CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATION PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTION

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Abstract

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria operate in a turbulent environment that truncates their academic performance. Tertiary institutions are faced with numerous challenges in which conflict is essential to it. This prompts a need for appropriate strategies that would help them to build a healthy and uninterrupted working environment that would improve their performance. The question is now whether conflict management strategies adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria as the employer (Management) to make a truce with the academic staff union of universities are jointly working to resolve the conflict between them that degenerated into industrial action. This study investigates the effect of conflict management strategies on organisation performance in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. This study explored quantitative technique, the questionnaire was distributed to 357 respondents using a convenience sampling technique. Multiple regressions were explored to analyse the data collected. The statistical findings indicated a positive significant relationship between determinants of conflict management strategies (such as accommodation strategy and compromising strategy) and organisation performance. The finding revealed that conflict management strategies have a positive significant impact on organisation performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The study implication showed that failure to utilise conflict management strategy effectively could hinder organisation performance. Therefore, it is recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria should make a critical improvement on the strategies adopted and focus on accommodation strategy, compromising strategy as well as alternative dispute resolution (ADR) to create a sense of belonging and avoid industrial action.

Keywords
Accommodation Strategy, Compromising Strategy, Conflict Management, Performance, Tertiary institution

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigerian institutions operate in a turbulent working environment nowadays where employees experience epileptic and interruptive work due to industrial action. Institutions are faced with many problems in which conflicts played a significant role to it, therefore institutions must search for appropriate strategies that would enhance their performance. Conflict management is very essential to the organizational performance (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014), numerous authors of conflict management asserted that conflict is an inherent component of the organisation; thus, conflict contributes to the performance of the organisation if managed constructively (Momanyi & Juma, 2016; Esquivel & Kleiner, 1997).

Conflict management is of keen interest to directors and managers in the ministries or organisations because it facilitates harmony in the working environment.

Conflict management strategies have come to be one of the essential elements of conflict literature, and it mostly regarded as key factors that employers depend on for conflict resolution. Directors and managers must understand how conflict is to be managed effectively for dispute resolution as well as to facilitate organisational performance (Henry, 2008), especially in the universities. Authorities need to identify conflict management strategies that could influence harmonious relationships in a conducive working environment. In recent times, universities workers have been experiencing several challenges including economic hardship due to concern issues such as revitalization fund, the payment of Earned Academic Allowance and the discontinuation of the use of the Integrated Personnel Payroll Information System (IPPIS) and replacing it with the University Transparency System (UTAS) (Vanguard, 2022).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The research study pointed out a lack of effective conflict management and inefficient strategies occurred between university workers (ASUU) and the employer (Nigerian government) (Wobodo, 2019). In recent times, the Nigerian government's failure to use appropriate conflict management strategies such as accommodating and compromising workers to avoid conflict has degenerated and led to industrial action (general strike). Specifically, in February 2022, The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) which represents millions of universities workers all over Nigeria commenced industrial action (strike) started with a one-month warning strike over a face-off with the Federal Government that included the non-acceptance of UTAS as the means of payment platform as an alternative to the Integrated Personnel and Payment Information System (IPPIS) (Agbakwuru, 2022).

In 2019, the Federal Government of Nigeria completed the arrangements to enrol the federal universities on the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS). The scheme aimed to promote transparency, probity and accountability in government expenditures and to achieve desired governance objectives in centralizing the payroll system. Contrarily, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) argued that IPPIS introduced by the government into Nigeria's public Universities has hindered academic institutions' progress in the country (Pwanagba, 2021). Like every other sector in Nigeria, the education sector is bedevilled with collective disputes due to poor conflict management. The Federal government released some of the N30billion allowances to the lecturers, while lecturers asked for a 23billion to be paid which would make a total of N53billion. The Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu stated that the Ministry of Finance has promised to conduct a forensic audit of the N30billion that was earlier released (Nwachuwu, Agbajileke, & Akinboade-Oriere, 2022), despite the initial payment of the allowance the total indefinite industrial action continue. These have been serious issues of concern among students, academia, human resources practitioners and the Federal government. Despite government efforts to negotiate with ASUU for a lasting resolution, the issues remain unresolved due to inappropriate strategies adopted to manage the conflict.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate if conflict management strategies are jointly working between the government (management) and the union representing university workers (ASUU) using accommodating and compromising strategies to resolve conflict.

