CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND EMPLOYEE'S JOB PERFORMANCE IN FEDERAL COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURE IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study aims at exploring the effect of conflict management techniques on employees' job performance in Federal Colleges of Agriculture in South-West Nigeria. A descriptive research design was used to solicit information from employees, and the instrument used was a questionnaire. A multistage sampling technique was used: the first stage was random sampling of 2 colleges out of 5 colleges in South-West Nigeria, and a random sampling technique was used to sample 162 employees from 1,621 employees in the 2 colleges. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, the mean, and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). Structural factors ($\bar{x}$=3.0) were adjudged to be the predominant determinant of conflict in the two colleges. Collaborative was the most effective technique ($\bar{x}$=4.0) that brought the harmony necessary to increase employees' performance in the two colleges. Job performance was statistically significant to conflict management techniques. Organization directors and managers should sensitize their employees to techniques to resolve conflicts and create an enabling work environment that will enhance job performance.

Key words: *conflict, management, employees, performance*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is considered a natural event that is unavoidable as long as human connections are involved in every element of human civilization and activity. It is a procedure that starts when one party feels that something significant to their party has been negatively impacted by another party or soon will be.
[2] view conflict as the existence of disagreement in terms of the ideals, aspirations, or aims of various people or groups that obstruct one another's efforts to accomplish organizational goals. From the standpoint of the conflict dimension, however, conflict is a phenomenon with two sides: dysfunctional and functioning. Conflict or disagreement between individuals, teams, and groups that produces favorable outcomes and the accomplishment of organizational objectives and goals is referred to as constructive conflict or functional conflict. [9]. It spurs workers to come up with innovative solutions to the current problems and boosts production. When conflict creates an atmosphere that is conducive to self-evaluation and change, releases stress, encourages creativity and invention, and facilitates decision-making, it is considered constructive. Conversely, conflict or disagreement between parties within an organization that is detrimental to the achievement of organizational goals is referred to as dysfunctional conflict or destructive conflict. This is a situation in which disputes or confrontations among members of an organization hurt the organization or make it more difficult to achieve its objectives [13]. It usually hurts individuals, teams, groups, and management, as well as leads to decreased productivity and hinders organizational performance. Dysfunctional conflict may totally halt group functioning and potentially threaten the survival of the organization. Management must, hence, seek to eliminate dysfunctional conflict. It could be deduced from the dimension of conflict that conflict is an agitation for change by the employee; such

agitation could be handled functionally or dysfunctional based on the handling of the conflict by the employee or administrator. In an organization or community, conflict is unavoidable; in fact, the degree to which competing interests and needs are skilfully managed to prevent violence from endangering the organization's or society's survival is what distinguishes good governance/administrator from bad. Thus, it is important to focus on how people handle conflict rather than conflict itself. Therefore, conflict should not be understood exclusively in the negative context of dysfunctional or disjunctive processes and a breakdown in communication. It is a process by which interdependent individuals express their differences in order to fulfil their demands and realize their objectives [4]. Therefore, conflict occurs when one or more parties' differences require at least one of them to alter in order for their relationship to continue and grow. Without some sort of adjustment, the difference cannot coexist; it is the process of adjustment that typically leads to conflict. If handled incorrectly or mishandled, conflicts that have the potential to be constructive and functional might instead become destructive and dysfunctional. The organization that would be called successful, therefore, needs to ensure conflict is effectively managed and remains functional so that divergent views can be analyzed and innovations can spring up.

Organizational managers are often seen as the only ones who can resolve disagreements, and they often adopt a strict approach to doing so. When organizations handle conflicts in this way, they miss the fact that conflict is a normal part of organizational life and that it has advantages as well as disadvantages [13]. Intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts are taking up so much time and energy in many Nigerian companies that it appears as though conflict is their main concern [6].

This trend can be attributed, in large part, to managers' incapacity in Nigerian work organizations to approach conflict management with the same systematic approach that they use in information, human resource, and financial management systems. The managers rather see conflict as a local occurrence that is addressed piecemeal.

