

# The Effect of Conflicts among Executives of Identifiable Students Groups on the Performance of Executives and Achievement of Goals: A Case Study of Koforidua Polytechnic – Ghana

Regina Bekoe (Corresponding author)  
Koforidua Polytechnic  
School of Business and Management Studies  
Post Office Box981  
Koforidua – Ghana  
[regibekoe@yahoo.com](mailto:regibekoe@yahoo.com)

Ernest Fianko Quartey  
Koforidua Polytechnic  
School of Business and Management Studies  
Post Office Box981  
Koforidua – Ghana  
[ernestquartey77@yahoo.com](mailto:ernestquartey77@yahoo.com)

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## Abstract

Conflict is an ever-present situation in an organization and needs to be handled with care before it escalates into something that will bring down the image of an organization or a team. The objectives of this research is to assess the causes of conflict among identifiable student groups in Koforidua Polytechnic, determine how these conflicts are addressed to improve the performance of the groups towards the achievement of their goals. During the research questionnaires were administered to the respondents and others were interviewed. The research revealed that most ladies do not go for positions in the institution. It was found out that the roles of all the executive groups were well spelt out. The common causes of conflict included mismanagement of funds, disloyalty of some members, undermining each other as well as usurping each other's role. It was also found out that task and relationship conflicts were negatively affecting decision making of the executive groups. Also, most of the conflicts were unresolved because the executives have no knowledge or training of conflict resolution as such they are unaware of the causes and symptoms of conflict so these conflicts were ignored consciously or unconsciously for the fear that they will assume responsibility for the resolution. The study also showed that conflicts could be minimized if the various executives were given training on the symptoms, causes and prevention of conflict before they assume their positions.

**Key Words:** Conflict, Performance, Personality clash, Undefined roles and Usurping role.

## 1.0 Introduction/background

Conflict can be said to be a struggle between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals. When individual or teams have differences in beliefs or goals conflict is very likely to be present. Conflict happens when two or more people think they have incompatible goals <http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs>. Conflict is the expression of disagreement over something important to both or all sides of a dispute. Conflict is dependent on the people involved. It depends on the people involved having a particular point of view, which may or may not have independent facts and evidence to support it, and on how they behave when they encounter an opposing point of view.

Conflicts start when an individual perceives that someone is negatively affecting or about to affect, something they care about (Bell and Hart, 2012). When people care about something they hold on to it and try that nobody will do anything to destroy it and when they feel someone is doing something to destroy what they believe in then the possibility that conflict will occur is high. Although conflict is popularly thought of as involving a win-lose

struggle, many conflicts in the work place occur between individuals and small groups who share similar goals but disagree over the means by which they can be achieved. Personal agendas may drive member participation, and members push their own ideas regarding task definition and resolution.

Conflict is part of human life, but how to resolve conflict can be a very difficult duty. This is particularly so when it occurs in groups. Resolving conflict is a huge task for leaders for that matter some leaders ignore issues concerning conflict as if they do not exist. Some leaders worry about conflict in their groups because the leaders believe that such conflicts could undermine work performance. In such situation the best solution to the conflict is to ignore it and hope that soon the conflict will go away. In most cases this assumption could not be true. Addressing conflict should be viewed as an important element in achieving group effectiveness and enhancing productivity. Many groups, however, suffer chronic patterns of unresolved conflicts that are costly and often symptomatic of serious group dysfunction. Unresolved conflict represents the largest reducible cost in many businesses, yet it remains largely unrecognized without a clear picture of the real costs associated with conflict, the priority for developing healthy resolution strategies is likely to remain low (Runde and Flanagan, 2007).

Conflicts could have both positive and negative effects. Some theorists have focused on the negative effects of team conflict. Conflict has been suggested to interfere with team performance and reduce satisfaction because it produces tension, antagonism, and distracts team members from performing the task. Empirical evidence has supported the negative relationship between conflict and team productivity and satisfaction (McCarthy, 2007).

