

Relationship between Workplace Conflict Management and Task Performance among Employees of Colleges of Agriculture

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between workplace conflict management and employees' task performance in Colleges of Agriculture in Southwest, Nigeria. A total of 220 employees were selected from three colleges of agriculture in southwest, Nigeria. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, frequency counts, standard deviation and regression analysis were used for the analysis.

Results showed that the mean age of the employees was 37.81 years, and 35.4% had a bachelor's degree with 10 years of work experience. Employees frequently experienced affective conflict ($w = 318.7$) and substantive conflict ($w = 297.3$). Results show that 58.6 percent of the employees attested that they investigated issues and found acceptable solutions while 41.8 percent worked with other employees to find a solution(s) that satisfied their expectations. In addition, 38.0% of the employees were exceptional in their performance in managing tasks so that it is finished in due course. Displaced conflict ($t=1.75$; $p=0.02$) affected the task performance.

The study concluded that task performance is more affected by displaced conflict than other kinds of conflicts in the institution. It is then recommended that the institutions should discourage the prevalence of displaced conflict and sensitize the employees to conflict management to improve the administrative and task performance on the institutional goals.

(Keywords: *workplace, conflict management, task performance, displaced conflict, employees, agriculture*)

INTRODUCTION

In organizations, whether in the public or private sector across the globe, the problem of workplace conflicts and its effect on employees' performance is becoming a leading discourse in different forums and workshops. Conflict in institutions may arise due to incompatibility of feelings, variation in value, interest, ideology, and limitedness of resources.

According to Dreu *et al.*, (2019), workplace conflict is endemic despite the application of the best management practices in organizations and manifests in various forms as an intrinsic and unavoidable feature of employment relationships. This assertion implies that conflict as the inevitable experience of human beings; is bound to occur in any hierarchical organization where employees with different views, interests, ideologies, perspectives, and backgrounds interact. In most cases, conflict in the workplace may not be an aberration, because it provides an avenue for better work-relationship and the integration of the organization and the employees. However, conflict is also conceptualized as one of the most destructive elements in the workplace.

As noted by Kamran, *et al.*, (2021) conflict in the workplace is one of the most destructive antecedents of demotivation, the risk of job loss, low level of job satisfaction, and a reduction in employees' job performance. It also creates uncertainty, turnover of talented employees, and a reduction in overall organizational performance. Conflict, therefore, is natural and not abnormal nor pathological or insane behavior; it is not opposite to order and there is orderliness in

conflict. It can be positive/functional, negative/dysfunctional depending on how it is managed, it is helpful and be useful part of society (Ross, 2001).

Workplace conflict, also conceptualized as organizational conflict, is a state of disagreement or confusion caused by actual or perceived differences in an organization's employees' relationships, resources, values, and needs. Tension usually arises when employees interact at work and differ in their perspectives on a decision or task. This variance in perspectives may reduce mutual understanding, hinder the commitment of employees to their tasks and affect their level of commitment to the organization (Nair, 2016; Dalton, 2015). In other words, inherent in the human genetic build-up, conflict with the other employees, (interpersonal conflict) with oneself, (intrapersonal conflict) and with the organization (educational institutions inclusive), is at the heart of the working relationship, whose causes are due to variance in personality traits, interest, culture, belief system, value, and power (Almost, *et al.*, 2016). Thus, conflict is an inevitable human experience, a critical mechanism by which the goals and aspirations of individuals and groups are articulated. It is a channel for the definition of creative solution to human problems and a means to the development of a collective identity (Ross, 2001). Ross further notes that:

If disadvantaged groups and individuals refuse to consider an open conflict, they deny themselves what sometimes is the most effective means of or bringing about a desire change (Ross 2001 b: xiv)

It is impossible to think of an institution or organization where there are no conflict situations, hence the existence of conflict is part of everyday life. As stated by Silva and Dota (2013) conflict situation are part of the everyday life of any organization, which make employees work with conflict rather than against it. In the absence of needed skills, employees who are unable to manage conflict situations are confronted with frustrations and high levels of job dissatisfaction.

The most frequent workplace conflicts that are predominant in Nigerian Colleges of Agriculture are affective, substantive, goal, realistic, and institutionalized-based conflicts. Other are conflict of value, conflict of interest, mis-attribute, and

displaced conflicts. For conflict in the workplace, Ayinde *et al.*, (2021) indicate the following causes; the overbearing nature of superior officers, the existence of favoritisms, injustice in the workplace, unacceptable political climate, management's inability to nip disagreement in the bud, and lack of adequate remuneration and incentives.

