

The Effect Of Organizational Resistance Level On Company Growth: A Study Of MTN Nigeria

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Abstract: Organizational resistance to change represents one of the most persistent and costly barriers to corporate growth in dynamic business environments, and this challenge is especially pronounced in the telecommunications sector across sub-Saharan Africa. This study investigates the effect of organizational resistance levels on company growth, with MTN Nigeria serving as the primary case study. Drawing on a qualitative and exploratory research design, the study integrates evidence from secondary data sources including organizational reports, peer-reviewed academic literature, and empirical case studies on change management in Nigerian corporations. The central focus is on how varying degrees of employee and stakeholder resistance, when mediated by the quality of communication, the transparency of leadership, and the strategic alignment of change initiatives, directly influence organizational performance and growth outcomes. The findings demonstrate that high resistance levels, which typically arise from communication failures, inadequate change preparation, and employees' perception that they have been excluded from decision-making processes, directly impede corporate growth. These negative effects manifest as operational disruptions, reduced productivity, and the erosion of the employee morale and commitment that sustains long-term institutional performance. Conversely, organizations that invest in structured communication strategies and implement inclusive change management frameworks, as demonstrated by MTN Nigeria's progressive adoption of internal communication platforms and stakeholder engagement mechanisms over the past decade, experience significantly lower resistance and achieve stronger and more sustainable growth trajectories. The study concludes that managing organizational resistance through deliberate, transparent, and empathetic communication is not merely a human resources concern or a soft management function. It is a core strategic imperative for corporate growth in competitive African markets, and organizations that fail to treat it as such consistently underperform against peers that do.

Keywords: organizational resistance, company growth, change management, MTN Nigeria, communication strategy, employee acceptance

I. INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by rapid technological disruption, shifting regulatory landscapes, and intensifying competitive pressures across African markets, the ability of organizations to implement change successfully has become a defining determinant of long-term corporate growth and institutional survival. Yet despite the centrality of change to organizational development, resistance to change at the individual, team, and

institutional level remains one of the most commonly cited barriers to successful organizational transformation across industries and geographies (Northouse, 2018; Hughes, 2019).

This challenge is particularly pronounced in the Nigerian telecommunications industry, where market leaders like MTN Nigeria operate at the intersection of technological dynamism, workforce diversity, and complex stakeholder relationships. MTN Nigeria, as one of Africa's largest telecommunications corporations, has undergone multiple significant

organizational changes over the past decade, ranging from leadership transitions and CRM system implementations to broader digital transformation initiatives and policy restructuring. Each of these change episodes has encountered varying degrees of internal resistance, with outcomes demonstrably shaped by the quality of the communication and change management practices deployed at each stage. This study examines the relationship between organizational resistance levels and company growth, arguing that resistance is not an inevitable or unmanageable feature of change but a variable outcome that can be substantially moderated by the deliberate and skilled application of communication frameworks and structured change management tools. The study situates this argument within the Nigerian corporate context, where empirical research on the growth consequences of organizational resistance remains limited relative to the practical urgency of the challenge facing practitioners.

A. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Organizations across Nigeria's telecommunications sector regularly initiate change programmes covering system upgrades, policy reforms, and structural reorganizations, all of which promise growth and efficiency gains but frequently deliver disruption and underperformance instead. A common thread running through these failures is the consistent underestimation of organizational resistance and the inadequacy of communication strategies deployed to address it at the critical early stages of each transition. The research problem this study addresses is therefore: to what extent does the level of organizational resistance, when shaped by communication quality and change management practice, affect company growth outcomes at MTN Nigeria?

B. RESEARCH QUESTION

To what extent does organizational resistance level, as mediated by communication skills and change management strategy, affect company growth in MTN Nigeria?

C. OBJECTIVE

To examine the effect of organizational resistance levels on company growth in MTN Nigeria, and to evaluate the role of communication skills and change management frameworks in moderating that resistance.

