

# **Obstacles, Resistance and Impact of Change in Organizations: An Examination of the Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC)**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the obstacles, resistance and impact of change in organizations. Taking the Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC) as the unit of analysis and utilizing descriptive analytic approach, we investigated the subject of discourse using a sample of 450 skilled employees. The results confirmed that ineffective change management team, poor support by the company's management, lack of resources and planning, and lack of communication are the fundamental obstacles to change in the company. The findings further revealed that the causes of change resistance in the company revolves round employees being comfortable with the status quo, change is imposed by force, lack of clarity, several changes happen simultaneously, and the fear of the future state. Additionally, the study confirmed that change has overall negative impact on STC. This is so because change in the company leads to reduction in productivity and competitiveness, it results to confusion within the organization and it does not make the company's operations run smoother or easier.

**Keywords:** Change, Management, Environmental dynamism, Resistance, Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC)

## **1. Introduction**

The Saudi Arabian Telecommunications and Information Technology sector is fast growing and it is characterized by dynamic changes. The companies which constitute this sector should see change as a major issue in their quests for survival, growth and development. The Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC) is one of such companies. The executives of this company

ought to constantly take initiatives that keep the company's activities abreast with the dynamic nature of the sector. This suggestion is founded on the notion that the success of any company is significantly dependent on its ability to align its internal activities to the specifics of its external environment. In view of this realization and given the fact that the Saudi telecommunications and information technology sector is constantly changing, the need for STC to transform in line with the environment becomes imperative. It is stressed however, that it is one thing for an organization to recognize the need for change and it is another situation for the change to be effectively managed. This assertion is hinged on the fact that there is tendency for a well proposed change to impact negatively on overall organization's performance if such change is improperly managed (Thomas, 2014). Change requires passing through a transitional phase. It is a transformational experience that could be incremental or radical for companies seeking improvements and competitiveness. Several companies have failed to transform in spite of changes in their business environments. These organizations are satisfied with the status quo, they maintain organizational activities the way they are. Although academics and practitioners overtly recommend organizational change for effective alignment with a changing business environment, most companies attempting this transformation often encounter resistance to change in the way company's activities are carried out. This resistance is conceived to be a problematic factor that impedes overall growth of a company. By and large, resistance to change should be eliminated and acceptance to change encouraged (Jones and Smith, 2004). Employees have high propensity to resist change when the change is unexpected, sudden, or radical in their view (Gibson and Hodgetts, 2013). In today's competitive and dynamic business environment, organizations must be flexible in order to quickly react and adapt to external realities. In general, change is sine qua non for survival. Because of the importance of change to organizations, this study attempts to explore the transformational experiences that are associated with change. Specifically, the research focuses on investigating the obstacles, resistance, and impact of change in the Saudi Telecommunication Company.

## **2. Overview of the Saudi telecommunication company**

The Saudi Telecommunication Company (STC) has a workforce of 17,000. The Saudi government owns a share of 70% while 30% is privately owned. The company was founded in 1998 as the Saudi Joint Stock Company in pursuant of the Royal Decree No. M/35 dated 24 Dhul Hijja 1418 H. The company offers integrated services such as fixed lines; mobile phone services; internet and multimedia services to more than 160 million customers that abound in Saudi Arabia and in International locations (El Emary et al., 2012). The company is considered to be the largest telecommunication company by market capitalization. STC operates through its five business units: Al Hatif, which includes landline services, card phones, public telephones, prepaid card services and business services; Al Jawal, which offers a range of mobile services, including Family Al Jawal, Sawa, messaging services, business services, data services and roaming services; Saudi Net, an Internet provider, STC Online for electronic bills payment services and Saudi Data, a provider of data solutions. The company has expanded operations to

other countries such as Turkey, Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Africa, and India. As part of its corporate social responsibility, the Saudi government declared 30% of STC shares for sale to Saudi citizens and organizations. Specifically, 20% was allotted to Saudi citizens, 5% to the General Organization of Social Insurance (GOSI), and 5% to the Pension Funds Organization (PFO).