### **1.1 Problem statement**

Working together as a team enables the team members to accomplish much because each individual has different talents and when these talents are brought together effectively productivity increases. But because each individual has his or her own person views and need there is the likelihood that there could be some form of conflicts in working and living together. A major advantage a team has over an individual is its diversity of resources, knowledge, and ideas. However, diversity also produces conflict. When we are able to understand what goes on in conversations and listen attentively we can become better problem solvers and get our ways through conflicts. Learning to be patient and listen to others can increase our confidence which will enable us engage in dialogue of genuine 'give and take', and be able to help generate problem solutions that meet more of everyone's needs.

When conflicts are unresolved it can create varied consequences. Conflict among members can make an effective group or team fail. The process of getting the conflict resolved is a very critical factor in every relationship. Because conflict is an ever-present phenomenon the way it is resolved will determine if a relationship is friendly or unfriendly, intimate or cold. When conflicts are not resolved properly the end result is always unsatisfactory and relationships get nutty.

It is upon these facts that this research is conducted to find out the causes and effects of conflict among executives of identifiable student groups on the achievement of goals in the polytechnic and how to manage the conflicts effectively. This type of research has not been conducted in the institution before now.

### **1.2 General Objective**

The objective of this research is to understand the causes of conflict among the identifiable groups in Koforidua Polytechnic and the effects it is having on the groups.

### **1.3 Specific Objectives**

- To identify the types of conflicts that exists among the executives of the various groups in the institutions.
- To assess the causes of conflict among the groups.
- To examine the extent to which conflicts affect the achievement of goals.
- Determine how to address these conflicts in the groups.

### **1.4 Research questions**

This research seeks to answer the following:

1. What are the types of conflict that exist among the executives of the various students groups in the institution?
2. What are the causes of these conflicts?
3. How do these conflicts affect the achievement of goals in the various groups?
4. To what extent are conflicts important to the achievement of goals to the group?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is to assist in helping the identifiable groups to effectively manage conflict to be able to achieve their stated goals. This study will help the institution, policy makers, respondents and readers to be mindful of the existence of conflicts among groups in the polytechnic, the importance of conflicts, and how to manage conflicts effectively in and among the executives.

### **2.0 Literature Review**

This section examines relevant literature on conflict in teams and organizations.

According to Carsten et al. (2008) conflict, work and organizations are intertwined and that no one can exist without conflict. This is seen in most organizations and it has become a source of worry to the managers of organizations. As human beings come together to work or discuss issues conflict is likely to emerge. This could be as a result of someone's perception that conflict exist. Sometimes the other party may not be aware of the fact that conflict do exist as a result of him or her. When this happens work does not go on as effectively as it should and this in most cases leads to under productivity or underperformance.

Conflict is inevitable in any organization (Runde and Flanagan, 2010). So far as conflict is inevitable there is the need for every organization to be aware of this situation and be able to deal with it effectively so that the organization will improve. Where people work and anytime people come together there is bound to be conflict. No organization can exist without conflict. Some of these conflicts should be welcome in the organization because they lead to improvement. For example when the conflict has to do with procedure or the process of doing something, when this is allowed and well dealt with in the end the team will come out with a new process or procedure which will be workable for all the members of the team.

Garner (2012) also attests to the fact that conflict is an ever-present feature in organization where people work together. Research is yet to come out with any organization that has never experienced any form of conflict in that organization. From this assertion it is not surprising for the executives in the various groups in Koforidua Polytechnic to be beset by conflicts during their tenure of office.

All conflicts and complaints are the result of someone's expectations not being met (MTD, 2010). When the expectations of individuals and that of a team are not the same this can lead to conflict in the team. Some people find themselves in teams or groups because of their personal gains without thinking about the other members of the team. When people come together it is always good for the leaders to find out the individual expectations and also make clear the expectation from the team or the team objectives so that those who do not belong will find their way out before things go out of hand.

1. One of the causes of conflict at the work place is perceptions (Bell and Hart, 2012). Conflicts come about when individuals perceive that someone or something is about to affect them negatively. As soon as that perception is there the person who perceives the conflict begins to look for people who could be behind it and this will go on if not checked and dealt with it may pose danger to the team or organization. Sometimes this perception may not be correct.

