 0.97 | 77.2                    | 3    |
| I do not trust the intentions of those in charge of the change within the organization   | 3.82 | 0.95 | 76.4                    | 4    |
| I feel anxious or stressed about the anticipated changes                                 | 3.77 | 0.93 | 75.4                    | 5    |
| I feel that changes may threaten my job stability                                        | 3.74 | 1.01 | 74.8                    | 6    |
| I resist change due to a lack of information about its goals and benefits                | 3.68 | 0.92 | 73.6                    | 7    |
| I feel that the changes imposed by senior management are illogical or ill-considered     | 3.65 | 1.00 | 73.0                    | 8    |
| I believe that change does not take into account the circumstances of the employees      | 3.61 | 0.96 | 72.2                    | 9    |
| I find it difficult to adapt to new changes                                              | 3.56 | 0.93 | 71.2                    | 10   |
| I believe that change will negatively impact my duties or position                       | 3.47 | 0.91 | 69.4                    | 11   |
| I prefer to continue with old methods rather than innovate                               | 3.42 | 0.94 | 68.4                    | 12   |
| I see the new changes as unnecessary or unimportant                                      | 3.41 | 0.97 | 68.2                    | 13   |
| I find it difficult to understand the logic of changes occurring within the organization | 3.39 | 0.90 | 67.8                    | 14   |
| I have negative feelings toward new initiatives introduced by management                 | 3.28 | 0.88 | 65.6                    | 15   |
| I believe that change will deprive me of a sense of job stability                        | 3.25 | 0.89 | 65.0                    | 16   |
| I tend not to cooperate with colleagues involved in implementing change                  | 3.19 | 0.85 | 63.8                    | 17   |
| I resist or postpone implementing new procedures whenever possible                       | 3.15 | 0.86 | 63.0                    | 18   |
| I prefer to maintain old ways of working rather than adopting new ones                   | 3.12 | 0.84 | 62.4                    | 19   |
| Overall Mean                                                                             | 3.56 | 0.79 | 71.2                    |      |

**Table 7.** Correlation results

| Variables                                      | r     | Sig. (p) |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|----------|
| Organizational Conflict ↔ Resistance to Change | 0.612 | p < .001 |

**Table 8.** Regression analysis results

| Model                                          | B     | SE    | Beta  | t    | Sig.     |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|----------|
| Constant                                       | 1.245 | 0.214 | —     | 5.82 | p < .001 |
| Organizational Conflict → Resistance to Change | 0.587 | 0.062 | 0.612 | 9.47 | p < .001 |

communication, workload, uncertainty, and trust continue to influence employees' perceptions of organizational change.

Tables 5 and 6 present the descriptive statistics for organizational conflict and resistance to change, respectively. The findings indicate that communication breakdowns, competing departmental priorities, and ambiguity surrounding change strategies represent the most prominent sources of organizational conflict. Similarly, resistance to change appears to be primarily associated with perceived workload increases, uncertainty regarding job stability, and limited trust in change leadership.

To test Hypothesis 1, Pearson correlation analysis and simple linear regression analysis were conducted to examine the relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change.

The correlation analysis (Table 7) revealed a strong positive relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change ( $r = 0.612$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1.

The regression analysis (Table 8) further indicated that organizational conflict was significantly associated with employee resistance to change ( $\beta = 0.612$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 37.5% of the variance in resistance levels ( $R^2 = 0.375$ ). These findings indicate that employees who perceive higher levels of organizational conflict are more likely to report stronger resistance to organizational transformation initiatives.

To test Hypothesis 2, demographic comparisons were conducted using independent-samples *t*-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The demographic analyses (Tables 9 and 10) provide support for Hypothesis 2. Statistically significant differences in resistance levels were observed across gender, age, years of experience, and job level. Male employees, older age groups, and employees with longer organizational tenure reported relatively higher resistance to change, whereas senior leaders demonstrated comparatively lower resistance levels. These findings suggest that employee responses to transformation initiatives vary according to demographic and organizational characteristics.