2. Literature Review

Coser, (1957) refers to conflict as a physical confrontation i.e. battle or struggle over power, resources and values or claims to scarce status to eliminate, neutralize or injure the opponents/rivals. Whilst organisation conflict is defined as discord between individuals or groups of employees that are inconsistent with one another, it happens to frustrate others' efforts to achieve separate objectives (Henry, 2008). Meanwhile, Roche & Teague (2012) defined collective conflict as discord between workers and their employers about common issues in an organisation. Another author, James (2019) referred to the collective conflict as a right denial which becomes discern to affect a group of workers within an organisation. Although, it is observed that there is no universally accepted definition for collective conflict because it happens in several diverse settings. Still, it is incontestable that the fundamental reason behind the idea is that a group of employees are collectively standing for a common interest. Therefore, collective conflict can be referred to as a disagreement over common issues due to a clash of interest, goals or values which occurs between a group of employees and their employer.

The concept of managing conflict in an organisation is a phenomenon which has been given enormous attention from academic literature and practitioners' perspectives (Prause & Mujtaba, 2015; Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). Practically, conflict management has fundamentally become a subfield of organizational behaviour. Probably because of the wider acceptance of conflict as an essential part of human resources management, thus its effective management has been a major concern since it cannot be ignored. Managing conflict is necessary but it is becoming critical to managing conflict effectively. Conventionally conflict has been referred to as a destructive component. In the opposing view, Mohammed (2017) argued that conflict can provide some positive results if constructively managed. Some scholars such as Ajayi & Buhari, (2014), Iyiola & Rjoub (2020), and Giritli, Balci, & Sertyesilisik (2014) contested that conflict can be functional due to the output of intense debate that could improve the quality of the decision. Dineva, Breitsohl, Garrod, & Megicks, (2020) suggested that organizational conflict is permissible and it has a positive significant relationship with organisation management effectiveness.

Wobodo (2019) stated that both the group, individuals and organisation are positively benefited from functional conflict. It is agreed that conflict management contributes significantly to teamwork success, leadership and workplace commitment (Roche, 2016). Contrarily, Gibbons (2007) contested that conflict is not beneficial to anyone, neither groups, individuals nor organisations. It has a direct negative influence on work satisfaction and team performance. Therefore, conflict management is valuable and very keen to an organisation because it can genuinely develop harmony between individuals and it also promotes innovative and creative problem-solving (Dineva, Breitsohl, Garrod, & Megicks, 2020).

Several research studies had pointed out some critical strategies responsible for effective conflict management in the organisation i.e. accommodating, compromising, avoiding, competing and collaborating (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington, & Ackers, 2005). Although, research studies had emphasised the importance of accommodation and compromise strategies, but failed to establish the level of significance at which these strategies can influence organisation performance (Leat, 2014; John & Devasheesh, 2010; Gibbons, 2007). This study explores variables such as accommodating and compromising strategies to investigate the research objectives; therefore, accommodating and compromising strategies are used due to their significance to the objectives of this study.

2.1. Accommodating Strategy

Wobodo (2019) opined that conflict can be managed by putting the needs of one party before another; one or both parties should be ready to give one another what is needed. Accommodating strategies requires parties involved to accept the views of each other. Momanyi & Juma, (2016) opined that conflict can be effectively managed when parties involved in conflict aim to keep the peace by not pushing more pressure on the issue and knowing when to pick battles. Accommodating strategies is an essential tool that can be used in conflict resolution, as the research findings show that it has a positive significant influence on organisation performance (Yusuf-Habeeb & Kazeem, 2017).

Hussein, Salem Al-Mamary & Hassan, (2017) contested that exploring an accommodating strategy for the more essential issue cannot help an institution or an organisation as it does not have the potential to create a quality decision because it could lead to avoidance of several important issues. Wobodo (2019), concluded that the accommodating technique can easily assist to resolve disagreement before it degenerates into crisis or conflict in the organisation. And this can facilitate employee commitment as the employee can feel free to express their grievance concerning the issues facing the organisation without reprisal. Therefore, this strategy is an important factor which was used as a determinant in this study.