Many people react to conflict in many ways. According to Garner (2012), this is done through avoidance, yield and bend, direct and indirect aggression, accommodation and assertiveness. These reactions can be present in all conflict situation and the reaction to conflict will depend on the situation the individual or the team finds itself. I think the best reaction is dependent on the situation in which the parties are involved. The most important way to react is to make sure the reaction does not escalate into violence.

Poorly managed conflict creates enormous costs in the form of wasted management time (Runde and Flanagan, 2007). When conflicts are not properly handled a lot of time will be spent in trying to resolve it and by so doing productive time is being wasted. The individuals involve begin to drag their feet when it comes to team work because some of the party may think that they are not being treated fairly. However, when conflicts are handled properly this can create positive changes and bring about new opportunities in organizations (Scott, 2010).

Unresolved conflicts lead to pairing-off and clique-forming (Garner, 2012) when conflicts are not resolve members within each party begin to form alliance with those they think share in their views and this results in groups within a group. This was the situation in the case of Koforidua Polytechnic and this in a way affect the achievement of goals in the various executive groups.

As conflict is present in an organization or a team there is the need to find ways of resolving the conflict so that work will go on effectively (DuBrin, 2007; Larson & Gray, 2011; David, 2011) all stated the need for conflict resolution.

One of the styles of their conflict resolution strategy is confrontation. Confrontation is a means of identifying the source of the conflict. When conflict exist there is the need to confront the problem head-on in a gentle and tactical manner than in a radical manner which may erupt into an uncontrollable situation and this can be done through the confrontation method. When conflicts are managed properly the view point of each party to the conflict will be well appreciated and this could lead to trust and respect for each conflicting party.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The study used the descriptive survey design. This involves gathering data with the aid of survey instruments which was based on a description of the phenomenon under study, that is, conflicts among executives of identifiable student groups on the achievement of goals at Koforidua polytechnic. Two Hundred and Fourteen (214) respondents were drawn from all the executives of the identifiable groups in the polytechnic, using purposive and simple random sampling methods. Out of the total population size, 150 were sampled for the study. 10% of respondents were interviewed and 90% given questionnaires relating to conflict and its management to complete. The data collected from respondent were carefully checked and edited. The data analysis of the study was aided by the use of the bar chart and frequency tables. The data was subjected to frequency counts.

The focus of this research was on the identifiable students groups in Koforidua Polytechnic which have a total student population of 1,141. There are Eight (8) departmental associations, ten religious groups, four main regional groups in this population, three political groups and the Students' Representative Counsel (SRC). The members of all these executive groups total Two Hundred and fourteen (214).

Data was collected purposively from the three Schools and all the departments within the schools. These are School of Business and Management Studies (SBMS), School of Applied Science and Technology (SAST) and School of Engineering (SOE). The reasons for purposively using these selected school is that they are the ones the polytechnic has and they have the subject groupings and have executives for the groups. Out of the ten (10) religious groups five executive groups were selected using the Lottery Method. All the four regional group executives identified were used for the study and the SRC. The total sample is One Hundred and Fifty (150) executives from the 214 students. Each individual member of the various group executives were then selected using the simple random sampling method using a table of random numbers. This was done to give everybody in the identifiable student executive groups an equal chance to be selected.

### **4.0 Findings and Discussion**

#### **4.1 Demography**

The demographic characteristics of respondents revealed that 8% of the respondents in the executive groups are female and 92% were the male. This implies that the most ladies do not go in for executive positions in the institution.

#### **4.2 Task related conflict**

There are many reasons for conflicts within teams and among team members refer to table 1 and figure 1. One way to simplify the source of conflict is to examine whether the conflict is task-based or if it stems from a relational issue (Runde and Flanagan, 2010). This classification is important because generally speaking, task-based conflict is more productive while relationship-based conflicts are most of the time destructive to the outcome. Most conflicts do not have a single source.

The research revealed that 70% of the executives have issues based on the task they set themselves. Some of these issues were poor planning, incompatible interests, disagreement about strategy, and lack of focus, the setting of unclear objectives and the procedure used to accomplish tasks. According to the respondents these have led to serious disagreements among some of the executives. This resulted into gossip, passiveness, aggressive behaviors, hostility, finger pointing, hoarding of information and verbal abuse in some cases.

