

## Justification for Managing Organisational Conflicts

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### Abstract

The study seeks to identify some key sources of conflict in the workplace, ascertain the extent to which conflicts are resolved in the workplace, assess how to resolve conflict between groups, and ascertain how to manage conflict between a boss and a subordinate.

The study was carried out primarily through the survey method and interview of employees in three public sector organizations in Nigeria.

Secondary data were obtained through books, journals, and internet. Findings indicate that Scarcity of resources, different attitudes, poor communication and lack of teamwork are key sources of conflict in the workplace. Conflicts are always resolved in the workplace. Conflict between groups can be resolved by collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration while Conflict between a boss and a subordinate can be managed by collaboration and accommodation.

Conflict accelerates change in an organization, especially in small businesses, where it is easy to formulate and implement new policies. Conflict prompts modification of policies and operation procedures in the organization. Conflict forces the organization's leadership to realign its objectives towards common goals in order to foster teamwork amongst competing parties. Conflict that results into healthy competition cultivates innovation and inventiveness amongst employees. When an organization spends much of its time dealing with conflict, members take time away from focusing on the core goals they are tasked with achieving. Conflict sometimes has a destructive effect on the individuals and groups involved. At other times, however, conflict can increase the capacity of those affected to deal with problems, and therefore it can be used as a motivating force toward innovation and change.

**Keywords:** Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Collective Bargaining, Mediation, Arbitration, Accommodation, and Collaboration

### 1.0 Introduction

The potential for conflict exists whenever and wherever people have contact. As people are organized into groups to seek a common goal, the probability of conflict greatly increases. Conflict situations appear with frequency in daily, public, and private life. These conflicts may be on a small or large scale, they may occur within and among groups, communities, or nations; and they may be triggered by ethnic, racial, religious, or economic differences, or arise from differences in values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding issues. Conflict is a natural disagreement resulting from individuals or groups that differ in attitudes, beliefs, values or needs. It can also originate from past rivalries and personality differences. Conflict is defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns ([www.ohrd.wisc.edu](http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu)). Conflict tends to be accompanied by significant levels of misunderstanding that exaggerate the perceived disagreement considerably. Conflicts occur when people perceive that as a consequence of a disagreement, there is a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns. Although conflict is a normal part of organization life, providing numerous opportunities for growth through improved understanding and insight, there is a tendency to view conflict as a negative experience caused by abnormally difficult circumstances. A conflict is more than a mere disagreement- it is a situation in which people perceive a threat (physical, emotional, power, status, etc) to their well- being.

Conflict is actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and interests. A conflict can be internal (within one self) to individuals. Conflicts as a concept can explain many aspects of social life such as social disagreement, conflicts of interests, and fights between individual, group, or organizations. In political terms, conflict can refer to wars, revolutions or other struggles, which may involve the use of force as in the term armed conflict. Without proper social arrangement or resolution, conflicts in social settings can result in stress or tensions among stakeholders. When an interpersonal conflict does occur, its effects is often broader than two individuals involved, and can affect many associate individuals and relationships, in more or less adverse, and sometimes even way. Organisational conflict is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people working

together. There are jurisdictional disagreements among individuals, departments, and between unions and management. There are subtler forms of conflict involving rivalries, jealousies, personality clashes, role definitions, and struggles for power and favour (Johnson, 1976). Conflict management involves doing things to limit the negative aspects of conflict and to increase the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting (Rahim, 2002). Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes (Alpert et al, 2000).

### 1.1 Objectives

The study has the following specific objectives

- To identify some key sources of conflict in the workplace
- To ascertain the extent to which conflicts are resolved in the workplace.
- To ascertain how to resolve conflict between groups
- To ascertain how to manage conflict between a boss and a subordinate

### 1.2 Hypotheses

These hypotheses were proposed for the study

**H<sub>1</sub>** Scarcity of resources, different attitudes, poor communication and lack of teamwork are key sources of conflict in the workplace.