More significantly, the differences in the Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid (DNA) and personality traits (Oose, *et al.*, 2023) of employees do not always allow a seamless flow of work interactions, to this end their task performance and overall organizational productivity are affected.

As noted by Kalia and Bhardwaj (2019), task performance is an understanding under contractual terms between an employer and an employee to perform an assigned task. It is conceptualized as the employee's fulfillment of the duties and responsibilities of the relevant role in the job description and depends on the employee's efficiency in fulfilling the duties and responsibilities (Pradhan and Jean, 2016). This connotes how effectively employees of Nigerian Colleges of Agriculture respond to their responsibilities vis-à-vis teaching, research, and community services.

The efficient fulfillment of their duties is expected to contribute directly to all productivity and performance of the organization. Therefore, management of workplace conflict among employees of the Nigerian Colleges of Agriculture will enhance their task performance such as setting priorities, clear job descriptions, and high competency (Aslan, *et al.*, 2021). To improve the task performance of Nigerian employees of Colleges of Agriculture, it is important to examine whether the ways of resolving conflict situations matter or not.

The specific objectives of the study described the socio-economic characteristics of the employees in the study area, identified types of conflict experienced by the employees, examined employees' ways of managing conflict situations, and determined employees' level of task performance. It is hypothesized that types of conflict are significantly associated with task performance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in three Colleges of Agriculture in Southwest, Nigeria between December 2022 and April 2023. The colleges of Agriculture are situated entirely within the tropical zone and it lies between longitudes 2.5° and 6° east of the Greenwich Meridian and latitudes 5° and 9° north of the Equator. The region has many research institutes that are mainly concentrated in Oyo State and the First University in the country is also located in the region alongside many public and privately owned universities (Banmeke and Oose, 2012).

Sampling Procedures and Size

A multistage sampling procedure was used for selecting respondents for this study. Out of the six (6) states in the southwest geo-political zones of Nigeria, a simple random sampling technique was used to select two (2) states namely; Oyo and Ogun states. The second stage involves the selection of three (3) Colleges of Agriculture namely; the Federal College of Animal Health, Ibadan (FACAH), Oyo State College of Agriculture and Technology (OYSCAT), Igbo-Ora, and the School of Agriculture, Federal College of Education (FCE), Abeokuta.

A simple random sampling was used to select seventeen percent (17%) of the total employees from employees and this gives 82 employees from FACAH, 84 from OYSCAT, and 54 from FCE. A total of 278 questionnaires were distributed and 220 were retrieved and found usable. This signified a response rate of 79.0%. Therefore, since over 75.0% response rate was achieved, non-response error is not a threat to the external validity of the study findings (Lindner and Wingenbach 2002).

A structured questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents after it was content and face-validated. Also, a Cronbach-alpha test of internal consistency was conducted with reliability coefficients of 0.76, 0.97 and 0.82 for the scale for frequency of conflict experienced, ways of resolving conflict situations and task performance, respectively.

The frequency of conflict experienced was measured on a four (4) point rating scale of always (4), occasionally (3), rarely (2) and never (1). Ways of resolving conflict situations were

measured with a Likert-type scale of strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1) on a total of 14 items.

Fourteen items relating to task performance were adopted from the works of (Aslan, 2021) to assess the task performance of employees. Sample items are: managed to plan tasks so that it finished in due time, keeping in my task result that needed to be achieved, and ability to set priorities among others.

Responses on all the scale items were ordered on a four-point rating scale of exceptional (5), exceeds expectation (4), meets expectation (3), improvement needed (2) and unsatisfactory (1). The types of conflict experienced in the workplace and their meaning are presented in Table 1.

Data Analysis

The socioeconomic characteristics of employees were measured; age, household size, work experience and monthly salary were measured at interval levels; sex, marital status, rank and religion were all measured at a nominal level while educational status was measured at an ordinal level.

The study is correctional in design, objectives were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and Weighted Mean Score (WMS). The WMS was calculated by multiplying the assigned codes with the percentage and summing all the responses. The t-test value from the linear regression was used to test the hypothesis predicting the contribution of each workplace conflict experienced to task performance.

The model $Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \dots + b_nX_n$.

Y = Task performance

X1= Independent variables (Conflict experienced)

a= constant

b= slope of line

Table 1: Type of Conflicts in the Workplace and their Meaning.