The finding confirms the interview with some of the executives that left the institution in the year 2011. This states that some of the past executives resigned from their positions due to conflict among them.

Some of the issues raised can be constructive for example the issue on procedure to accomplish task. When this is managed effectively and quickly can be a constructive way of succeeding in the organization. A better procedure can be arrived at to foster productively and minimize time when this situation is handled properly through open

discussion and respect for each other's view. When members respect each other's view, ideas and beliefs these may lead to the inclusion of innovative ideas and a healthy team performance.

#### **4.3 Financial Mismanagement**

According to 80% of the respondents, mismanagement of funds by some of the executive members most of the time lead to argument and name calling among the executives. Some of the executives stated, "When we all agree on how much to be spent on a programme, and reduced amount is given for the programme, other executive members will think you have used part of the money". Others said "when it comes to programmes that involve spending money, some of the executive members will be asking for their share of the money and if you do not give them then they will be saying that you are spending the money for your personal use".

#### **4.4 Poor Role Clarity**

The research revealed that all the executives have their constitution and the role of each position is clearly stated in their constitutions. It was observed that 60% of the executives do not truly understand the role they are to play clearly causing other executives going beyond their roles and responsibilities. In addition, it is often assumed that most of the executives understand the role they are to play. These assumptions are never checked to see if they are right or wrong leading to some of the executive members unclear about what their roles are and the extent to which they should go when playing their roles.

According to Brown et al (2007), team expectations must be clear and explicit when this does not happen it leads to conflict in the team. Poor role clarity is a major cause of conflict among the executives and most of the time this is not properly resolved.

#### **4.5 No Trust within Team Member**

80% of the respondent stated that executives do not have trust for each other and are suspicious of each other's motives and this resulted in a team that is not cohesive in its approach to the achievement of the goals they set themselves. This supports McCarthy (2007) that destructive conflict undermines relationships. Members of the executive team have problems with each other making members withhold information that are vital to the team from each other. Low trust among team members can make some of the executives coil into their shell and adopt the attitude of "let's wait and see". This could lead to low productivity of team members.

#### **4.6 Unproductive Executive Meetings**

According to 65% of the respondents some of the executive meetings they attend become unproductive because they argue over the procedures they use in arriving at consensus or the procedure to accomplish a particular programme which sometimes leads to the adjournment of meetings. In most cases some of the executive meetings were not necessary and that some of the information they got at such meeting could be written and distributed to them so that man hours would not be wasted.

#### **4.7 Poor Time Management**

90% of the respondents stated that poor time management lead to conflict among some of the executive members. This is so because some of the executives are free during some times of the week and will always place activities at their free time forgetting about other executive members. In an interview with some of the executive members this were their responses, "We waste time at most of our meetings arguing over issues that are sometimes unnecessary causing some of us to miss lectures". "The way we waste time at our meetings does not make me feel like going for the meetings, all I do is to ask for permission to be absent and I use my time to learn." This finding attests to Garner (2012) why teams do not work that the meeting go on for far too long and cannot reach decisions.

#### **4.8 Personality clash**

Personality clash is a type of conflict within the executive team which emanate as a result of emotions and perceptions about somebody's motives and character, 80% of the respondents stated that sometimes some of the executive member's accuse others for being late because they view those members as being lazy and disrespectful. Also 70% of the executive members disagree with the team leaders. This leads to refusal to follow the direction of the team leaders. These disagreements lead some of the members to resign from their positions. In this case some of the executives have hidden agenda about some of their leaders stating that some are from rich homes so they do not respect the views of other executive members.

This type of conflict is very unproductive leading to goals not being achieved. For every group to effectively work and avoid this type of conflict there is the need for an effective team building intervention for them to be able to respect each other no matter who they are and where they are coming from.

#### **4.9 Ego**

A person's ego is a strong motivator in how some of the executive members act and in the decisions they make. 80% of the respondents stated that the ego of some of the executive members can cause them to feel they are always right. Some of them will refuse to accept they are wrong, even when it is very clear that they are wrong.