### **3. Change and change management**

Change is inevitable. This reality demands that flexibility ought to be the guiding philosophy for companies operating in dynamic business environments. Company's flexibility in the form of change needs careful management for it to have positive impact. Companies have to embrace change and make the transition process easier (Garber, 2013). Creasey (2009) acknowledged that the goal of change and change management is to improve the main elements of organizations such as: processes, systems, organizations structure and job roles, and how organizations operate? The focus of any change management is to maximize the benefits that result from the change, while minimizing the risks of failure during the change or transformational process.

Abbs (2012) conceptualized change management as an organized procedure of planning, initiating, realizing, controlling, stabilizing and sustaining new and improved work activities at the corporate, group and individual level. At its most basic level, change management is a control system that ensures that programs, systems, and infrastructure modifications are authorized, tested, documented, and monitored (Yarberry, 2007). Put differently, it is a structured approach to transitioning individuals, teams, and organizations from a current state to a desired state (Hiatt and Creasey, 2012; Kotter, 2011). According to Nickols (2010) change management is a strategic activity aimed at effectively implementing new methodologies and systems in an organization and obtaining the best outcomes from the change process.

### **4. Types of change and change management**

Organizational change exists in different forms. Each form requires a unique management approach. Each approach to change management is influenced by the degree of complexity, cost and uncertainty which an organization has to experience in addressing the change (Rees and French, 2013). The most frequent types of change occurring in organizations are categorized as: developmental, transitional, and transformational.

Developmental change is the simplest type of change. It focuses on improving what an organization is currently doing rather than creating something radically new. According to Tucker (2007) developmental change is exhibited if a company decides to update its policies, methods and procedures. Anderson and Anderson (2010) exemplify developmental change as increase in sales or quality, interpersonal communication training, simple work process improvements, team development, and problem-solving efforts.

Transitional change is a shift from an old state to a new context (De Roo, 2008). This type of change is challenging to manage. Its introduction and management requires leadership and organizational investments. For transitional change, major modifications are needed to organizational structure, policies and procedures, and individual skills (Rikerjoe, 2009). This type of change involves unfreezing the existing organizational equilibrium, moving to a new position or state, and then freezing in a new equilibrium position (Hunter, 2007). Under this category of change, the future state is radically different from the current state. As a result of the high degree of difference between the two states, employees and organizational culture must radically change in order to successfully adapt to the new state (Anderson and Anderson, 2010).

Transformational change is similar to transitional. However, there is a thin line separating the two forms of change. Whereas transformational change deals with complex and unpredicted outcomes, transitional change deals with simple, but unpredictable outcomes. Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) regarded transformational change as fundamental change. A fundamental change requires radical shift in a company's culture, business strategy, and processes. Change will continually be a feature of the external environment of organizations. Internal change therefore, is requisite requirement for coping with environmental dynamism (Burnes, 2004).

## **5. Obstacles to change**

A plethora of obstacles to change are conceivable. Amongst these plausible obstacles are: ineffective change management team, poor support by company's management, lack of resources and planning, and lack of communication. When organization's change management team is ineffective, it lacks the capacity to win employees cooperation and participation in change activities. According to Hiatt and Creasey (2012), an ineffective management team is likely to lose the ability to see what is right for an organization. Poor support by organization's management is another factor that can potentially pose as obstacle to change in organization. Poor support by organization's management is a situation whereby organization's leadership are reluctant to acknowledge the need for change (Audia and Brion, 2007; Sirkin et al., 2005). Another probable obstacle to change in organization lies in lack of resources and planning. A successful introduction, acceptance, and implementation of change will not be feasible without sufficient resources and robust plan that is actively supported by management (Sanchez et al., 2012). Lawler and Worley (2006) had earlier made this assertion when they observed that without resources and planning change actions will not be able to achieve its preconceived objective. A final attribute that the study viewed as a potential obstacle to change is lack of communication. Communication is the process through which information, ideas and knowledge are exchange (Khosa et al., 2015). Communication within the context of change is the mechanism that is utilized to announce, explain, and motivate employees to participate in a change process. Unequivocally, communication is a tool for successful organizational change.