2.2. Compromising Strategy

The compromising technique is used to discover a middle ground by letting or allowing aggrieved parties to concede or absorb some parts of their interest to be agreed upon for a solution (Momanyi & Juma, 2016). A compromising approach is referred to as lose-lose because it compels conflicting parties to give and take to agree on the most important issue (Dundon, Wilkinson, Marchington & Ackers, 2005). Contrarily, Kassim & Ibrahim (2014) argued that compromising strategies cannot bring a lasting solution to the conflict as no one among the conflicting parties leaves the negotiation table completely happy. It is understood that one side of the party might be unwilling to compromise in the future because they might feel as if they give up too much. For example, the Federal government of Nigeria felt like they are given up too much while ASUU on the other hand also felt the same. Therefore, Yusuf-Habeeb & Kazeem, (2017) opined that a compromising approach can help to resolve the issue faster, and quickly and set the stage for collaboration between the parties in which both conflicting parties can be heard. However, a compromising approach can result in resentment if ineffectively used for conflict resolution;

consequently, it could only be used sparingly. Compromising strategy can be explored as a determinant in this study due to its significance.

2.3. Organisation Performance

Hornby (2015) defined an organisation as a group of organised individuals with a specific objective/purpose, i.e. government ministry or business sector. Nene & Pillay, (2019) refers to organisational performance as the actual output or results of an organisation as it is measured by the planned outcomes. According to Almatrooshi, Sanjay, & Farouk, (2016), performance allows directors/managers/head of department to appraise, evaluate or assess an organisation whether its objectives was achieved or not and to further develops as well as compensates worker for a job well done. Performance management is necessary to ensure that the goals and objectives of the organisation are achievable as well as align them with the desires/interests of the employee. Diamantidis & Chatzoglou (2019) affirmed that the objectives of the organisation and performance management must be entwined with the morale and wellness of employees. In this perspective, every organisation's success is dependent on conflict management effectiveness. It plays an important role in facilitating a conducive business working environment and also strengthening employee commitment which could result in performance in the organisational (Nene & Pillay, 2019).

Empirical reviews are conducted to provide a deeper understanding as well as statistical support for the study's point of view. Melissa, Anna & Katie (2018) investigate classroom conflict management challenges experienced by K-12 teachers. The study found that comprehensive conflict management training and productive communication are very important to the system at all levels. Further findings indicate that conflict management training and productive communication are required to effectively manage conflict in the classroom. Another study was conducted by Irene & Athanasios (2018) on conflict management from a leadership context. The study surveyed 180 workers from Greek public administration using a questionnaire. The study found that the transformational leadership type has a positive correlation with the non-constructive conflict management technique, while the transactional has a negative correlation with the non-constructive conflict management strategy. Overall, the statistical findings showed the impact of transformational leadership to be stronger comparatively. Therefore, the results of this study revealed that leadership is an important part of conflict management, and it is much relevant to this study's objectives.

Another study carried out by Min, et al., (2020) investigates the relationship between supervisory behaviour, conflict management strategies, and sustainable employee performance and inquires mediating effect of conflict management strategies. The study collected data from the Pakistan SMEs manufacturing industry. Model significance was assessed using the PLS-SEM (structural equation modelling). The study found a positive and significant relationship between supervisory behaviour and sustainable employee behaviour. Also, found that conflict management strategies have a positive significant effect on the relationship between supervisory behaviour and sustainable employee behaviour. The study further established that conflict management strategies have an influential mediator in the relationship between supervisory behaviour and sustainable employee performance.

3. Methodology

This study used an explanatory design to investigate the cause-effect relationship due to its capacity to collect information that deals with the present issues. A quantitative method was explored to achieve the study objectives because it is considered an appropriate design for a study of this nature which investigates the currently existing issues of conflict management and organisational performance in the Nigerian tertiary institution; thus, it helps to formulate a problem for proper research. The study surveyed lecturers working at the University of Ilorin (employees) and members of the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) who are currently working with a Federal university in Nigeria. Primary data was used through a structured questionnaire to collect information directly from the respondents without coercing or influencing their choices.