#### **4.10 Some Effects of Conflicts on the Performance of the Executives**

In an interview with some of the respondents on the effects of conflict on the performance of the executive, some of the respondents said, "When conflicts exist during discussion no decision is reached and the problem is not addressed". Conflicts destroy the morale of the executive members, divides them leading to alliances with other groups to expose some of the members". See table 2 and figure 2.

70% of the respondents stated that conflicts take attention away from other important activities and reducing cooperation and participation of the entire student body in the programme of the groups.

Some of the comments by respondents on the effect of conflict on performance of the executives are: "conflicts among us sometimes lead to some members behaving irresponsibly by fighting and calling each other names and gossiping among members which in effect make those affected stop performing their function". Others interviewed said "the kind of conflict that happens in the group waste time, energy, reduce efficiency and lead to aggression on the part of those who are involved. This supports the assertion of Pynchon (2010) that, conflicts in teams lead to naming, blaming and claiming.

The study also indicated that conflicts lead to reduction in work performance of the individuals involved and these stress others who are not involved in the conflict in the team. This come about as a result of miscommunication among members and this reduces motivation and innovation among members. Those who are not part of the conflict also find themselves forming alliance and this will not be health for any effective team.

These effects of conflicts support the assertion of Runde and Flanagan (2007) that conflicts lead to unproductive use of valuable time. The overall result of such negative effects of conflict is the reduction of team commitment to goals and group efficiency.

This table and chart represent the responses from the respondents on the effect of conflict on the various executives. Irresponsive behaviors among the executives sometimes leading to the state police coming in to stop students from behaving irresponsibly.

#### **4.11 Ways of Dealing with Conflict among the executives**

Conflicts are a normal phenomenon among individuals and organizations and need to be handled properly so that people will be willing and ready to work for the success of the organization. It is therefore the duty of leaders in organizations and teams to be able to facilitate the resolution of conflict when conflicts occur. This requires the leader of the team to remain impartial and face the situation with all integrity.

However, this research revealed that when conflicts were preserved in most cases they are ignored without the leader calling those involved to find out what the problems were. This resulted in some of the team members responding to the conflict by avoiding some of the members, others leaving the executive positions or ending relationships with some members. Opposing groups must open up channels of communication and work upwards to reach full agreement.

The best way of dealing with conflict is to get a good facilitator to spearhead the resolution to make the team a formidable one and cohesive to be able to achieve the goals they set themselves. Dealing with conflict head-on helps find a better solution to organizational problems and also develop a solid trust among team members. Conflicts should not be 'swept under the carpet' as it is done among the executives of the groups in Koforidua Polytechnic. When conflicts are not resolved people become disillusioned and when that happens it affects productivity and distrust among members.

#### **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

Because of the growing popularity in team work, organizations are relying on their employees' ability to collaborate with their co-workers. Organizations that are interested in sustaining a competitive advantage rely heavily on work handled by many people being able to work together rather than many individuals working side-by-side.

The study revealed that relationship conflict is the dominate type of conflict that exist among the executives. The role of every executive member is well spelt out in their constitution but some members are seen usurping others' role which in most cases lead to misunderstanding among the executives.

Conflict among the executive has led to name calling, the formation of alliances and irresponsible behaviors among members. One of the major effects of conflict among the executives is the executive's inability to achieve the goals they set themselves.

Some of the causes of conflict among the executives are financial mismanagement, poor time management, personality clash, the ego of the individuals executives involved and these have led to irresponsible behaviors on campus like name calling, formation of bad clique, mismanagement of the group's fund and lack of achievement of goals.

The research also revealed that there is no medium through which conflict could be discussed and resolved therefore when conflict is perceived the best way of dealing with it is to ignore it.

There is the need for a conflict resolution centre which could call for open communication on issues that are likely to lead to conflict in the institution.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

There should be orientation for all students who have been elected or appointed to positions in the institution to explain the tasks each member is to perform, their expectations and timeframes to complete each task. This in a way could minimize the usurping of roles among the executive groups which leads to conflict among them.