## **6. Resistance and causes of resistance to change**

Resistance to change is the action taken by an individual or group that perceives a change as threat. Employees tend to have high inclination to change when environmental factors present no other choice except change. In this situation, organization's employees are compelled to change (Samuel, 2013). Miller and Friesen (2000) exacerbated the argument on resistance to change by stressing that employees tend to show resistance to change even when the business environment threatens extinction. Resistance to change can be classified along three dimensions into three: technical resistance, political resistance, and cultural resistance. Technical resistance results from the habit of following established procedures and focusing actions on maintaining the status quo. Political resistance is friction that arises in the form of fight back when change threatens major stakeholders, such as top executives. Cultural resistance take the form of systems and procedures that reinforce the status quo, promoting conformity to existing values, norms, and assumptions about how things should operate (Cummings and Worley, 2009).

More often than not, resistance to change arises when employees get comfortable with the status quo and when they do not understand the reasons behind a change. Resistance to change is further apparent when a change process is imposed by force; there is lack of clarity regarding the change; several changes happen simultaneously; and the fear of the future state. There are empirical evidences which partly held the view that resistance to change is one of the reasons for failure of change initiatives (Maurer, 2006; Waddell and Sohal, 1998; Anderson and Anderson, 2010). The causes of resistance to change should be identified and eliminated in order to make a change process effective. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) emphasized that there are six steps that must be put in place to achieve this direction. These six steps include: education and communication; participation and involvement; facilitation and support; negotiation and agreement; co-optation and manipulation; and implicit and explicit coercion.

## **7. Change and its impact on organizations**

A well-intended change can impact negatively on the performance of organizations. Negative impact of change in organization are evidenced in the form of reduction in productivity; reduction in competitiveness; confusion within the organization; and friction in the operations of organizational activities. Bruck (2002) emphasized that mitigating these negative impacts require that a change process should be carefully planned and adequately managed. Change is both risky and murky endeavor that can create undesirable results if the change process is not adequately managed. Blanchard (2010) observed that approximately 70 percent of change initiatives fail. This high rate of failure has made organizations cynical toward change initiatives.

## 8. Methodology

The branches of STC are widely dispersed throughout Saudi Arabia. Accessing data from all the branches is not feasible. As a result, the branches situated in Abha and Khamis Mushyt was the focal points for data collection. These two branches have 750 skilled employees collectively. The skilled employees formed the unit of analysis and the target population for the study. A target or study population can be viewed as a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which a researcher intends to generalize the results of a research (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Convenience sampling method was used to select the 498 respondents which the study termed as the initial sample size. A total of 464 questionnaires were sent to the 464 respondents and were all returned. However, 14 of the questionnaire were found unusable due to major errors in their completion by the respondents. In this case, the effective sample size of the study stood at 450. The questionnaire concentrated its enquiry on key demographic variables, obstacles encountered in change management, resistance to change, and the impact of change on the employees. Nominal scale was utilized to measure the demographic items while a five-point likert scale was used to measure obstacles to change, resistance to change, and impact of change in the company. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

## 9. Results

### 9.1 Demographic profile of respondents

**Table 1: Demographic Profile**

| Background information | Range                     | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Age                    | 20 – 29                   | 17        | 3.8     |
|                        | 30 – 39                   | 164       | 36.4    |
|                        | 40 – 49                   | 251       | 55.8    |
|                        | 50 – 59                   | 9         | 2.0     |
|                        | 60+                       | 9         | 2.0     |
| Education              | High school or equivalent | 26        | 5.8     |
|                        | Bachelor’s degree         | 277       | 61.5    |
|                        | Master’s degree           | 130       | 28.9    |
|                        | Doctoral degree           | 17        | 3.8     |
| Year of service        | Less than two years       | 17        | 3.8     |
|                        | Between 2 and 10 years    | 44        | 9.8     |
|                        | More than 10 years        | 389       | 86.4    |

Table 1 indicates that 3.8% of the respondents fall within the 20-29 age category. 36.4% of the respondents lie within the 30-39 age bracket. 55.8% are within the 40-49 age range. While 2.0% is situated in the age range of 50 -59 and 60+ categories respectively.

