

THEORETICAL ANTECEDENTS OF RESISTANCE TO CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are critical drivers of change. HEIs from Saudi Arabia are expected to contribute towards the attainment of the Government's change program (the Vision 2030) through the production of the requisite workforce for commerce, industry, and government. The Vision, described as a revelation from above, seeks to wean the Kingdom away from oil-dependence into a knowledge-driven economy and nation for the future. However, Saudi HEIs must first adapt to the change to produce the change outcomes expected from them. As knowledge organizations, HEIs are expected to understand resistance to change that may arise following the implementation of the Vision 2030 and pre-empt adverse reactions that may hamstring the actualization of the Vision. In this article, the authors present a theoretical model for understanding the potential resistance to the Vision 2030 in Saudi HEIs. The practical implication is that familiarity with the underlying logic of resistance to change process may reflect positively on the resistance change management efforts associated with activating the Vision 2030 in Saudi HEIs.

KEYWORDS: Resistance to change, Model, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Vision 2030, Saudi Arabia

1. INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia is well-known as an oil-rich state. Indeed, modern Saudi Arabia is built on the proceeds of the vast carbon resources under its scorching sands. However, experts believe that oil-driven development is no longer tenable, going by the falling demand and prices of oil in the global market [1, 2]. Further, the prevailing economic management system has been criticized as rentier and may not stand in the face of changing economic fortunes of a less oil-powered future [3]. Unless some drastic measures are taken, the Saudi economy may implode [4]. This potential implosion prompted the Saudi government into taking steps to wean the economy from its massive dependence on oil revenues. The latest ambition in this direction is the Saudi Vision 2030 launched by the modernist Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud. The collective impact of the reform initiatives undertaken under the watch of the Crown Prince has been correctly described as a "revolution from above" [5], as it has thoroughly shaken a hitherto ultra-conservative society. It is, therefore, out of the question that such radical changes cannot elicit strong resistance. Indeed, no matter how well-predisposed employees are to any change initiative, organizations will always face a certain measure of employee resistance [6].

The Vision 2030 [7] is a policy document for bringing about far-reaching changes in all facets of life in Saudi Arabia. Disaggregated into 96 strategic objectives [8], the Vision seeks to "provide the education that builds our children's fundamental characters and establish empowering health and social care systems" [7]. As it is generally the case with development plans across the globe, the Vision 2030 also seeks to achieve key human development goals through education by orchestrating improvements in all facets of the Kingdom's education system. Pursuant to this overarching framework, all the 2,920 kindergartens, 15,579 primary schools, 9,528 intermediate schools, and 6,790 high schools in 13 regions around Saudi Arabia [9] were merged under the unified oversight of the Ministry of Education which now boasts over 800,000 employees [10]. The overall aim of the merger exercise was to produce graduates with employable skills, developed professional teachers and improve administrative, operational, and financial efficiency in the education system [7]. However, mergers hardly go without

substantial socio-economic and psychological costs to employees [11] which may cause the affected employees to resist the changes, thereby potentially risking the benefits expected from the changes. Thus, understanding the roots of employees' resistance to change in actualizing the objectives of the Vision 2030 as it appertains to HEIs in Saudi Arabia is important. This is the main thrust of this study.

2. Meaning Of Resistance To Change

Oreg [12] defines resistance as a three-dimensional (negative) attitude towards change, including both affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. The emotional dimension is the way the individual expresses feelings about change (anxiety, anger). The cognitive dimension implies what it will think of change (is the change necessary, is it beneficial?). Finally, the behavioral dimension includes the actions it will take in response to this change (complaining, sabotaging). These three components are interdependent. Oreg [12] specifies, for example, that what an individual can think of change will be reflected in his feelings and his actions towards the latter. However, if each of these dimensions provides a different theoretical perspective on the phenomenon of resistance, the links between the mechanism of resistance to change and its antecedents need to be examined.