Because the primary objective of the demographic analyses was exploratory rather than confirmatory, statistically significant group differences were interpreted descriptively. Additional post hoc comparisons and effect size estimates were beyond the scope of the present study and are recommended for future research involving more comprehensive comparative designs.

Based on the hypothesis testing results, H1 was supported, as organizational conflict was positively and significantly associated with employee resistance to change ( $r = 0.612$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $\beta = 0.612$ ,  $p < .001$ ). H2 was also supported, as statistically significant differences in resistance to change were observed across gender, age, years of experience, and job level.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change within public-sector transformation contexts. The significant positive association identified in this study ( $r = 0.612$ ,  $p < .001$ ) is consistent with previous re-

**Table 9.** Gender differences

| Gender | N   | Mean | SD   | T    | df  | Sig. (p) |
|--------|-----|------|------|------|-----|----------|
| Male   | 270 | 3.62 | 0.48 | 2.31 | 382 | 0.021*   |
| Female | 114 | 3.48 | 0.52 |      |     |          |

**Table 10.** One-way ANOVA results for demographic characteristics

| Variable            | F    | Sig. (p) | Post Hoc Result                                                           |
|---------------------|------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Age                 | 3.28 | 0.021*   | Higher resistance among 45–54 years versus younger groups                 |
| Years of Experience | 4.15 | 0.007**  | Employees with more than 10 years of experience showed greater resistance |
| Job Level           | 2.96 | 0.033*   | Senior leaders reported lower resistance than employees                   |

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

search suggesting that organizational tensions and perceived instability contribute to defensive employee reactions during change initiatives (Cameron & Green, 2020; Dent & Goldberg, 1999). The results indicate that organizational conflict represents an important organizational condition associated with employee responses to transformation efforts.

The findings are also consistent with studies demonstrating that resistance to change is influenced by employees' perceptions of fairness, communication quality, and leadership behavior during transformation processes (Oreg et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2008). When employees perceive communication breakdowns, conflicting priorities, or insufficient involvement in decision-making, resistance is more likely to emerge.

The regression analysis further indicated a statistically significant positive association between organizational conflict and resistance to change ( $\beta = 0.612$ ,  $p < .001$ ), explaining 37.5% of the variance in resistance levels ( $R^2 = 0.375$ ). These findings support previous research emphasizing the importance of procedural fairness, communication quality, and employee participation in shaping responses to organizational change (Georgalis et al., 2015; Shrivastava & Pazzaglia, 2022). In particular, when conflict reflects unclear procedures or perceived inequities, employees may interpret transformation initiatives less favorably and become less willing to support their implementation.

The present findings also support multidimensional perspectives of resistance to change (Piderit, 2000), which conceptualize resistance as a complex cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reaction rather than simple opposition to change. Similar to previous research, employees in this study appear to experience uncertainty, stress, and reduced trust during transformation processes, particularly when communication is insufficient or decision-making processes are perceived as lacking transparency (Burnes, 2015; Issah, 2018).

The observed demographic differences further align with existing literature indicating that employees' reactions to change vary according to experience, organizational position, and perceived

control within the organization. Consistent with leadership and justice-based perspectives, individuals with longer tenure or lower hierarchical positions may exhibit higher resistance because they perceive greater disruption and possess less influence over change-related decisions (Sharif & Scandura, 2014; Rahaman et al., 2020).

Within the Saudi reform context, Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program place simultaneous performance and implementation pressures on public institutions. Under such conditions, effective conflict management becomes an important organizational capability rather than a peripheral administrative function. Sectoral evidence highlighting the importance of readiness and coordinated change implementation (Alharbi, 2018) complements the present findings, which suggest that proactively addressing organizational conflict may facilitate adaptation and support the sustainability of large-scale transformation initiatives.