## 9.2 Obstacles to change management

**Table 2a: Distribution of responses on obstacles to change**

| <b>Ineffective change management team</b>   |                |                          |
|---|----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Frequency</b>                            | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 17  | 3.8            | 32.7                     |
| 130   | 28.9           |                          |
| 164   | 36.4           | 36.4                     |
| 78  | 17.3           | 30.9                     |
| 61  | 13.6           |                          |
| <b>Poor support by company's management</b> |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                            | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 9   | 2.0            | 32.7                     |
| 138   | 30.7           |                          |
| 156   | 34.7           | 34.7                     |
| 130   | 28.9           | 32.7                     |
| 17  | 3.8            |                          |
| <b>Lack of resources and planning</b>       |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                            | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 43  | 9.6            | 67.4                     |
| 260   | 57.8           |                          |
| 86  | 19.1           | 19.1                     |
| 35  | 7.8            | 13.6                     |
| 26  | 5.8            |                          |
| <b>Lack of communication</b>                |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                            | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 35  | 7.8            | 63.6                     |
| 251   | 55.8           |                          |
| 104   | 23.1           | 23.1                     |
| 43  | 9.6            | 13.4                     |
| 17  | 3.8            |                          |

Table 2a is the presentation of the obstacles to change in STC. According to the table, the pooled weight showed that 32.7% of the respondents agree that ineffective change management team is an obstacle to change in STC. 30.9% of the respondents disagree that ineffective change management team is an obstacle to change in the company. The inquiry



into poor support by company’s management as a possible obstacle revealed a tie between agreement and disagreement on the issue. Specifically, 32.7% of the respondents agree and disagree on the issue. As for lack of resources and planning as an obstacle to change, 67.7% of the respondents agree that the issue is an obstacle while 13.6% of the respondents disagree that is an obstacle to change in STC. In the analysis of lack of communication as an obstacle, 63.6% of the respondents agree that the issue is an obstacle while 13.4% of the respondents disagree that the issue is an obstacle to change in STC.

**Table2b: Summary of the obstacles to change in STC**

| S/No | Factors                              | Pooled weight (%) | Is the factor an obstacle to change? |
|------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1    | Ineffective change management team   | *32.7 , **30.9    | Yes                                  |
| 2    | Poor support by company’s management | *32.7, **32.7     | Tie(no decision)                     |
| 3    | Lack of resources and planning       | *67.7, **13.6     | Yes                                  |
| 4    | Lack of communication                | *63.6, **13.4     | Yes                                  |

\* agree, \*\* disagree

Table 2b is derived from table 2a. The table is a summary of the factors that are seen as significant obstacles to change in STC. According to the table, ineffective change management team, lack of resources and planning, and lack of communication are major obstacles.