Employee performance in businesses has been negatively impacted by workplace conflicts due to an inability to view and manage conflicts in a systematic way. Workplace conflict that is not addressed can have a number of detrimental effects, including significant human and financial expenses. Conflict can lead to a variety of negative outcomes, including stress, low morale, missed deadlines, low trust, and lack of confidence, communication issues, absenteeism, and legal actions. Conflict is inevitable in any dynamic organization, to which agricultural colleges belong. However, few studies have been carried out on this concept in federal colleges of agriculture in south-west Nigeria.

For this reason, this study sought to:

(i)examine the causes of work-place conflict in agricultural colleges

(ii)identify the conflict management technique; utilized in the institutions;

(iii)ascertain employee job performance levels during conflict in the institutions.

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between conflict management techniques and employee performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research study was carried out at the Federal College of Agriculture in South Western State, Nigeria, at longitude 30° and 7°E and latitude 4° and 9°N. These colleges of agriculture located in the south-western states are: the Federal College of Agriculture, Akure, the Federal College of Agriculture, Ibadan, the Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, Lagos, the Federal College of Animal Health and Production Technology, Ibadan, and the Federal College of Forestry, Ibadan.

A multistage sampling technique was used; the first stage was random sampling of 2 (10%) colleges out of 5 colleges. The second stage was a random sampling of 81 employees per college. Therefore, a total of 162 employees from 1,621 employees in the 2 colleges were sampled. Data were obtained on employees' causes of conflicts, conflict management techniques utilized, and employee performance using a structured questionnaire. Causes of

conflict were measured by using 20 statements classified into three indexes: physiological factors, communication factors, and structural factors. Indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale of "Strongly Agree = 5," "Agree = 4," "Undecided = 3," "Disagree = 2," and "Strongly Disagree = 1" for positive statements and/or negative statements measurement in reversed order.

Conflict management technique was measured by using 25 variables classified into five indexes: competition, accommodation, compromising, collaboration, and avoiding. It was measured by using a five-point Likert scale of "strongly agree = 5," "agree = 4," "undecided = 3," "disagree = 2," and "strongly disagree = 1" for positive statements and reverse order for a negative scale.

The minimum score obtainable was 25, while the maximum score was 125. Employee job performance was measured using 15 statements classified into three components: task performance, contextual performance, and adaptive performance.

The variables were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale of Strongly Agree (S.A.) = 5,

Agree (A.) = 4, Undecided (U) = 3, Disagree (D.) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (S.D.) = 1 for positive statements and reverse order for negative statements.

The sum of points assigned to each point on the scale divided by the scale point number gives a mean cut-off score for each item or index on each variable. A mean less than 3.0 reflected less than of the variables that were measured on a 5-point scale, while in reverse order, there was a high manifestation of the variables (causes of conflict, conflict management technique, and level of job performance) that were measured. The data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, means, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 shows that structural factors that cause workplace conflicts are: employee inability to work in harmony with those that are awarded an unfair reward ($\bar{x}$=3.07); lack of resources to perform work ($\bar{x}$=2.85).

Table 1. Causes of workplace conflict in the Agricultural Colleges

Statements	$\bar{x}$	Std. d
Structural factor	**3.01**	**0.91**
Don't feel comfortable to work in harmony with those who receive unfair reward.	3.06	1.31
No enough resource to perform my job	2.84	1.36
Uncertain about what task is expected from one to do.	2.82	1.27
Feeling unsatisfied with the reward system that the organization follows.	2.81	1.37
Entering into argument with my manager as a result of reward system.	2.74	1.38
Facing a clash over one's role in the organization.	2.56	1.22
Psychological factor	**2.98**	**0.85**
Negative feeling affects my effective performance	3.79	1.22
Don't have the energy to work and communicate when my feeling is down	3.61	1.32
'Angry when my supervisor criticized my work	3.20	1.39
Enter into disagreement with my colleagues	3.01	1.29
Not comfortable working in wide divers work environment.	2.98	1.33
Failures to avoid difficult conversations thata problem just goes away	2.93	1.29
Not having ability to reason logically, collaborate, and network with others	2.24	1.30
Communication factor	**2.69**	**1.06**
Supervisor/manager fail to use sincere, clear, concise, and kind words during communication.	2.92	1.31
Falling short to give time and attention while communicating with colleagues and supervisor.	2.74	1.27
Instead of providing quality information, I focus on quantity of information.	2.73	1.41
Failure to provide information most of the time	2.71	1.40
Misperceive by co-workers.	2.63	1.36
Inability to logically reason, to collaborate and network with others.	2.58	1.40
Judging co-workers the first time of meeting them	2.50	1.22

Source: Field survey, 2022.