The study used convenience sampling techniques which allows the researcher to make use of available participants who are willing and volunteered to partake in the research process (Gay, Mills, & Airaisan, 2012). The questionnaire was distributed to 357 respondents, using 5 points Likert scale. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients perform to check the reliability of the data and the results show .790 which is considered good and acceptable. The study conducted One-way ANOVA to determine the discrepancy between the components. Therefore, multiple regression analysis was used to determine the level of a significant relationship between determinants of conflict management and organisation performance. The p-value of 0.005 was considered to be statistically significant for the components.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

This study used multiple regression analysis to determine the level at which conflict management strategies (such as accommodating and compromising scales) can influence performance in the Nigerian tertiary institution. Preparatory analyses i.e. linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and Multicollinearity were conducted in this study to ensure that assumptions of multiple regression were not violated.

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.555[a]	.308	.304	.54428	1.495
a. Predictors: (Constant), CompromisingStrategy, AccommodatingStrategy					
b. Dependent Variable: OrganisationPerformance					

Source: *Author's Field Survey (2022).*

The table above depicts the results of multiple regression analysis with R Square value of 30.8 per cent. This indicated that model fit analysis (i.e. accommodating and compromising scales) explained about 30.8 per cent of the variance in the performance of Nigerian tertiary institutions. By implication, the study suggested that conflict management strategies determinants such as accommodating and compromising can predict the performance of Nigerian tertiary institutions. However, Durbin-Watson Statistic shows 1.495 coefficients that revealed the absence of serial correlation regarding a model error, thus the issues related to spurious regressions are eliminated.

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	46.620	2	23.310	78.686	.000[b]
	Residual	104.869	354	.296		
	Total	151.489	356			

a. Dependent Variable: OrganizationPerformance

b. Predictors: (Constant), CompromisingStrategy, AccommodatingStrategy

Source: *Author's Field Survey (2022).*

The ANOVA was carried out to check if the means views of respondents are significantly different from each other. The findings of ANOVA for this study show F-test with 78.686, significant at 1 per cent [*p<.000*]. It indicated that the models used for the study were specified as the impact of conflict management strategies (i.e. accommodating and compromising scales) are properly checked by comparing the means of different respondents i.e. university employees and members of the academic staff union of universities (ASUU).

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.865	.191		9.752	.000
	AccommodatingStrategy	.350	.058	.354	5.994	.000
	CompromisingStrategy	.225	.053	.253	4.281	.000

a. Dependent Variable: OrganizationPerformance

Source: *Author's Field Survey (2022).*

The findings of multiple regression coefficients in the table above revealed that accommodating strategy has a positive significant influence on the performance of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The accommodating strategy showed β coefficients with .354, a t-value with 5.994 at sig of .000. It was significant statistically in terms of Beta coefficient, t-value, and p-value. Thus, an increased unit of accommodating strategy score gives rise to a .354 and 5.994 unit increase in the performance score. By implication, this implies that accommodating strategy as a determinant of conflict management can facilitate conducive, harmonious and uninterrupted academic sessions which in turn could lead to a performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

The multiple regression coefficients revealed the level of compromising strategy strength as a determinant of conflict management in the performance of the tertiary institution in Nigeria. Compromising strategy have significant impact with a β coefficient of .253, t-value of 4.281 at p-value [sig = .000]. The findings suggested that a unit increase in compromising strategy score could cause about .253 and 4.281 unit increase in the performance of tertiary institution score. By implication, the study established that compromising strategy can predict performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions through uninterrupted academic programmes.

5. Discussion of findings

This study examines the effect of conflict management strategies between the Government as an employer (Management) and the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) at Nigerian Federal University. This study objective planned to be achieved by exploring the issues of collective conflict that occurred between the Federal government (Management) and ASUU (employees) which had bedevilled Nigerian tertiary institutions. Specifically, the conflict management strategies adopted by the Federal government (Management) such as accommodation strategy and compromising strategy to resolve conflict had degenerated into industrial action as well as increasing performance in the institution. The results of multiple regression coefficients indicated that all determinants of conflict management strategies examined have a positive significant impact on developing uninterrupted academic sessions which could lead to a performance in a tertiary institution.