Oreg's [12] definition, however, reflects only the negative side of the phenomenon. Resistance to change can be positive, as well [13]. Thus, resistance to change can be negative or positive, and each of these dual types consists of two sub-types. The negative type consists of active resistance and passive resistance, and the positive variant is made up of active support and passive support [13]. Thus, the discussion of resistance to change in this study broadly follows the duality conceptualized in the extant literature including Bridgman [14], Busse and Doganer [15], and Fugate and Soenen [16]. We conceptualize resistance to change by some of its underlying logic used in everyday conversation such as inertia, lethargy. It refers to people's reticence in making the required transitions and their inability to quickly and efficiently react to changes happening in the workplace [17].

Historically, McMurry [18] and Coch and French [19], who were credited with being the first to use the term "resistance to change," respectively attributed the phenomenon to two psychological dispositions: emotion

and motivation. According to McMurry [18], fear of the unknown as an emotion that makes people resist change. On their part, Coch and French [19] theorized, based on the result of their studies, that "resistance to change ... is primarily a motivational problem" [19]. Since the works of McMurry [18] and Coch and French [19] over seventy years ago, the construct of resistance to change has been investigated in numerous settings at national, organizational, team, and unit levels of analysis [14, 20-22]. However, the volume of research has not kept pace with the unbroken interest in the field. For instance, a title search of resistance to change [in quotes] from 1947 to August 25, 2019, yielded only 523 documents. However, out of this output, only three [including 23] are from Saudi Arabia, and none of the three was cited anywhere. Furthermore, researchers are convinced that the specific antecedents of resistance to change in specific contexts (such as the culturally monolithic Saudi Arabia) still require further exploration [24]. Thus, to address the imperative of understanding resistance to change concerning Vision 2030, this study scoured the relevant literature for insights into the antecedents of resistance to change that could, theoretically, help towards understanding the change processes going on in Saudi HEIs under the stimulus of the Vision 2030.

3. Heis, Change, And Vision 2030

The history of educational development in Saudi Arabia is characterized by both incremental advancements and changes that can pass as radical and revolutionary [25, 26]. The educational change envisaged in the Vision 2030 is a mixture of both and was brought about through Government reform policies meant to improve the quality of education. Before the Vision 2030, there were other change programs such as the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project of 2007 [27] and the Public Education Evaluation Commission of 2013 [9]. The current reform, however, is more comprehensive as it comes under the Vision 2030. With regards to education, the Vision 2030 seeks to reposition Saudi HEIs to be among the top 200 globally by developing rigorous curricula whose implementation is monitored closely, making them an important springboard for the achievement of the Vision 2030. The Vision further seeks to align higher education outcomes with market needs, benchmarking professional qualifications in all fields, and maintaining students' records from kindergarten through higher education [7]. According to Alamri [28], there are 170 public universities and colleges and 33 private universities colleges in Saudi Arabia.

A critical enabling strategy for the attainment of the Saudi Vision 2030 is the National Transformation Programme 2020 - NTP 2020 [29]. This program was developed "to help fulfill Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and to identify the challenges faced by government bodies in the economic and development sectors" [29]. An aspect of the NTP 2020 relevant to this study is the one relating to the Ministry of Education. Based on the identified challenges facing Saudi Arabian education, the NTP 2020 sets out eight strategies for the Ministry of Education towards the achievement of the overall Vision 2030. These objectives include the provision of universal education, teacher development, boosting innovation and creativity, revamping the curricula and teaching methods, developing values and core skills, bridging education-labor market gap, support alternative

education finances, and encouraging more private sector participation in education [29, 30].

It is noteworthy that "two-thirds of its [Saudi Arabia] young people now [are] entering higher education" [5]. Some scholars even "believe that the wave of Arab Spring uprisings was due to the enlargement of higher education" [31] which is interpreted as resistance to the ruling structures dominant in the Arab world. However, this segment of the Saudi population has been described as "a natural constituency for this National Transformation Programme" [32], and are therefore the least expected to resist some of the changes that Vision 2030 promises. But the older members of the higher echelon of the education system, especially the religious establishment, may not be ready for the almost revolutionary purports of the Vision 2030 which include the opening of amusement parks, museums, and cinemas, and relaxation of dress codes and mixing of sexes in public spaces [5].