This result is in line with [3], who found that lack of resources has the highest frequency as the cause of conflict in Nigerian institutions. On the other hand, the psychological factors that cause workplace conflicts were employees having negative feelings ($\bar{x}$=3.79) and when employee feelings are down ($\bar{x}$=3.79). This result is in line with the research of [1], who stated that some behavioral factors, such as negative attitudes, affect how workers approach their jobs, and attitudes can have a ripple effect on those around them. In a professional workplace setting, a negative attitude can affect everyone and cause conflict among employees [7]. Furthermore, Table 1 shows that communication factors that cause workplace conflicts are: superiors not using clear, concise, and kind words during communication ($\bar{x}$=2.92), falling short to give time and attention to colleagues, and superior not communicating ($\bar{x}$=2.74).

Vocabulary differences, unclear language, a lack of information sharing, and noise in the communication channel are obstacles to communication and possible preconditions for conflict [5].

In the Nigerian service industry, communication issues are the second-most common cause of conflict. Employees view perception and communication issues as moderately serious sources of conflict, although staff members' assessments of these issues' seriousness varied from officers.

Conflict Management Techniques in Agricultural Colleges

Figure 1 shows that the collaborating technique ($\bar{x}$=4.00) ranked first among the conflict management techniques, followed by the accommodating technique ($\bar{x}$=3.96) and the avoiding technique ($\bar{x}$=3.94). Also, compromising technique ($\bar{x}$=3.80) ranked fourth, while competing technique ($\bar{x}$=3.42) was the least utilized technique in the institutions. It could be deduced from the result of the five-management technique weighted mean that each management technique mean was greater than the cut-off point mean of 3.0. Hence, the institutions effectively made use of the five conflict management techniques. However, the institutions made more use of collaborative techniques to resolve conflict. Similarly, [1] found that staff collaboration and work performance are positively correlated. That is, combining employees' ideas to achieve a specific goal reduces disagreements because it promotes involvement. The collaboration strategy side-lines differences and promotes idea sharing to arrive at a workable solution for all parties. By being more concerned for employers' own needs as well as the needs of their employees. Organizations that apply this strategy deal with problems head-on and come up with innovative and constructive solutions by keeping both their own and the workers' needs in mind [11]. The advantage of using the cooperative approach to conflict resolution is that both parties benefit in the end.
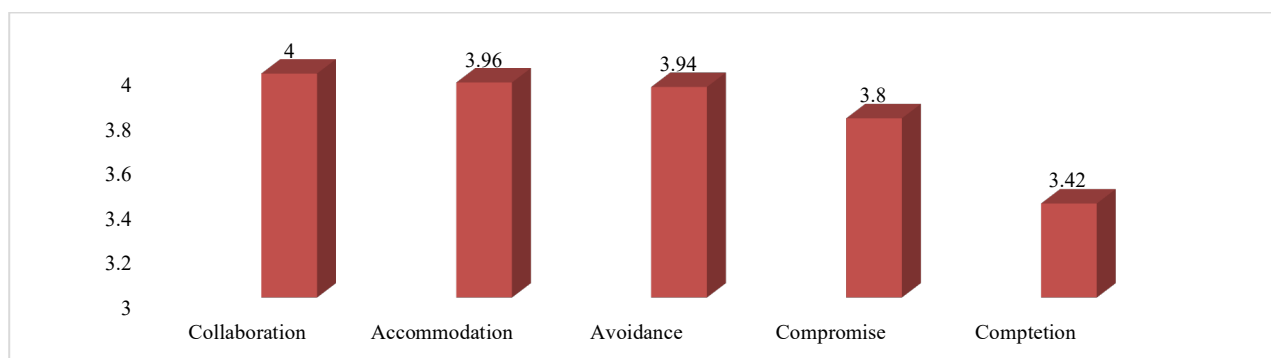

Fig. 1. Conflict Management Techniques in Agricultural Colleges
Source: Field survey, 2022.