**H<sub>2</sub>** Conflicts are always resolved in the workplace

**H<sub>3</sub>** Conflict between groups can be resolved by collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration

**H<sub>4</sub>** Conflict between a boss and a subordinate can be managed by collaboration and accommodation.

### 1.3 Research Method

The study was carried out primarily through the survey method and interview of employees in three public sector organizations in Nigeria. Secondary data were obtained through books, journals and internet. Empirical works of other scholars were consulted. A sample size of 336 was obtained from the population of 2100 at 5% error tolerance and 95% confidence interval using Yamane's statistical formula. 320 (95.24%) of the questionnaire distributed were returned while 16 (4.76%) of the questionnaire distributed were not returned. The questionnaire was designed in four point Likert scale format. The researcher conducted a pre-test on the questionnaire to ensure the validity of the instrument. Data collected were presented in frequency tables. Chi-square statistical tool was used to test the hypotheses.

## 2.0 Literature Review

### 2.1 Causes or Sources of Organisational Conflict

The most common causes of conflict include the following:

- Scarcity of resources (finance, equipment, facilities, etc).
- Different attitudes (rigid or flexible).
- Disagreements about needs, goals, priorities, and interests.
- Poor communication.
- Poor or inadequate organisational structure.
- Lack of teamwork.
- Lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities.
- Differing ideas (creative or mundane).
- Differing agendas (sometimes hidden ones).
- Differing circumstances
- Differing perspectives (limited or broad, domestic or international)
- Differing values (conservative or progressive minded) (<http://mahendrayoung.org>)

### 2.2 Types of Conflict

Conflict could be in different forms such as

#### ➤ Conflict between Individuals

People have differing styles of communication, ambitions, political or religious views and different cultural backgrounds. In our diverse society, the possibility of these differences leading to conflict between individuals is always there, and we must be alert to preventing and resolving situations where conflict arises.

### **Signs of Conflict between Individuals**

In the organisation, leaders and members should be alert to signs of conflict between colleagues, so that they can be proactive in reducing or resolving the conflict by getting to the root of the issue. Typical Signs

- Colleagues not speaking to each other or ignoring each other,
- Contradicting and bad-mouthing one another, and deliberately undermining or not co-operating with each other, to the downfall of the team.

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#### ➤ **Conflict within a Group of People**

Conflict arises in groups because of the scarcity of freedom, position, and resources. People who value independence tend to resist the need for interdependence and, to some extent, conformity within a group. People who seek power therefore struggle with others for position or status within the group. Rewards and recognition are often perceived as insufficient and improperly distributed, and members are inclined to compete with each other for these prizes (Mills, 1967). True interdependence among members leads automatically to conflict resolution in the group. Interdependence recognises that differences will exist and that they can be helpful. Hence, members learn to listen and to value openness, and they learn to share a mutual problem-solving attitude to ensure the exploration of all facets of a problem facing the group (Jones and Pfeiffer, 1973).

#### ➤ **Conflict between Groups of People**

Whenever people form groups, they tend to emphasize the things that make their group “better than” or “different from” other groups. This happens in the fields of sport, culture, religion and the workplace and can sometimes change from healthy competition to destructive conflict.

### **Signs of Conflict between Groups of People**

Similarly, leaders and members can identify latent conflict between groups of people in the organisation or the community and plan action before the conflict becomes open and destructive. The possible signs include

- ✓ Cliques or factions meeting to discuss issues that affect the whole organisation separately,
- ✓ One group being left out of organising an event which should include everybody, and
- ✓ Groups using threatening slogans or symbols against the others to show that their group is right and the others are wrong (Ezigbo, 2011).

### **2.3 Conflict Management Strategies**

Blake and Mouton (1964), were among the first to present a conceptual scheme for classifying the modes or styles for handling interpersonal conflict into five types: forcing (competition), withdrawing (avoidance), smoothing (accommodating), compromising and problem solving.

Conflict management minimizes the negative outcomes of conflicts and promotes the positive outcomes of conflict (Rahim, 2002). Conflict management is something that companies and managers need to deal with. Conflict significantly affects employee morale, turnover, and litigation, which affects the prosperity of a company, either constructively or destructively (Lang, 2009). Turnover can cost a company 200% of the employees annual salary (Maccabeus and Shudder). Without an understanding of ethics, conflict cannot be handled (Batchldor, 2000). The conflict management strategies are discussed below.