A proactive step taken to mitigate the effects of resistance to change is the establishment of the National Character Enrichment Programme which aims to strengthen Saudis' "personal and psychological characteristics that lead and motivate people to be successful and optimistic." [8]. It is noteworthy that all the vision objectives directly related to the National Character Enrichment Programme fall within the ambit of education. This underscores the position of educational institutions as the vanguards in overcoming resistance to vision implementation. The implication is that HEIs must first be less change resistant by first understanding its antecedents, among others.

4. Resistance to Change from the Lens of Vision 2030

A national vision such as the Vision 2030 contemplates an alternative future for an entire nation. To bring this future into reality necessary entails changing the current state of things. While the average Saudi youth, "keen to have more fun as *Vision 2030* unfolded" [5], may not dislike the future envisaged in the Vision 2030, the prospects of wading into the unknown with all its uncertainties usually trigger a complex of psychological response in people known as resistance to change [33]. It is, therefore, germane to understand some of the challenges on the path of Vision 2030 as it relates to the Saudi Arabian education industry. In general, change in education entails modifying or redesigning the curriculum, research, administration, finances, and school-community interface [34]. This type of change entails "continually renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capabilities to serve the ever-changing needs of external and internal" [35] stakeholders of the education system. Such changes have been attempted in the past through the *Tatweer* Project (known as King Abdullah Project), which carried out large-scale systems changes in educational delivery [36]. Experience from the project has shown that even key managers of the project did not anticipate and therefore failed to prepare for the myriad human challenges the change project entailed, including cultural issues, new technology acceptance, increased workload, etc. [27, 37]. The result is the widespread criticism of the project [38] despite its modest achievements [39].

5. Models of Resistance to Change

Some scholars offer models explaining the change management process that is a recurring decimal in all dynamic environments. The models were developed based on different streams of thought, thus vary in their

methodologies for understanding resistance to change. Wisniewski, et al. [40] have presented a summary of some of these models to include organizational cybernetics, open systems, system dynamics, social theory, creativity and innovation management, chaos theory and complexity theory, and BPC (business process change). However, these models are generic, and the respective referents they seek to explain are diffused, thereby making it difficult to use them across variegated research contexts. In this study, therefore, we employed the change resistance model synthesized in Oreg, et al. [41], as supplemented by Oreg's [42] earlier theory, to potentiate how employees of Saudi HEIs are likely going to react to the sweeping changes introduced in the education industry through the Vision 20030.

The Oreg, et al. [41] model of resistance to change (Figure 1), adopted in response to the parsimony dictum, consists of change recipients' explicit reactions to organizational change (i.e., cognitive, affective, and behavioral), pre-change antecedent categories (i.e., change recipient characteristics, internal context), change antecedent categories (i.e., change process, perceived benefit/harm, and change content), and change consequences (i.e., work-related and personal outcomes). This study discussed the pre-change and change antecedents against the backdrop of the resistance to change the Saudi authorities should appreciate and handle in the course of managing the Vision 2030.

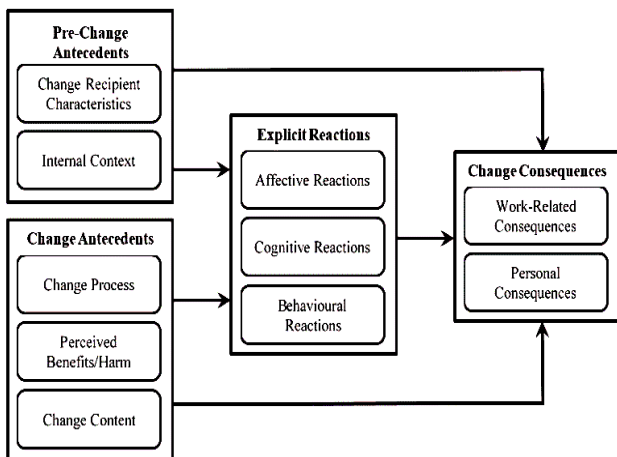


Figure 1. Change Resistance Model
 Source: Adapted from Oreg, et al. [41]

This study posits that the reactions employees of Saudi HEIs in response to the changes instituted through the agency of the Vision 2030 may be informed by several factors many of which predate the change program (pre-change antecedents) while some may be triggered or created by the change itself (change antecedents). However, the factors most likely to drive resistance the more could be found in the already settled individual norms of Saudis and organizational routines of Saudi public institutions which are known to be conservative in Saudi Arabia [43]. In this study, we discuss the potential effects of these all antecedents on how the employees of Saudi HEIs react to the changes brought about by the Vision 2030 with reference to the affective, cognitive, and behavioral forms of reactions to change theorized in Oreg [42] and Oreg [12] and developed fully in Oreg, et al. [41].