Executive members in the various groups should have a plan in place to achieve the goals they set themselves. This plan must be reviewed where necessary and be monitored regularly so that deviations could be addressed as time goes on.

Executive members of the various groups should be coached on how to communicate effectively so that there will be positive and open discussion of issues. This in a way can reduce tension in the executive teams.

There is the need for each executive group to have in place a mechanism or a team in place to help address conflicts when the symptoms show up. This in a way will enable perceived issues on conflicts to be addressed before they get out of hand.

There should be a training programme for the various executive members on how to work as a team.

Executives should be taken through the causes, effects and preventions of conflict before they begin to work.

There is the need for a conflict resolution center in the polytechnic so that anyone who perceives conflict or is aggrieved can go and complain so that issues could be handled by trained and effective personnel.

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**Notes**

Table 1: SUMMARY OF CAUSES OF CONFLICT AMONG EXECUTIVES OF IDENTIFIABLE GROUP

CAUSES	AGREE	DISAGREE
Task related conflict issues (poor planning, lack of focus, incompatible interest)	70%	30%
Financial management	80%	20%
Poor role clarity	60%	40%
Lack of Trust	80%	20%
Poor Time management	90%	10%
Personality clashes( emotion and character)	80%	20%
Ego	80%	20%

Source: Field work (2012)Description of the table above

Causes of conflict among the executives in the various groups

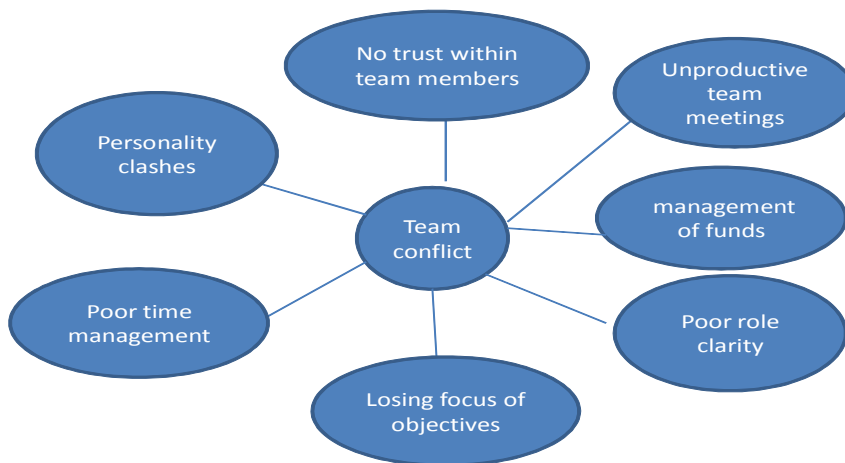




Table 2: EFFECTS OF CONFLICTS ON PERFORMANCE OF EXECUTIVES

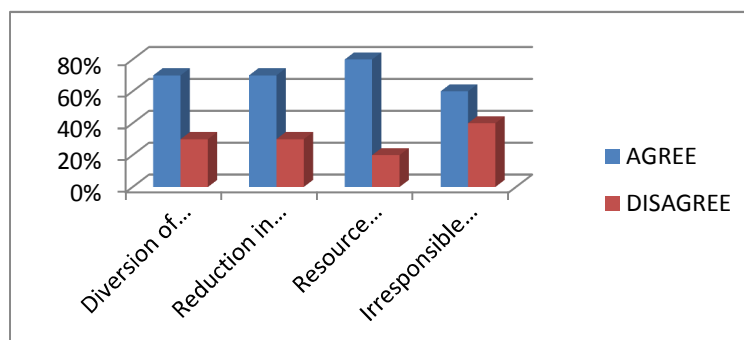
EFFECT	AGREE	DISAGREE
Diversion of focus	70%	30%
Reduction in productivity	70%	30%
Resource mismanagement	80%	20%
Irresponsible behavior	60%	40%

Source: Field work (2012)

Description of the table above

Figure 2: A BAR CHART SHOWING SUMMARY OF RESULT OF THE EFFECT OF

CONFLICT ON PERFORMANCE



Source: Field work, 2012