**Figure 1: Comparative analysis of the obstacles to change in STC**

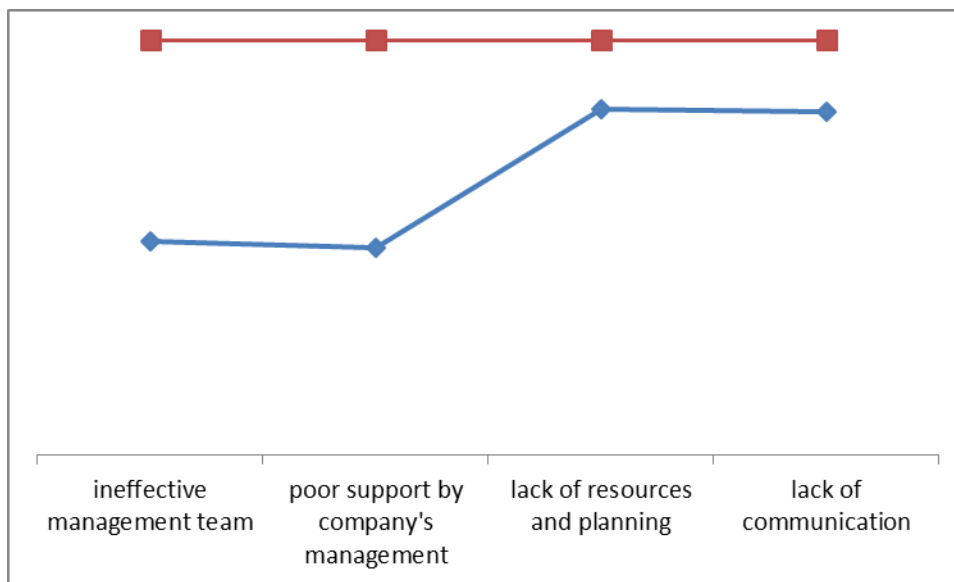




Figure 1 shows the comparative strengths of the obstacles to change in STC. The figure shows that lack of resources and planning as well as lack of communication are more significant obstacles when compared to ineffective change management team.

### 9.3 Causes of resistance to change

**Table 3a: The causes of change to resistance in STC**

| <b>Comfortable with the status quo</b>                |                |                          |
|---|----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Frequency</b>                                      | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 35  | 7.8            | 42.5                     |
| 156   | 34.7           |                          |
| 95  | 21.1           | 21.1                     |
| 147   | 32.7           | 36.5                     |
| 17  | 3.8            |                          |
| <b>Do not understand the reason behind the change</b> |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                                      | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 43  | 9.6            | 38.5                     |
| 130   | 28.9           |                          |
| 87  | 19.3           | 19.3                     |
| 164   | 36.4           | 42.2                     |
| 26  | 5.8            |                          |
| <b>Change is imposed by force</b>                     |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                                      | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 26  | 5.8            | 46.2                     |
| 182   | 40.4           |                          |
| 147   | 32.7           | 32.7                     |
| 78  | 17.3           | 21.1                     |
| 17  | 3.8            |                          |
| <b>Lack of clarity</b>                                |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                                      | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 87  | 19.3           | 73.1                     |
| 242   | 53.8           |                          |
| 78  | 17.3           | 17.3                     |
| 26  | 5.8            | 9.6                      |
| 17  | 3.8            |                          |
| <b>Several changes happen simultaneously</b>          |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                                      | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 61  | 13.6           | 59.6                     |
| 207   | 46.0           |                          |
| 95  | 21.1           | 21.1                     |

|                                 |                |                          |
|---------------------------------|----------------|--------------------------|
| 61                              | 13.6           | 19.4                     |
| 26                              | 5.8            |                          |
| <b>Fear of the future state</b> |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 17                              | 3.8            | 44.4                     |
| 182                             | 40.4           |                          |
| 95                              | 21.1           | 21.1                     |
| 147                             | 32.7           | 34.7                     |
| 9                               | 2.0            |                          |

Table 4 indicates the analysis of the causes of resistance to change in STC. The table reveals that 42.5% of the respondents agree that they resist change because they are comfortable with the status quo. 36.5% of the respondents disagree that being comfortable with the status quo is the reason for resisting change. The inquiry on the issue that change is imposed by force shows that 46.2% of the respondents agree on the issue while 21.1% of the respondents disagree on the same issue. In the examination of lack of clarity as a basis for resisting change, 73.1% of the respondents agree that this factor is a cause of resistance to change while 9.6% disagree that the factor is a foundation for resisting change in STC. Regarding several changes happening simultaneously, 59.6% of the respondents agree on the issue while 19.4% disagree on the issue. On fear of the future state, 44.2% of the respondents agree that this factor is a basis for resisting change while 34.7% disagree on the issue.