According to Oreg's [42] theory, a person's reaction to change could take three forms: namely, affective, cognitive, and behavioral. These three specific reaction patterns

explain an individual's concerns about and reactions to change. Thus, with regards to the Vision 2030, we can expect anxieties and possibly anger about the Vision from individuals triggered by the uncertainties of the new order of things envisaged in the Vision. Also, the cognitive thesis of Oreg's [42] theory of resistance in the light of Vision 2030 explains the questions Saudis may entertain about the Vision, including its potential and perceived costs and benefits to each of them as individuals. Finally, the theory posits that resistance to Vision 2030 may be expressed as individual behaviors in the form of, for example, compliance and support or denial and complaints. Collectively, Oreg's [42] theory provides plausible explanations for the antecedents and consequences of the Vision 2030 from the perspectives of employees of HEIs in Saudi Arabia.

6. Antecedents of Resistance to Change

This paper relies on Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis's [41] model explaining five factors that antedate the emergence of change in organizations. The model shares many similarities to Jaziri and Garbaa's [44] four-factor typology of the antecedents to change resistance. The researchers used Oreg and his colleagues' model to discuss the potential sources of resistance to change in Saudi HEIs arising out of the processes related to the implementation of Vision 2030.

6.1 Characteristics of Persons Affected by Change

Resistance to change is triggered by the defense mechanisms adopted by individuals to protect them from the perceived threats posed by the proposed change. Change recipient personal characteristics are known to trigger resistance to change [16, 24, 45]. In general, people affected by changes differ in the way they react based on their characteristics. Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis's [41] model identify four potential sources of resistance associated with change recipient characteristics: namely: traits, coping styles, needs, and demographics.

A trait is an important affective referent that informs how employees respond to the stresses and challenges associated with change. Talat [33] made a masterful case for the human side of organizational change focusing on the centrality of emotion in workplace interactions. The personality trait of the average Saudi citizen has been a subject of research. While Farrag [46] has demonstrated that the average Saudi personality closely approximates the big five traits, and Rojas-Méndez, et al. [47] have shown the Saudis as overwhelmingly conservative in their personality dispositions, other studies have [e.g., 48] shown Saudis to be highly individualistic and motivated to experience life to the fullest. Thus, we surmise that an equal force for resistance/compliance to Vision 2030 maybe experienced in Saudi workplace, with the older segment of HEIs likely to exhibit subtle but persistent and powerful resistance [14, 49, 50]. However, Kunze, et al. [51] reported that employee age is negatively associated with resistance to change.

Coping styles have also been advanced as an important cognitive/behavioral factor in resistance to change in organizations. According to Mack, et al. [52], there is a complex interplay between change at the organizational level and stress at the individual level which necessitates the development of coping strategies on the part of the change recipient. The ability to cope with the changes determines how stressed an individual becomes, with

higher-stressed Saudis and other Arabs reporting being highly stressed [53, 54]. The level of stress occasioned by changes may induce individuals to resist the change as a coping mechanism. A study indicates that Faculty in Saudi HEIs are stressed on almost all the subscales of the Faculty Stress Index, including rewards and recognition, time constraints, departmental influence, professional identity, and student interactions [55]. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect an increase in stress levels among faculty following the implementation of the Vision 2030, and which necessitates the deployment of more effective coping strategies is resistance to the Vision is to be minimized. Studies in Saudi contexts have indicated several coping strategies employees could use including spiritual, administrative, leadership, and interpersonal skills [56], problem-solving skills [57], and other physical and mental coping strategies [58].