The study revealed that an accommodation strategy could positively create a harmonious working environment which could lead to employee performance. The study established that accommodation strategy is an essential component that can help to resolve conflict and strategically it could increase performance in the institution. From every indication, it seems the Federal government as an employer adopted this strategy to resolve conflict with the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) but could not yield a positive result, as many respondents prove that the Minister of Labour and his counterpart from education which represented Federal government on the negotiation table show indifference to the plight of ASUU especially on the issues concern UTAS. Although the findings of this study support the results of an empirical study conducted by Iyiola & Rjoub (2020) on conflict management to develop relationship quality between contractors and owners of Construction Company, the study investigate the mediation role of trust. The study used structural equation modelling to analyse data gathered from 424 contractors' employees and owners in the Nigerian construction industry. The results indicated that conflict management climate has a significant influence on trust and relationship quality. It also showed that trust has a partial mediating relationship between conflict management climate and relationship quality. The study highlighted the importance of conflict management in an organisation.

This study also established that a compromising strategy has a positive significant impact on conflict resolution adopted by the Federal government in Nigeria. Although the view of some respondents showed otherwise; thus, the findings of multiple regression coefficients revealed that the majority of respondents agreed that the compromising strategy adopted by the Federal government as a conflict resolution method was used effectively. Consequently, these findings support the research conducted previously by Yusuf-Habeeb & Kazeem (2017). The study found that a compromising strategy can resolve conflict as quick, and fast as possible, and also can set the stage for collaboration in which conflicting parties can be heard. Therefore, adopting a compromising strategy to resolve conflict in Nigerian tertiary institutions is not just resolving industrial action between the Federal government as an employer (Management) and the academic staff union of universities as an employee (ASUU) but also solidified employment relationship in the academic working environment that could improve performance.

6. Contribution and Recommendation

Having evaluated the results of this study, it is evident that both the Federal government and the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) maintain a good relationship. Although the conflict between them persists despite their relationship. Conflict is inherent in the working environment, perhaps the present conflict that degenerated into industrial action has been a long-term conflict. The Federal Government of Nigeria must make a crucial improvement on the conflict management strategies effectiveness which was adopted presently for the resolution of conflict with ASUU.

It is recommended that Federal Government (employer) should focus on the accommodation strategy by reasons with university employees, and gives in to their interest to create a conducive and healthy working environment. In a circumstance where the demand for employees goes beyond government capacity, for example in a situation where the government found the issues of removing university workers from the IPPIS scheme difficult, the government need to engage them by evaluating and finding a way to integrate UTAS designed by them if possible. Based on the result of this study, it is suggested that Federal Government (Employer) should be engaged and communicate with the academic staff union of universities (ASUU) to inform university employees about the benefit of their policy and why it is necessary to include them, or listening to their point of view, this would have created a sense of belonging among the union representing employees.

It is suggested that the Federal government should allow direct participation of the employee in a decision that affects them, especially on the issues concerning IPPIS and UTAS to gain their trust and loyalty. The federal government must compromise on the issues of IPPIS by allowing UTAS which accommodates their allowances and other demand as an alternative to IPPIS which covers a few of their demands. The issues of allowance should not be taken with levity by the Federal Government (Management) as well as regular payment of the employee salary. Therefore government should also adopt alternative dispute resolution (ADR) as a strategy to avoid conflict degenerating into industrial action that always disrupts academic sessions that affect students as well as the performance of university workers. Alternative dispute resolution approach such as mediation, conciliation and arbitration could have helped to resolve conflict amicably and also help to avoid industrial action.

7. Conclusion

This study used a quantitative approach to measure the aggregate determinants of conflict management strategies that could facilitate performance in a tertiary institution. The study used a survey method to evaluate conflict management strategies determinants i.e. accommodation strategy and compromising strategy to ensure a healthy working environment which could lead to the performance of the institution. Therefore, the study concluded that conflict management strategy can positively influence performance in the tertiary institution by creating conducive and a healthy working environment. Based on the findings of this study, it is established that conflict management strategy contributed immensely to institution performance by creating uninterrupted academic sessions. It is also concluded that conflict management strategy effectiveness can enhance employee commitment which could result in the institution's performance.

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