#### ✓ **Collaboration**

This results from a high concern for your group’s own interests, matched with a high concern for the interests of other partners. The outcome is “win/win.” This strategy is generally used when concerns for others are important. When consensus and commitment of other parties is important. When a high level of trust is present. When a long-term relationship is important. When you don’t want to have full responsibility. It is also generally the best strategy when society’s interest is at stake. This approach helps build commitment and reduce bad feelings. It reinforces mutual trust and respect. It builds a foundation for effective collaboration in the future. It leads to solving the actual problem. The drawbacks are that it takes time and energy. In addition, some partners may take advantage of the others’ trust and openness. Generally regarded as the best approach for managing conflict, the objective of collaboration is to reach consensus.

✓ **Compromise**

This strategy results from a high concern for your group's own interests along with a moderate concern for the interests of other partners. The outcome is "win some/lose some." This strategy is generally used to achieve temporary solutions, to avoid destructive power struggles or when time pressures exist. Compromising looks for an expedient and mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. Compromising is used when the goals are moderately important and not worth the use of more assertive or more involving approaches, such as competition and collaboration. To reach temporary settlement on complex issues. To reach expedient solutions on important issues. When collaboration or competition do not work. Compromising can provide a temporary solution while still looking for a win-win solution. It lowers the levels of tension and stress resulting from the conflict. It may result in a situation when both parties are not satisfied with the outcome, It does not contribute to building trust in the long run.

✓ **Competition**

This strategy results from a high concern for your group's own interests with less concern for others. The outcome is "win/lose." Competition is used when basic rights are at stake or to set a precedent. When you need to stand up for your own rights, resist aggression and pressure. When a quick solution is required and using force is justified. As a last resort to resolve a long-lasting conflict.

However, it can cause the conflict to escalate and losers may try to retaliate.

✓ **Accommodation**

This results from a low concern for your group's own interests combined with a high concern for the interests of other partners. Accommodation is accommodating the concerns of other people first of all, rather than ones own concerns. The outcome is "lose/win." This strategy is generally used

when the issue is more important to others than to you. When you accept that you are wrong. When continued competition would be detrimental. It is a "goodwill gesture. The drawbacks are that your own ideas and concerns don't get attention. You may also lose credibility and future influence.

✓ **Avoidance**

This results from a low concern for your group's own interests coupled with a low concern for the interests of others. Avoiding or withdrawing occurs when a person does not pursue his/ her own concerns or those of the opponent. The outcome is "lose/lose." This strategy is generally used

when the issue is trivial or other issues are more pressing. when confrontation has a high potential for damage or more information is needed. When you need time to think and collect information before you act. When it is not the right time or place to confront the issue. When you are unable to handle the conflict. The drawbacks are that important decisions may be made by default.

## 2.4 Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict through bargaining, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration ([www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/conflict\\_management](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/conflict_management)).

➤ **Collective Bargaining**

In workplace situations, it is necessary to have agreed mechanisms in place for groups of people who may be antagonistic to collectively discuss and resolve issues. This process is often called "collective bargaining" because representatives of each group come together with a mandate to work out a solution collectively. Experience has shown that this is far better than avoidance or withdrawal, and puts democratic processes in place to achieve "integrative problem solving", where people or groups who must find ways of co-operating in the same organisation do so within their own agreed rules and procedures.

➤ **Conciliation**

The dictionary defines conciliation as "the act of procuring goodwill or inducing a friendly feeling". The process of conciliation occurs whereby groups who are in conflict and who have failed to reach agreement can come together once again to attempt to settle their differences. This is usually attempted before the more serious step of a strike by workers or a lockout by management is taken, and it has been found useful to involve a facilitator in the conciliation process.

➤ **Negotiation**

This is the process where mandated representatives of groups in a conflict situation meet together in order to resolve their differences and to reach agreement. It is a deliberate process, conducted by representatives of groups, designed to reconcile differences and to reach agreements by consensus. The outcome is often dependent on the power relationship between the groups.

Negotiations often involve compromise: one group may win one of their demands and give in on another. In workplaces, unions and management representatives usually use negotiations to solve conflicts. Political and community groups also often use this method.

➤ **Mediation**

When negotiations fail, parties often call in an independent mediator. This person or group will try to facilitate settlement of the conflict. The mediator plays an active part in the process, advises both or all groups, acts as intermediary and suggests possible solutions.

Mediators act only in an advisory capacity: they have no decision-making powers and cannot impose a settlement on the conflicting parties. Skilled mediators are able to gain trust and confidence from the conflicting groups or individuals.