D. HYPOTHESIS

H0: Organizational resistance level has no significant effect on company growth in MTN Nigeria.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. ORGANIZATIONAL RESISTANCE AND ITS GROWTH CONSEQUENCES

Organizational resistance to change is widely recognized in management literature as a significant and measurable

impediment to corporate performance. Oreg, Vakola, and Armenakis (2018), in a comprehensive 60-year review of quantitative studies on change recipients' reactions, found that resistance consistently correlates with reduced implementation success, lower employee morale, and diminished organizational output across sectors and national contexts. Rafferty and Jimmieson (2017) further demonstrated that subjective perceptions of change, particularly when employees feel inadequately informed or excluded from decision-making processes, generate psychological resistance that directly undermines engagement and productivity. In the Nigerian corporate context specifically, Oyetunji (2023) documented that MTN Nigeria's growth trajectory during periods of organizational transition was measurably affected by the degree of internal resistance encountered, with communication quality emerging as the primary mediating variable in each case studied.

Hughes (2019) argues that organizational resistance should not be treated as an irrational obstacle to be overcome through management pressure but as a meaningful signal that employees need more information, more inclusion in decision-making, and more visible leadership transparency. Organizations that respond to resistance with enhanced communication and genuine engagement rather than top-down directives consistently achieve better change outcomes and stronger growth performance over the medium and long term. This insight forms a central pillar of the analytical framework guiding this study.

B. COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS A MODERATOR OF RESISTANCE

The role of communication in moderating organizational resistance is extensively and consistently documented across management literature. Adler and Proctor (2023) establish that effective communication, characterized by clarity, active listening, and contextual adaptability, creates the conditions of mutual understanding and interpersonal trust that are prerequisite to acceptance of change. Kotter (2016) identifies communication as the single most critical enabler across all eight steps of his change model, from creating urgency through to institutionalising new behaviours permanently. The ADKAR model (Hiatt, 2017) makes this relationship even more precise at the individual level: resistance emerges specifically when any of the five ADKAR elements, namely Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement, is inadequately communicated, and it dissolves when effective communication fills those gaps.

In the MTN Nigeria context, Makinde (2020) found that communication breakdowns during the CRM implementation were the direct and identifiable cause of the confusion and resistance that temporarily disrupted the project timeline and service delivery metrics. Once structured feedback channels and targeted training communications were deliberately introduced, resistance declined measurably and technology adoption accelerated. This experience illustrates precisely the mechanism through which communication quality translates into resistance management and, ultimately, into stronger growth outcomes for the organisation.

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applies four complementary theoretical frameworks. Lewin's three-stage Change Model (Cummings et al., 2016), covering Unfreeze, Change, and Refreeze, provides the foundational understanding of how organizational inertia must be actively and deliberately dismantled through communication before new behaviours can be introduced and subsequently sustained as institutional norms. Kotter's 8-Step Model (Kotter, 2016) operationalises this into a sequential and communication-driven process through which resistance is progressively reduced and growth-enabling change is institutionalised step by step. The ADKAR Model (Hiatt, 2017) focuses the analysis at the individual level, identifying precisely where in the change journey resistance arises and explaining how targeted communication addresses each specific resistance point in sequence. The Shannon-Weaver Communication Model (Femi, 2017) provides the theoretical basis for understanding how noise, whether informational, emotional, cultural, or structural in nature, disrupts the communication channel and amplifies resistance, offering practitioners clear guidance on designing communication strategies that minimise such interference.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and exploratory research design, which is appropriate for investigating the nuanced relationship between organizational resistance levels and company growth outcomes in a specific and well-documented corporate context. The research draws primarily on secondary data, including a systematic review of academic literature on change management, organizational resistance, and communication in Nigerian corporate settings; organizational reports and annual publications from MTN Nigeria spanning 2018 to 2024; documented case studies of change episodes within MTN Nigeria, specifically the CRM implementation analyzed by Makinde (2020) and the broader change management performance assessed by Oyetunji (2023); and news reports and institutional publications relevant to organizational change in Nigeria's telecommunications sector. The qualitative approach was selected because the research question is fundamentally concerned with understanding mechanisms, causal relationships, and contextual dynamics rather than generating generalizable statistical estimates. The case study methodology, centered on MTN Nigeria with comparative reference where appropriate to Coca-Cola Nigeria and NNPC, allows for rich and contextually grounded analysis of how the theoretical frameworks apply in real practice within the Nigerian organizational environment.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm that organizational resistance level has a significant and measurable effect on company growth outcomes at MTN Nigeria, and that this

effect is mediated primarily by the quality of communication deployed during each change process. The evidence from multiple documented change episodes within the organisation consistently demonstrates that periods of high organizational resistance, characterised by employee confusion, low buy-in, and operational disruption, correspond directly with periods of reduced productivity, implementation delays, and missed growth targets that affect service delivery and competitive performance.