Employee job performance in agricultural colleges

Table 2 shows under task performance that the determination of priorities ($\bar{x}$=4.37) was rated higher, followed by organizing the workload to complete it by the deadline ($\bar{x}$=4.26). This implies that employees were efficient in their job performance. The result is in line with [12],

who found that the key to high levels of performance lies in having employees who can set priorities, carry out their work efficiently, plan work accordingly, manage their time, and always re-skill. Contextual performance ($\bar{x}$=4.14) was the second most rated part of job performance in the institutes. Also, Table 2 indicates that under contextual job performance for employees, the most effective aspect of a contextual job was employees' ability to discover original solutions to a new issue ($\bar{x}$=4.31) and employees keeping their skills set current ($\bar{x}$=4.12) This implies that employees possess a sense of self-efficacy because they take on challenging tasks and do their best to perform extra responsibilities. This brings a positive outlook towards the supervisor and organization because of increasing the likelihood of organizational citizenship behaviours. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that under adaptive job performance, staying current in their understanding of their jobs ($\bar{x}$=4.00) ranks higher than any other adaptive job performance in the institution. This implies that employees keep updating their skills and knowledge, which enables them to be creative when solving organizational problems. An employee's talents are developed by a constant acquisition of professional or managerial skills and experience, which can lead to awards and promotion [8].

Table 2. Employees' Job Performance in Agricultural College

Items	$\bar{x}$	Std. D.
Task performance	4.23	
Able to set priorities	4.37	.721
Able to plan my work so that I finished it on time	4.25	.718
Kept in mind the work result I needed to achieve	4.21	.719
Able to carry out my work efficiently	4.12	.892
Managed my time well	4.10	.860
Contextual performance	4.14	
Came up with creative solutions to new problems	4.31	.901
Love keeping my work skills up-to date	4.11	.967
Actively participated in meetings and/or consultations	4.10	.800
On my initiative, I started new tasks when my old tasks were completed	4.09	.871
Continually sought new challenges in my work	4.05	1.016
Adaptive performance	4.12	
Keep job knowledge up-to-date	4.28	.922
Show resilience (coping with stress, difficult situations and adversities)	4.27	.947
keep job skills up-to-date	4.12	.906
deal with uncertain and unpredictable work situations	4.09	.947
adjust Adjusted work goals when necessary	4.01	.877

Source: Field survey, 2022.

Influence of Conflict Management Techniques on Employee Job Performance
Table 3 shows that accommodating technique (β = 0.58), compromise technique (β = 0.47), and avoiding technique (β = 0.70) had a positive and significant influence on employees' job performance. On the other hand, competing (β = -0.34) had a negative and significant influence on employees' job performance. Based on the outcome, it can be concluded that using these strategies more frequently will improve employees' job performance. These strategies, according to [2] and [10] are utilized to sustain a cordial working relationship between management and staff, which promotes great employee performance, particularly when the method works.

Table 3. Relationship between Conflict Management Technique variables and Employee Job Performance

Model	B	Std. Error	t-Value
(constant)	34.12	5.44	6.28
Competing	-0.34*	0.14	-2.48
Accommodating	0.58*	0.20	2.89
Collaborating	0.01	0.20	0.06
Compromising	0.47*	0.19	2.45
Avoiding	0.70*	0.23	3.00
R	**0.49**		
R²	**0.24**		

Source: Field survey, 2022.

CONCLUSIONS

Conflict is unavoidable in the daily routine of organizations, and it is a latent factor that most managers marginalize when considering factors that will boost employee performance. The predominant determinant of work-place conflict in agricultural colleges is structural factors.

The institutions managed intra-conflict and interpersonal conflict constructively using all five conflict management techniques, and this contributed immensely to harmony and promoted employee job performance. It is therefore recommended that managers and employees undergo training on workplace conflict management. This will enable them to acquire conflict management knowledge and skills that will boost organizational performance. Since conflict is inevitable in any organization, every organization should plan, develop, and have strategies for managing conflict.

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