Also, changes that interfere with how people go about fulfilling their life's need is known to trigger resistance. Needs as triggers of resistance to change are overwhelmingly behavioral; as such, are easily noticed in the workplace. People satisfy most of their economic, social, and political needs in their workplaces. Mealiea [59], seven specific needs employees nurse in order to have a fulfilling organizational life. They include the need for information, environmental consistency, affiliation, defined self-concept, control, self-discretion, and need to predict the future. However, changes have a way of upturning the status quo and thus likely to lower people's "income, job status and social relationships" [60] and defeat their abilities or opportunities to meet their needs. When such happens, people may invariably resist the change, openly or by subterfuge. This has been noted with regard to the implementation of the Vision 2030. The "changes in welfare provision and the sense of security the welfare system allowed which is now undermined" [61] have provoked growing resistance among Saudi employees.

Finally, with regards demographics vis-à-vis potential resistance to Vision 2030, the literature presents a different picture. For instance, the age-group typically found in higher education in the SAUDI ARABIA has been described as "a natural constituency for this National Transformation Programme" [32], and are therefore the least expected to resist some of the changes that Vision 2030 promises. The same source also reported that youths in particular who constitute the largest segment of the SAUDI ARABIA population "feel a great deal of anxiety about issues related to societal transformation and socio-economic change" [32].

6.2 Internal Context

Organizational context greatly influences how employees react to changes. The context is defined by an organization's implicit and explicit internal environment. Several factors define this environment, including supportive environment, organizational commitment, organizational culture and climate, and job characteristics [41]. According to Eisenberger, et al. [62], perceived organizational support refers to the extent to which an organization values the efforts and contributions made by its employees and shows care about their well-being. A supportive organizational environment will assist significantly in making employees make the transitions in times of change. With regard to the Saudi context, research has shown that the level of employee engagement with

their workplace is a function of a supportive environment [63]. Thus, we can surmise that resistance to Vision 2030 is most likely to be minimal where there is sufficient organizational support to help the employees make the change transition successfully. However, research has shown that the effect of organizational support and employee commitment on change compliance and championing depends on the employees' task abilities [64]. Furthermore, the level of trust between employees and the change managers significantly shapes the trajectory of resistance in any given organization [6]. Thus, the need to ensure that investments in providing a supportive and trusting work environment are matched with careful considerations of employees' work abilities.

Related to the question of a supportive environment is that of employee commitment. Meyer, et al. [65] show that committed employees not only comply with the change programs but also exert discretionary efforts towards the actualization of the change mandate. In the words of Fugate and Soenen [16], committed employees not only become change compliant but also become change champions: "Champions of change often actively engage in problem-solving and promote the benefits of change to others, whereas those who comply follow instructions but are unlikely to involve others, exercise initiative, or assume any personal risk" [16]. Furthermore, employee commitment creates greater employee willingness to change [66] and evince behavioral support for change [67], especially in organizations undergoing major restructuring [14, 68]. Thus, there is the need for Saudi HEIs to cultivate committed employees in order to minimize some of the adverse outcomes associated with revolutionary changes the like envisaged in the Vision 2030.

Two closely related but different factors that underscore both organizational support and employee commitment are organizational climate and organizational culture. According to Allen [69], organizational climate reflects the way people perceive and describe their workplace environment, while organizational culture reflects peoples' perceptions about the way things are done in an organization. The two phenomena shape the way employees react to change.

Bareil [70] observed that organizational culture and climate rooted in people's values, rites, and history could cause resistance to organizational change. The higher the impact of a change on the values, rites, and history of a people, the higher the intensity of resistance. Any change initiative that diverges widely from a peoples' way of doing things in organizations is bound to attract stiff resistance. Also, del Val and Fuentes [71] show that facets of organizational cultures, such as employees' conservatism and the embeddedness of their values and rites are the most explanatory of resistance to organizational change. Thus, seen from the perspective of the highly traditional and conservative Saudi organizational climate and culture, it could be expected that the revolutionary objectives enshrined in the Vision 2030 may likely trigger resistance from employees used to the old order.