Types of Conflict	Meaning
Affective conflict	It occurs when two interacting employees while trying to solve a problem together, become aware that their feelings and emotions regarding some of the issues are incompatible
Substantive conflict	It occurs when two or more employees disagree on their task issues
Conflict of interest	It is an inconsistency between two employees in their preferences for the allocation of a scarce resource.
Conflict of value	Conflict of value occurs when two individuals differ in their values or ideologies on certain issues
Goal conflict	This occurs when the preferred outcome of two employees is inconsistent.
Realistic conflict	Refers to incompatibilities that have rational content (i.e., tasks, goals, values, and means and ends).
Institutionalized conflict	It's characterized by situations in which individuals follow explicit rules, and display predictable behavior, and their relationship has continuity.
Retributive conflict	This conflict is characterized by a situation where the conflicting employees feel the need for a drawn-out conflict to punish the opponent.
Misattributed conflict	Misattributed conflict relates to the incorrect assignment of causes (behaviors, parties, or issues) to conflict
Displaced conflict	This type of conflict occurs when the conflicting individuals either direct their frustrations to individuals who are not involved in the conflict or argue over not major issues

Source: Authors, 2022

Employees' Socioeconomics Characteristics

The result in Table 2 revealed the mean age and standard deviation as 37.8 years \pm 8.96 respectively with 41.8% of the employees within the age bracket of 32 and 41 years. This means that a larger percentage of the employees within the study location were agile and full of strength. These findings imply that employees in the Nigerian College of Agriculture are in their middle age, to this end, it is expected that they are agile in discharging their duties and responsibilities. This claim corroborates the earlier findings of Oose, *et al.*, (2022) that most of the employees in Nigerian organizations are in their middle age and still active in service.

A good number (76.4%) of the employees were married, 54.5 percent of them were male and 35.4 percent had a degree in Bachelor of Science. This shows that employees in this study were responsible married individual with attachment to a family and also that there were more male employees than their female counterparts. This may be adduced to the demand placed on men by society to cater to and provide for their households.

In addition, the result shows that the mean work experience and monthly salary of the employees were 10.24 years and N69,000, respectively. This

implies that most of the employees had worked for 10 years in their respective institutions

Conflict Experienced by Employees

The frequency of types of conflict experienced by employees is presented in Table 3. Findings revealed that affective conflict ($\bar{x}_w = 318.7$), substantive conflict ($\bar{x}_w = 297.3$), conflict of value ($\bar{x}_w = 295.3$), and institutional conflict ($\bar{x}_w = 295.0$) are the most experienced conflict in Nigerian Colleges of Agriculture. Hence, it could be inferred that conflicts that are predominant in Nigerian College of Agriculture are a combination of affective, substantive, and conflict of values.

This implies that employees usually experience disagreement while performing their tasks and often differ in their values or ideologies on certain issues. The implication of these findings is that the prevalence of these conflicts in the institution may affect their work interaction and hence reduce task performance. Similarly, Kazimoto (2013) found that conflicts in the workplace eschew when the objectives, interests or principles of individuals or groups are different and frustrate each other's attempt to reach organizational goal.

Table 2: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Employees (n=220).

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	Mean (sd)
Age (years)			
22-31	45	20.5	37.81 (8.96)
32-41	92	41.8	
42-51	61	27.7	
52-62	22	10.0	
Sex			
Male	120	54.5	
Female	100	45.5	
Marital Status			
Single	34	15.5	
Married	168	76.4	
Divorced	8	3.6	
Widowed	10	4.6	
Educational Status			
OND/NCE	26	11.8	
HND	43	19.5	
B.Sc	78	35.4	
M.Sc	53	24.1	
PhD	20	9.1	
Rank			
Teaching	123	55.9	
Non-teaching	79	44.1	
Household Size			
1-3	106	48.2	3.99(1.43)
4-6	108	49.1	
7 and above	6	2.7	
Years of Experience			
1-10	156	70.9	10.24(6.49)
11-20	51	23.2	
21 and above	13	5.9	
Monthly Salary ₦			
Less than 100,000	130	59.1	96,000
100,000 and above	90	40.9	

Source: Field survey, 2022; standard deviation (sd)

Table 3: Frequency of Conflict Experienced by the Employees (n=220).