#### 4.1. Theoretical contributions

This study contributes to the organizational change and public-sector management literature in several ways. First, it empirically examines the relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change within a unified analytical framework, helping address the tendency of previous studies to investigate these constructs separately. Second, the study extends organizational change research to the context of large-scale national transformation initiatives, which remain comparatively underrepresented in empirical literature. Third, by providing evidence from Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing Vision 2030 reforms, the study contributes context-specific insights from a non-Western institutional environment and broadens understanding of employee reactions to organizational transformation across diverse settings.

#### 4.2. Practical implications

The findings offer practical guidance for Saudi government institutions implementing large-scale transformation initiatives. First, strengthening cross-unit coordination mechanisms, such as interdepartmental committees, shared governance

structures, and formal conflict-resolution channels, may reduce organizational tensions and improve alignment during change implementation.

Second, transparent communication and clearly articulated decision rationales are essential for maintaining perceptions of procedural fairness. Early employee involvement in planning and feedback processes may enhance ownership, reduce uncertainty, and mitigate resistance to change (Georgalis et al., 2015). Establishing structured communication mechanisms throughout transformation programs can help ensure that employees receive timely and consistent information.

Third, leadership development initiatives should prioritize competencies related to conflict management, negotiation, communication, and emotional intelligence. Leaders who can identify and address emerging tensions constructively are better positioned to support employees throughout the transformation process (Issah, 2018; Rahaman et al., 2020).

Collectively, these implications suggest that effective transformation governance requires deliberate investment in coordination mechanisms, communication practices, and leadership capability development. Aligning these efforts with Vision 2030 objectives may strengthen employee engagement and support successful implementation of reform initiatives.

### 4.3. Limitations and future research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional research design limits the ability to draw causal conclusions because data were collected at a single point in time. Second, reliance on self-reported survey data collected at a single point in time may introduce common method bias. Although several procedural remedies were implemented, including

anonymous participation, voluntary participation, standardized questionnaire administration, and carefully worded measurement items, the possibility of common method bias cannot be completely excluded. Future research is encouraged to assess common method bias using appropriate statistical diagnostic techniques. Third, the study focuses exclusively on Saudi public-sector institutions, which may limit the generalizability of findings to private-sector organizations or different national contexts.

Future research should employ longitudinal or multi-wave designs to examine how organizational conflict and resistance to change evolve throughout different stages of transformation. Such approaches may provide deeper insight into the temporal dynamics of employee reactions and the sustainability of change initiatives.

Future studies may also investigate potential mediating and moderating mechanisms, including procedural justice, trust in leadership, communication quality, leadership style, and organizational culture. Examining these factors may contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how organizational conflict influences resistance to change in complex institutional environments.

Another limitation concerns the analytical model used in this study. Although simple linear regression identified a statistically significant relationship between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change, the model did not incorporate demographic and organizational characteristics as control variables. Therefore, the observed predictive relationship should be interpreted within the scope of the analytical model adopted in this study. Future research is encouraged to employ multivariable regression models that incorporate relevant control variables to examine the robustness of the observed relationship.

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## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between organizational conflict and employee resistance to change within Saudi public-sector institutions undergoing transformation. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change and indicate that organizational conflict is significantly associated with employee resistance to change within public-sector transformation settings.

The results suggest that conflict associated with communication breakdowns, unclear procedures, and perceived inequities is linked to stronger resistance toward organizational change initiatives. These findings support the view that resistance to change is influenced not only by individual attitudes but also by broader organizational conditions and experiences.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights the importance of proactive conflict management, transparent communication, and employee involvement in decision-making processes. Strengthening these areas may help reduce resistance, improve trust, and enhance the effectiveness of transformation initiatives aligned with Vision 2030.

Future research should continue examining the dynamic relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change across different transformation stages and organizational settings, while also incorporating additional explanatory variables to further develop theoretical understanding of organizational change processes.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Faiz Alfazzi.

Data curation: Faiz Alfazzi.