6.3 Change Process

The process of conceiving a vision rarely meets anything but enthusiasm; the implementation process is, however, a race on a bridge of resistance. This explains why most studies on resistance to change focus on one process or the other. According to Bareil [70], employees resist change

mostly due to the way it is implanted, and such implementation-related resistance counts as the primary cause of change failure. To understand this vital phase of change, Oreg and Berson [72] model the implementation process as an important issue to be understood and mastered by change agents. Accordingly, we potentiate three of the five issues they suggest for understanding the change implementation process and added the fourth issue from Vos and Rupert [45]: participation, communication and information, interactional and procedural justice, and change agents' leadership behavior.

Several studies, including the early work of Coch and French [19], have attributed failures in organizational changes to lack of project ownership and participation of people in planning for changes that affect them [27, 73-79]. The participation of employees in the implementation of the change is likely to help them understand its necessity and its usefulness and therefore encourage them to accept it. Coch and French [19] show that employees' employee participation in the change management process attenuates the level of resistance to change. Similarly, van Dam, et al. [80] note a significant negative impact of employee participation in the change process on the level of resistance. The problem here is that Vision 2030 a "revolution from above" [5] with little or no input from institutional leaders and managers. Will they resist it all out? The answer is not necessarily in the affirmative. Buy-in of institutional managers for the Vision and its objectives can still be achieved through effective communication [81, 82]. According to Lewis [83], communication is an essential means of reducing the ambiguity that accompanies organizational change. Lack of disclosure of relevant and quality information may lead employees to resist change in order to maintain their familiar and habitual routines [84]. Several studies have reported a significant negative impact of information quality on the intensity of resistance to change; employees who receive more information about the change initiatives are less likely to be change-resistant [80, 85-87]. With regards to Vision 2030, there was a lot of media coverage (making the Vision communicated widely), and large segments of the younger population were optimistic about the Vision [32]. However, at the institutional level, there is much more to be done in order to douse the rising skepticism about the vision and its feasibility [3, 38, 88, 89], all of which are potential triggers for resistance.

One credible way Vision 2030 change managers can allay fears about the reforms is to ensure fairness in the implementation processes. It is always reassuring for employees who have no power to control events to perceive a sense of fairness in the change process. They will automatically default to resistance when they perceive the change process is skewed to their disadvantage [90]. Conversely, change agents who "demonstrate a fair-minded approach to the process of change are able to carry through much greater change and with much better results" [40]. Thus, Saudi employees in HEIs need to perceive the presence of both interactional justice [91] and procedural justice [92] in the whole reform process. To this end, change managers should carry their subordinates along in the change effort by providing them relevant information, in a complete and sensitive manner, bespeaking of respect so that the employees will perceive fairness in the entire

process [90, 93], thereby attenuating their resistance to the change [94-96].

Finally, the leadership behavior of people in charge of implementing any program of change is known to influence the level of resistance evinced by employees. A highlight of change leader behaviors could be seen in Stilwell, et al. [97] who developed the Change Leader Behaviour Inventory (CLBI). Similarly, Vos and Rupert [45] have investigated the effects of change agents' leadership behaviors on the resistant profiles of change recipients and found that change managers are wont to see higher resistance from employees than the employees themselves and that effective rather than cognitive overtures from change leaders are more effective in lowering employee resistance to change in organizations. With regards to the Vision 2030, HEIs managers must provide employees with the necessary direction and motivation to work for the Vision. Relevant experience has been reported by Rogers [98] who aver that "the most critical factors affecting successful and substantive change – from my experience – are visible and engaging leadership; a joined-up senior team with a consistent message and support; and being authentic by answering any question no matter the difficulty" [98]. Thus, a mental understanding of the reasons behind the Vision is not enough to deter employee resistance unless the employees bond with the change leaders' behaviors as exhibited selflessly in pursuit of the change mandates.

6.4 Perceived Benefits/Harm

Oreg [12] notes the importance of the expected benefit of change as one of the essential determinants in cognitive assessment and acceptance of the change. He describes this factor as the rational component of resistance. Similarly, Michel, et al. [99] suggest that benefits employees' commitment to change is a function of the benefits they expect from the changes. On the negative side, costs associated with change are strong resistance provocateurs. Kim and Kankanhalli [100] established a significant positive impact of the cost of change on the degree of resistance. According to them, the effort to learn to work with the new system, the troubles caused by the transition to the new system as well as the potential losses suffered during this passage contribute strongly to the resistance to the adoption of change. In general, the expected benefits of change leads to acceptance, while expected costs drive resistance. Oreg, et al. [41] modeled the benefits/harm of change under three broad groups: anticipated outcomes, job insecurity, and distributive justice.