Types of conflict	AL	OC	RY	NV	WMS	Rank
Affective conflict	77(35.0)	113(51.4)	24(10.9)	6(2.7)	318.7	1 st
Substantive conflict	59(26.8)	102(46.4)	52(24.1)	6(2.7)	297.3	2 nd
Conflict of interest	54(24.5)	91(41.4)	57(25.9)	18(8.2)	282.2	6 th
Conflict of value	63(28.7)	101(45.9)	38(17.3)	18(8.2)	295.3	3 rd
Goal conflict	58(26.4)	82(37.3)	53(24.1)	27(12.3)	278.0	7 th
Realistic conflict	55(25.0)	90(40.9)	62(28.2)	13(5.9)	285.0	5 th
Institutional conflict	71(32.3)	85(38.6)	46(20.9)	18(8.2)	295.0	4 th
Retributive conflict	36(16.4)	100(45.5)	56(25.5)	28(12.7)	265.8	10 th
Misattributed	47(21.5)	96(43.6)	56(25.5)	21(9.5)	277.3	8 th
Displaced conflict	51(23.2)	85(38.6)	60(27.3)	24(10.9)	274.1	9 th

Source: Field survey, 2022; always (al); occasionally (oc); rarely (ry); never (nv); weighted mean score (wms)

Table 4: Ways of Resolving Conflict Situations (n=220).

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
Investigate issues and find acceptable solution	129(58.6)	71(32.3)	9(4.1)	7(3.2)	4(1.8)
Satisfying the needs of my colleagues	48(21.8)	107(48.6)	35(15.9)	28(12.7)	2(0.9)
Avoid keeping conflict with my colleagues to myself	61(27.7)	76(34.5)	52(23.6)	22(10.0)	9(4.1)
Integrating my ideas to come up with a collective decision	77(35.0)	94(42.7)	24(10.9)	19(8.6)	6(2.7)
Work with others to find solution that satisfy expectations	92(41.8)	87(39.5)	21(9.5)	15(6.8)	5(2.3)
Trying to find a middle course to resolve an impasse	54(24.6)	78(35.5)	40(18.2)	33(15.0)	15(6.8)
Using my influence to get my ideas accepted	61(27.8)	96(43.6)	32(14.5)	23(10.5)	8(3.8)
Using my authority to make a decision in my favor	31(14.1)	82(37.3)	35(15.9)	49(22.3)	23(10.5)
Accommodating the wishes of my colleagues	24(10.9)	60(27.3)	32(14.5)	50(22.7)	54(24.5)
Going along with the suggestion of my colleagues	53(24.1)	99(45.0)	38(17.3)	19(8.6)	11(5.0)
Ability to use give and take so that compromise is made	32(14.6)	89(40.5)	50(22.7)	34(15.5)	15(6.8)
Using my power to win a competitive situation	101(46.0)	84(38.2)	15(6.8)	12(5.5)	8(3.6)
Avoiding unpleasant exchanges with my colleagues	56(25.5)	106(48.2)	33(15.0)	18(8.3)	7(3.2)
Work with colleagues for understanding of a problem	48(21.9)	110(50.0)	33(15.0)	19(8.6)	10(4.5)

Source: Field survey, 2022; strongly agree (sa); agree (a); undecided (u); disagree (d); strongly disagree (sd)

Way of Managing Conflicts Situations

Findings in Table 4 present employees' ways of managing conflict situations. Results show that 58.6 percent of the employees attested that they investigated issues and found acceptable solutions, 41.8 percent worked/collaborate with other employees to find a solution that satisfied their expectations while 35.0 percent integrated their ideas to come up with a collective decision. The findings imply that employees employed a mutually beneficial solution/method to their conflict and each party has a say in the resolution of the conflict. In other words, it is the collaborative method of resolving conflict situations. This is in line with the studies of Pablo (2023) and Oose, *et al.*, (2023) who noted that collaborative mode of conflict management is a joint problem-solving approach in which the individuals come together to resolve a conflict situation.

Employees' Task Performance

Table 5 indicates that the task was efficiently done because about 55.0% of the employees' task performance was exceptional and met expectations. It was revealed that 38.0% of the employees were exceptional in managing to plan tasks so that they finished in due course, also, 30.5% of them were exceptional in keeping in mind the task result that is needed to achieve. In

addition, 39.1% and 34.1% of the employees exceeded expectations in the management of time and keeping task-related knowledge up to date.

The average performance of tasks by employees in Nigerian Colleges of Agriculture could be traced to the prevalence of affective conflict, substantive conflict and conflict of value which were rated highest and most experienced by the employees. Corroborating this study, Elbanna (2009) found that affective conflicts such as frustrations and anxiety affected task performance in the film industry. From the findings, employees in institutions need sensitization to conflict management to avert a reduction in enhanced job performance.

Inter-Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Results in Table 6 show a positive and significant correlation between sex ($r = .03^*$), religion ($.001^*$), frequency of conflict ($.017^*$), ways of resolving conflict ($.001^{**}$), and task performance. This indicates that variations in the sex and religious affiliation of the employees, frequency of occurrence of conflict, and ways by which conflict situations are resolved affect employees' task performance.

Table 5: Employees' Task Performance (n=220).