➤ **Arbitration**

This means the appointment of an independent person to act as an adjudicator (or judge) in a dispute to decide on the terms of a settlement. Both parties in a conflict have to agree about who the arbitrator should be, and that the decision of the arbitrator will be binding on them all.

Arbitration differs from mediation and negotiation in that it does not promote the continuation of collective bargaining: the arbitrator listens to and investigates the demands and counter-demands and takes over the role of decision-maker. People or organisations can agree on having either a single arbitrator or a panel of arbitrators whom they respect and whose decision they will accept as final, in order to resolve the conflict.

## **2.5 The Effects of Conflict**

In general, conflict may

- Be stressful and harmful to individuals or groups,
- Have positive results,
- Help define and sharpen community issues to improve decisions,
- Help gain recognition for a group,
- Increase bitterness, alienation and divisiveness,
- Increase unity, cohesion, and solidarity within a group,
- Strengthen group boundaries,
- Aid in the formation of a new group,
- Weaken or destroy a group,
- Increase tension within or between groups,
- Result in restructuring a group,
- Lead to alliances with other groups,
- Disrupt normal channels of cooperation, and
- Become destructive (Ezigbo, 2011).

## **2.6 Results and Discussion**

This section presents the analysis of data collected in the course of this study. Data were presented in tables for analysis. Hypotheses were tested by chi-square test statistics using SPSS.

**Table ((1) What are the key sources of conflict in the Work Place**

S/N		Agreement	Disagreement	Total
1	Scarcity of resources (finance, equipment, and information)	310 (299.5)	10 (41)	320
2	Differing attitudes (rigid or flexible	308 (299.5)	12 (41)	320
3	Poor communication	280 (299.5)	40 (41)	320
4	Lack of teamwork	300 (299.5)	20 (41)	320
<b>Total</b>		1198	82	1280

Source: Field Survey, 2012.

**H<sub>1</sub>: Scarcity of resources, differing attitudes, poor communication, and lack of teamwork are key sources of conflict in the workplace**

**Table (2) Chi-Square Tests Computed from the Frequency Cross Tabulation**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	363.990(a)	6	.000
Likelihood ratio	405.026	6	.000
Linear-by-linear association	28.183	1	.000
N of valid cases	1280		

Source: SPSS Version 15.00.

Table (2) presents the output of the computed Chi-Square values from the cross tabulation statistics of observed and expected frequencies with the response options of agree and disagree based on the responses of the research subjects from the three public sector organisations in Nigeria. Pearson Chi-Square computed value ( $x^2_c = 363.990$ ) is greater than the Chi-Square tabulated value ( $x^2_t = 12.59$ ) with 6 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 level of alpha ( $x^2_c = 363.990$ ,  $p < .05$ )

**Decision Rule**

The decision rule is to accept the alternate hypothesis if the computed Chi-Square value is greater than tabulated Chi-Square value otherwise reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis.

Since the Pearson Chi-Square computed  $x^2_c = 363.990$  is greater than Chi-Square table value  $x^2_t = 12.59$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, we conclude that Scarcity of resources, differing attitudes, poor communication, and lack of teamwork are key sources of conflict in the workplace.

**Table (3) To What Extent are Conflicts been Resolved in the workplace**

S/N		Agreement	Disagreement	Total
1	Conflicts are not always resolved in the workplace	40(170)	280(150)	320
2	Conflicts are always resolved in the workplace	300(170)	20(150)	320
<b>Total</b>		340	300	640

Source: Field Survey, 2012.

**H<sub>2</sub> Conflicts are always resolved in the workplace**

**Table (4) Chi-Square Tests Computed from the Frequency Cross Tabulation**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	120.502(a)	6	.000
Likelihood ratio	116.777	6	.000
Linear-by-linear association	24.458	1	.000
N of valid cases	640		

Source: SPSS Version 15.00.

Table (4) presents the output of the computed Chi-Square values from the cross tabulation statistics of observed and expected frequencies with the response options of agree and disagree based on the responses of the research subjects from the three public sector organisations in Nigeria. Pearson Chi-Square computed value ( $x^2_c= 120.502$ ) is greater than the Chi-Square tabulated value ( $x^2_t=12.59$ ) with 6 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 level of alpha ( $x^2_c=120.502$ ,  $p < .05$ )

**Decision Rule**

The decision rule is to accept the alternate hypothesis if the computed Chi-Square value is greater than tabulated Chi-Square value, otherwise, reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis.