**Table 3b: Summary of the causes of resistance to change in STC**

| S/N | Factors  | Pooled weight (%) | Does the factor indicate resistance to change? |
|-----|--|-------------------|--|
| 1   | Comfortable with the status quo                | *42.5, **36.5     | Yes  |
| 2   | do not understand the reason behind the change | *38.5, **42.2     | No   |
| 3   | Change is imposed by force                     | *46.2, **21.1     | Yes  |
| 4   | Lack of clarity                                | *73.1, **9.6      | Yes  |
| 5   | Several changes happen simultaneously          | *59.6, **19.4     | Yes  |
| 6   | Fear of the future state                       | *44.2, **34.7     | Yes  |

\* agree, \*\* disagree

Table 3b follows from table 3a. The table stipulates that the major reasons for resistance to change in STC include: employees are comfortable with the status quo; change is imposed by force; lack of clarity; several changes happen simultaneously; and fear of the future state.

**Figure 2: Comparative analysis of the causes of resistance to change in STC**

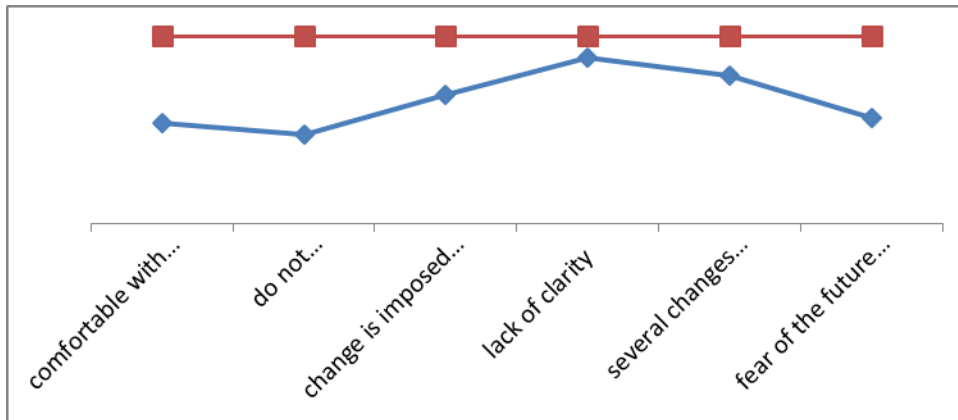


Figure 2 indicates the relative strengths of the factors that are responsible for change resistance in the STC. Although, four factors depict the major sources of resistance to change, lack of clarity stood as the most significant cause. This is followed by several changes happening simultaneously. Fear of the future state and change is imposed by force have approximately similar strengths.

#### 9.4 The impact of organizational change in STC

**Table 4a: The impact of organizational change in STC**

| Reduction in productivity         |         |                   |
|-----------------------------------|---------|-------------------|
| Frequency                         | Percent | Pooled weight (%) |
| 43                                | 9.6     | 46                |
| 164                               | 36.4    |                   |
| 87                                | 19.3    | 19.3              |
| 139                               | 30.9    | 34.7              |
| 17                                | 3.8     |                   |
| Reduction in competitiveness      |         |                   |
| Frequency                         | Percent | Pooled weight (%) |
| 52                                | 11.6    | 40.5              |
| 130                               | 28.9    |                   |
| 121                               | 26.9    | 26.9              |
| 121                               | 26.9    | 32.7              |
| 26                                | 5.5     |                   |
| Confusion within the organization |         |                   |
| Frequency                         | Percent | Pooled weight (%) |
| 87                                | 19.3    | 57.7              |
| 173                               | 38.4    |                   |
| 121                               | 26.9    | 26.9              |

|  |                |                          |
|--|----------------|--------------------------|
| 52   | 11.6           | 15.4                     |
| 17   | 3.8            |                          |
| <b>Made operations smoother and easier</b> |                |                          |
| <b>Frequency</b>                           | <b>Percent</b> | <b>Pooled weight (%)</b> |
| 26   | 5.8            | 21.1                     |
| 69   | 15.3           |                          |
| 19   | 42.2           | 42.2                     |
| 130  | 28.9           | 36.7                     |
| 35   | 7.8            |                          |

Table 4a is the analysis of the impact of organizational change in STC. According to the table, 46.0% of the respondents agree that change in the company reduces productivity of employees. 34.7% of the respondents disagree that organizational change reduces employee productivity. Furthermore, 40.5% of the respondents agree that change reduces organization competitiveness while 32.7% disagree that change reduces organization competitiveness. Additionally, 57.7% of the respondents agree that change leads to confusion within the organization while 15.4% disagree on this issue. The final analysis in this section reveals that 21.1% of the respondents agree that organizational change makes operations smoother and easier while 36.7% disagree on this issue.