Statements	ET	EE	ME	IN	US
Manage to plan task so that it is finished in due course	83(38.0)	52(23.6)	57(25.9)	20(9.1)	7(3.2)
Keeping in mind the task result that is needed to achieve	67(30.5)	61(27.7)	63(28.6)	26(11.8)	3(1.4)
Ability to set priorities	58(26.3)	62(28.2)	67(30.5)	28(12.7)	5(2.5)
Ability to carry out task work efficiently	66(29.6)	58(26.4)	58(26.4)	29(13.2)	9(4.1)
Management of time very well	44(20.0)	86(39.1)	55(25.0)	24(10.9)	11(5.0)
Ability to start new task when old tasks were completed	54(24.5)	61(27.7)	68(30.9)	28(12.7)	9(4.1)
Challenging tasks when they were available	49(22.3)	73(33.2)	59(26.8)	34(75.5)	5(2.3)
keeping task-related knowledge up-to-date	54(24.5)	75(34.1)	59(26.8)	27(12.3)	5(2.3)
Keeping my work skills up-to-date	56(25.4)	58(26.4)	73(33.2)	20(9.1)	13(5.9)
Coming up with creative solutions for new problems	57(25.9)	49(22.3)	68(30.9)	35(15.9)	11(5.0)
Taking extra responsibilities	48(21.8)	64(29.1)	58(26.4)	37(16.8)	13(5.9)
Continually sought new challenges in my work	43(19.5)	53(24.1)	50(22.7)	37(16.8)	37(16.8)
Actively participating in meetings and/or consultations	39(17.7)	36(16.4)	36(16.4)	29(13.2)	80(36.4)
Effort to complained about minor work-related task at work	38(17.3)	46(20.9)	38(17.3)	34(15.5)	64(29.1)

Source: Field survey, 2022; exceptional (et); exceeds expectation (ee); meets expectation (me); improvement needed; (im); unsatisfactory (us)

Table 6: Correlation Matrix of Variables and Alpha Coefficient.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	1								
2. Sex	.03*	1							
3. Marital status	.001**	.04*	1						
4. Educational status	.001**	.55	.001**	1					
5. Years of experience	.001**	.11	.001**	.001**	1				
6. Religion	.08	.001**	.70	.02*	.95	1			
7. Frequency of conflict	.30	.92	.32	.10	.53	.25	(.68)		
8. Ways of resolving conflict	.78	.87	.48	.39	.08	.002*	.001*	(.80)	
9. Task performance	.73	.03*	.75	.24	.68	.001*	.017*	.001**	(.74)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Figures at the diagonal/parenthesis are alpha coefficient values

Relationship between Types of Conflicts and Employee's Task Performance

Table 7 shows that displaced conflict affects employees' task performance by 68.0%. This result implies that conflicting employees directed their frustrations to other colleagues who were not involved in their conflict. However, displaced conflict should not be encouraged in institutions because of the damaging effects it has on employees' task performance.

These findings corroborate the work of Hussein and Al-Manmary (2019) that the existence of displaced conflict in an organization will not only affect task performance but also cause psychological and behavioral responses such as leaving the organization, work distress, lack of interest, and absentmindedness to work.

Table 7: Regression Analysis of Types of Conflict and Task Performance.

Variable	B	Standard Error	t-Value	Sig
Constant	54.9	4.83	11.3	0.00
Affective conflict	.60	1.23	.55	.58
Substantive conflict	1.19	1.17	1.01	.31
Conflict of interest	1.01	1.02	.99	.32
Conflict of value	.43	1.07	.40	.68
Goal conflict	.30	.92	.32	.74
Realistic conflict	1.08	1.05	1.01	.30
Institutional conflict	.31	.28	1.09	.27
Retributive conflict	1.29	1.07	1.24	.22
Misattributed	.86	.52	1.67	.10
Displaced conflict	1.70	.97	1.75	.02*
Number	220			
R	.26			
R ²	0.68			
ΔR ²	.022			
Df	10/203			

*p<0.05

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The most experienced workplace conflict among employees of Colleges of Agriculture in Southwest, Nigeria is affective and substantive conflict. While displaced conflict had a positive influence on task performance, affective and substantive conflict does not influence task performance, though experienced in the institutions. Investigating issues, finding acceptable solutions, and satisfying the needs of other colleagues were predominant ways of resolving conflict situations within the institutions.

Employees in the study area will highly be effective in performing their tasks if displaced, affective and substantive workplace conflict are managed to the barest minimum. Hence, the management of the institution should discourage the prevalence of displaced conflict and sensitize the employees of conflict management to improve the administrative and task performance on the institutional goals.

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