Formal analysis: Faiz Alfazzi.

Funding acquisition: Faiz Alfazzi.

Investigation: Faiz Alfazzi.

Methodology: Faiz Alfazzi.

Project administration: Faiz Alfazzi.

Resources: Faiz Alfazzi.

Software: Faiz Alfazzi.

Supervision: Faiz Alfazzi.

Validation: Faiz Alfazzi.

Visualization: Faiz Alfazzi.

Writing – original draft: Faiz Alfazzi.

Writing – review & editing: Faiz Alfazzi.

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## APPENDIX A. Survey questionnaire

Dear Participant,

This questionnaire is designed to examine the relationship between organizational conflict and resistance to change in Saudi public-sector institutions. Please indicate your level of agreement using the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

| Items                                                                                                    | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| <b>Section 1: Organizational Conflict</b>                                                                |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 1. Poor communication between departments leads to misunderstandings and increased tension               |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 2. Conflict occurs between departments due to conflicting priorities and goals                           |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 3. Lack of clarity regarding change strategies increases disagreements between employees and management  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 4. There are frequent disagreements among employees about how tasks are carried out                      |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 5. Competition for promotions or rewards causes conflicts among colleagues                               |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 6. Employees feel unfairly distributed tasks or resources                                                |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 7. Conflict arises due to ambiguity in roles and responsibilities                                        |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 8. There are allied groups within the organization vying for influence                                   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 9. Employees disagree with leaders about the core values and principles of the business                  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 10. Senior management imposes decisions without considering the opinions of executive teams              |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 11. Divisional priorities within the organization differ, leading to conflicting goals                   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 12. Ineffective methods are used to resolve employee conflicts                                           |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 13. Management deals with conflicts passively, such as avoiding or ignoring them                         |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 14. Disagreement resolution is often left to employees themselves, without clear management intervention |                   |          |         |       |                |
| <b>Section 2: Resistance to Change</b>                                                                   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 1. I believe the new changes will increase the workload without any clear benefit                        |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 2. I believe that change will increase my workload                                                       |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 3. I feel uncomfortable with changes imposed by management                                               |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 4. I do not trust the intentions of those in charge of the change within the organization                |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 5. I feel anxious or stressed about the anticipated changes                                              |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 6. I feel that changes may threaten my job stability                                                     |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 7. I resist change due to a lack of information about its goals and benefits                             |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 8. I feel that the changes imposed by senior management are illogical or ill-considered                  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 9. I believe that change does not take into account the circumstances of the employees                   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 10. I find it difficult to adapt to new changes                                                          |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 11. I believe that change will negatively impact my duties or position                                   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 12. I prefer to continue with old methods rather than innovate                                           |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 13. I see the new changes as unnecessary or unimportant                                                  |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 14. I find it difficult to understand the logic of changes occurring within the organization             |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 15. I have negative feelings toward new initiatives introduced by management                             |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 16. I believe that change will deprive me of a sense of job stability                                    |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 17. I tend not to cooperate with colleagues involved in implementing change                              |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 18. I resist or postpone implementing new procedures whenever possible                                   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| 19. I prefer to maintain old ways of working rather than adopting new ones                               |                   |          |         |       |                |

| Section 3: Demographic Information |                      |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Gender                             | Male                 |
|                                    | Female               |
| Age                                | 24–34                |
|                                    | 35–44                |
|                                    | 45–54                |
|                                    | 55–64                |
| Job Level                          | Employee             |
|                                    | Supervisor           |
|                                    | Manager              |
|                                    | Senior Leader        |
| Years of Experience                | Less than 5 years    |
|                                    | 5–10 years           |
|                                    | More than 10 years   |
| Educational Qualification          | Diploma              |
|                                    | Bachelor's           |
|                                    | Master's             |
|                                    | PhD                  |
| Institution Type                   | Ministries           |
|                                    | Authorities          |
|                                    | Independent Agencies |