**Table 4b: Summary of the impact of organizational change in STC**

| S/No | Factors                             | Pooled weight (%) | Does the factor indicate impact? |
|------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1    | Reduction in productivity           | *46.0, **34.7     | Yes                              |
| 2    | Reduction in competitiveness        | *40.5, **32.7     | Yes                              |
| 3    | Confusion within the organization   | *57.7, **15.4     | Yes                              |
| 4    | Made operations smoother and easier | *21.1, **36.7     | Yes                              |

\* agree, \*\* disagree

Table 4b clearly indicates that change in STC impact on the company in the direction of reduction in productivity, reduction in competitiveness, confusion within the company, and does not make operations smoother or easier.

**Figure 3: Comparative analysis of the impact of organizational change in STC**

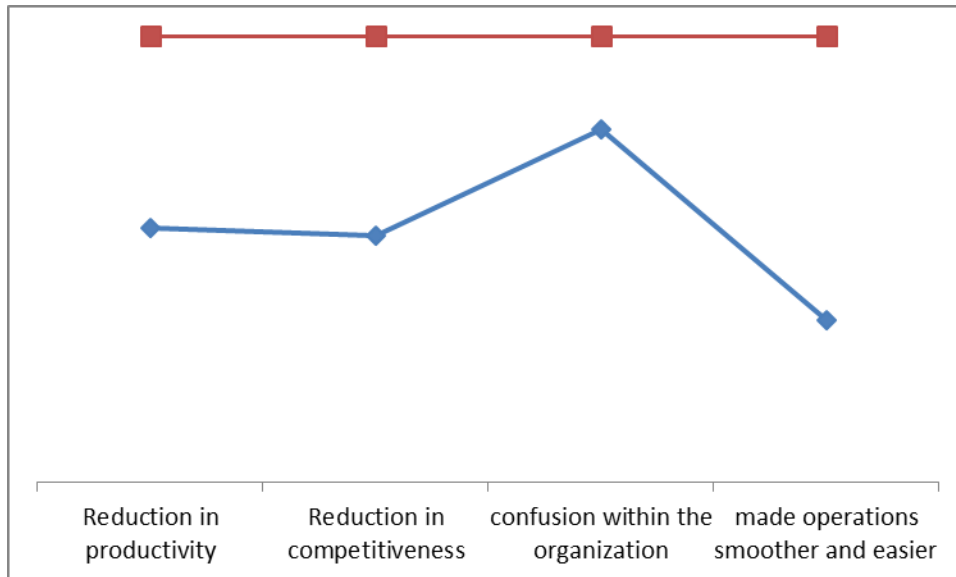


Figure 3 shows that change in the company has an overall negative impact. The negative impact is depicted along four dimensions. However, the most significant of the four dimensions is the impact regarding confusion within the organization. This is followed by reduction in productivity and competitiveness of the company. The least significant impact is that change does not lead to smooth and easy functioning of operations in the company.

## 10. Conclusion

Management literature recommends that organizations should change as a result of environmental dynamism. Although this recommendation holds true and critical to successful existence of organizations, it is an uphill task to implement and manage in the Saudi Telecommunication company (STC). On the basis of the results, the study conclude that ineffective change management team, poor support by company’s management, lack of resources and planning, as well as lack of communication are major obstacles to change in STC. The study further concludes that the main causes of resistance to change in STC are that: employees are comfortable with the status quo, change is imposed by force, lack of clarity, several changes happen simultaneously, and the fear of the future state. On a final note, the study concludes that change in STC has overall negative impact. This is so because it leads to reduction in both productivity and competitiveness, results in confusion within the company and it does not make operations smoother or easier. Therefore, change initiatives in the Saudi Telecommunication Company fail and confirms the notion that most change initiatives in organizations fail (Blanchard 2010).

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