Anticipated outcomes of change could be positive or negative. The negative aspects may include retrenchment, increased workload, a higher workload, loss of job control, and increased job complexity [41]. Job complexity refers to the cognitive demands of the job. Interpreting Becton, et al. [101], we can say that changes that make the current job of employees more complex are likely going to elicit higher resistance from average workers. This has been demonstrated in the *Tatweer* project where a revamped curriculum was poorly received due to the complexity of instructional technologies that were introduced into Saudi schools [37].

Job insecurity is also a factor responsible for employees' resistance to change in organizations. Most changes not only threatened the long-term job security of employees but also bring about job status insecurity [102]. Total job loss

or the likelihood of total job loss, loss of important job features, the likelihood of losing important job features, and perceived powerlessness to prevent any of such losses have been used as metrics in defining job insecurity [103]. The fears implied in job insecurities may potentially hold true with regards to the changes made in the Saudi education system, as suggested in previous studies [34, 104-107]. Finally, distributive justice has been linked to change resistance in organizations. Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of decisions, allocations, outcomes. While distributional justice decisions could be made on the basis of any three of its principles (i.e., equity, equality, need), contextual and specific factors may influence the tilt towards any of these principles, but in all cases, the overriding concern is to ensure that recipients perceive the decision as fair [108]. However, the practice of distributive justice in Saudi Arabia has been based on the Islamic perspective, which is humanistic and subsumes three ethes: *Adl, Insaaf, and Ihsaan* [109]. The Saudi educational reforms, designed based on the tacit assumptions of the utilitarian principles, may misalign with the dominant Islamic perspective current in Saudi Arabia, thereby potentially creating tensions among employees. Another potential source of resistance to Vision 2030 is the policy that encourages Saudis to participate in private enterprises [7] while a large portion of the population is used to public employment and its non-competitive nature [110]. The "changes in welfare provision and the sense of security the welfare system allowed which is now undermined" [61] have provoked growing resistance among the people.

6.5 Change Content

According to Oreg, et al. [41], few studies investigate the impact of change content on employees' reactions to change in organizations. However, the measures to reform education highlighted in the Vision 2030 represent a sea-change in the education sector [30]. Some of the content of the vision bound to arouse anxiety and possible resistance from employees include upgrading the professional development of teachers, establishing key performance indices and holding some people accountable for achieving them, and the introduction of digital technologies in education delivery processes [38, 111]. However, while Oreg, et al. [41] presented compensation, job design, office layout, and shift schedule as change content elements in a favorable light, their import in the Saudi education system may not be salutary.

Compensation has been generous in the Saudi public sector; any attempt at tying it to market demand may trigger resistance. Also, we infer that the content of the Vision 2030 [30] presupposes an enriched job design where the principles of autonomy, complexity, and task significance derive employee behavior [112]. However, the conservative work environment of Saudi HEIs is generally characterized by unenriched job design based on routinization and standardization. The transition from unenriched to enriched job design templates may elicit non-compliance from the change recipients, as suggested by the work of Battistelli, et al. [113] on the effects of enriched/nonenriched job designs on change-oriented behaviors of employees. Indeed, job enrichment which the reform means may affect some workers negatively by inducing feelings of inadequacy, fear of failure, and concern for dependency, thereby predisposing them to resist the new job design measures [114].

7. CONCLUSION

Employee resistance to change, though diffused and variegated across organizations, has the potency to crash even the best-designed and fully funded change initiative. In order to understand this phenomenon within the context of Saudi Vision 2030 as it affects the country's HEIs, this study adapted the resistance change model of Oreg, et al. [41] and theoretically discussed the potential resistance the authorities of the Saudi HEIs might face. The practical importance of the study is that familiarity with the underlying logic of resistance to change process may reflect positively on the resistance change management efforts associated with activating the Vision 2030 in Saudi HEIs.

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