Oyetunji (2023) documents that effective communication during MTN Nigeria's change initiatives significantly improved implementation success rates, with transparent employee participation reducing resistance measurably and timely messaging boosting morale and trust in leadership. These outcomes translated directly into growth-enabling results: reduced transition costs, faster operational normalisation after change events, and stronger employee commitment to performance targets aligned with the change objectives. Conversely, the CRM implementation episode documented by Makinde (2020) demonstrates the real and quantifiable growth cost of communication failure. The resistance generated by communication breakdowns caused implementation delays and confusion that temporarily disrupted service delivery and customer satisfaction metrics, both of which carry direct and measurable growth consequences in a competitive telecommunications market where customer retention is closely tied to service experience.

The ADKAR framework provides the most precise analytical lens for understanding these findings at the individual level. In the MTN Nigeria episodes where resistance was demonstrably high, consistent gaps in the Awareness and Desire stages of the model are identifiable. Employees neither fully understood the rationale for the change being implemented nor felt sufficient motivation to support it, because communication had not adequately addressed these foundational dimensions before implementation began. Where communication was subsequently improved through structured feedback loops, regular briefings, and targeted training communications, the Desire and Knowledge gaps closed progressively, resistance declined, and growth-enabling adoption accelerated. The null hypothesis, that organizational resistance level has no significant effect on company growth in MTN Nigeria, is therefore rejected on the basis of this evidence. The relationship between resistance and growth is not incidental but structural, consistently mediated by the quality of communication and change management practice deployed.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

A. RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ MTN Nigeria and comparable telecommunications corporations should institutionalise structured change communication protocols that explicitly address each ADKAR stage for every significant organizational change initiative, rather than continuing to rely on ad hoc or top-down announcement strategies that consistently generate the kind of resistance documented in this study.

- ✓ Organizations should invest in genuine two-way internal communication platforms that enable employees at all levels to provide feedback, raise concerns, and ask questions throughout change processes. Research consistently confirms that perceived inclusion and fairness in communication are among the strongest drivers of employee acceptance, and organizations that create real dialogue channels experience significantly lower resistance than those relying solely on broadcast communication (Oreg et al., 2018).
- ✓ Change leadership training should be embedded in management development programmes at MTN Nigeria and across the Nigerian telecommunications sector, with specific emphasis on the communication competencies required during the Unfreeze and Change stages of organizational transition, which are the periods when resistance is highest and the growth cost of poor communication is most severe.
- ✓ Further empirical research should be conducted using quantitative longitudinal methods to generate statistically robust estimates of the precise growth impact of specific resistance levels in Nigerian telecommunications firms, building directly on the qualitative evidence base established in this and related studies.

B. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that organizational resistance level exerts a significant effect on company growth in MTN Nigeria, and that this effect is primarily mediated by the quality of communication employed throughout the change management process. High resistance, arising from communication failures, information vacuums, and the perceived exclusion of employees from decision-making, directly impedes growth by disrupting operations, reducing productivity, and eroding the employee commitment that underpins sustained organisational performance over time. Low resistance, consistently achieved through structured, transparent, and empathetic communication that is aligned with established frameworks such as ADKAR and Kotter's 8-Step Model, enables smoother transitions, faster adoption of new systems and practices, and measurably stronger growth outcomes. The broader implication of this finding extends well beyond MTN Nigeria to the wider landscape of organizational change management across Africa. As Nigerian corporations navigate accelerating technological disruption, regulatory

evolution, and intensifying market competition, the strategic management of organizational resistance through deliberate communication investment will increasingly determine which organisations grow sustainably and which stagnate despite well-intentioned change programmes. Communication is not a soft organizational function. It is a hard and measurable growth driver, and the evidence from this study makes that case with clarity.

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