Since the Pearson Chi-Square computed  $x^2_c= 120.502$  is greater than Chi-Square table value  $x^2_t =12.59$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, we conclude that conflicts are always resolved in the workplace.

**Table (5) How could Conflict between Groups be Resolved**

S/N		Agreement	Disagreement	Total
1	Collective bargaining: where representatives of each group come together for dialogue.	290 (292)	30 (28.)	320
2	Negotiation: often involve compromise-one group may win one of their demands and give in on another.	250 (292)	70 (28.3)	320
3	Mediation: a mediator acts as intermediary and suggests possible solutions.	315 (292)	05 (28.3)	320
4	Arbitration: means appointment of an independent person to act as an adjudicator in a dispute to decide on the terms of a settlement.	312 (292)	08 (28.3)	320
<b>Total</b>		1167	113	1280

**Source:** Field Survey, 2012.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Conflicts between groups can be resolved by collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration

**Table (6) Chi-Square Tests Computed from the Frequency Cross Tabulation**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	265.207(a)	6	.000
Likelihood ratio	224.710	6	.000
Linear-by-linear association	7.655	1	.006
N of valid cases	1280		

**Source:** SPSS Version 15.00.

Table (6) presents the output of the computed Chi-Square values from the cross tabulation statistics of observed and expected frequencies with the response options of agree and disagree based on the responses of the research subjects from the three public sector organisations in Nigeria. Pearson Chi-Square computed value ( $\chi^2_c = 265.207$ ) is greater



than the Chi –Square tabulated value ( $x^2_t=12.59$ ) with 6 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 level of alpha ( $x^2_c=265.207$ ,  $p, < .05$ )

**Decision Rule**

The decision rule is to accept the alternate hypothesis if the computed Chi- Square value is greater than tabulated Chi-Square value, otherwise, reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis.

Since the Pearson Chi- Square computed  $x^2_c= 265.207$  is greater than Chi- Square table value  $x^2_t =12.59$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, we conclude that conflict between groups can be resolved by collective bargaining, negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.

**Table (7) How could conflict between a boss and a subordinate be managed**

S/N		Agreement	Disagreement	Total
1	Collaboration: The outcome is win/win	240 (260)	80 (60)	320
2	Accommodation: The outcome is loss/win	280 (260)	40 (60)	320
Total		520	120	640

Source: Field Survey, 2012.

**H<sub>4</sub>: Conflict between a boss and a subordinate can be managed by collaboration and accommodation**

**Table (8) Chi-Square Tests Computed from the Frequency Cross Tabulation**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	259.162(a)	6	.000
Likelihood ratio	334.332	6	.000
Linear-by-linear association	33.000	1	.000
N of valid cases	640		

Source: SPSS Version 15.00.

Table (8) presents the output of the computed Chi-Square values from the cross tabulation statistics of observed and expected frequencies with the response options of agree and disagree based on the responses of the research subjects from the three public sector organisations in Nigeria. Thus, Pearson Chi-Square computed value ( $x^2_c= 259.162$ ) is greater than the Chi –Square tabulated value ( $x^2_t=12.59$ ) with 6 degrees of freedom (df) at 0.05 level of alpha ( $x^2_c =259.162$ ,  $p, < .05$ )

**Decision Rule**

The decision rule is to accept the alternate hypothesis if the computed Chi- Square value is greater than tabulated Chi-Square value, otherwise, reject the alternate hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis.

Since the Pearson Chi- Square computed  $x^2_c= 259.162$  is greater than Chi- Square table value  $x^2_t =12.59$ , the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis is accepted. Thus, we conclude that conflict between a boss and a subordinate can be managed by collaboration and accommodation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Conflict accelerates change in an organization, especially in small businesses, where it is easy to formulate and implement new policies. Conflict prompts modification of policies and operation procedures in the organization. Conflict forces the organization's leadership to realign its objectives towards common goals in order to foster teamwork amongst competing parties. Conflict that results into healthy competition cultivates innovation and inventiveness amongst employees. When an organization spends much of its time dealing with conflict, members take time away from focusing on the core goals they are tasked with achieving. Conflict sometimes has a destructive effect on the individuals and groups involved. At other times, however, conflict can increase the capacity of those affected to deal with problems, and therefore it can be used as a motivating force toward innovation and change.

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