



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEES' PRODUCTIVITY AMONG BUSINESS EDUCATORS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN CROSS RIVER STATE

AGNES AWOLI EWURU, MAUREEN BARONG ABANG, USMAN SHEHU AND CATHERINE ABUA
Email: ¹agewuru@yahoo.com, ²abangmaureen1@gmail.com

(Received 3, June 2024; Revision Accepted 27, July 2024)

ABSTRACT

The study determined the relationship that exists between conflict management and employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State. In other to achieve this purpose, the study was guided by three specific purposes, three research questions and three null hypotheses were formulated. Correlational research design was adopted. The population of study comprised 38 respondents made up of 30 business educators from FCE Obudu and 8 from COE Akamkpa respectively. The entire population was studied hence no sampling for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher made questionnaire titled: Conflict Management and Employees' Productivity Questionnaire (CMEPQ) and was validated by three experts, from the Department of Vocational Education University of Calabar. Data collected was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test null hypotheses at .05 levels of significance. Findings of the study showed collaboration, competition and compromise style of conflict management significantly relate to employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State. It is recommended among others that employees' and authorities should learn to work together for the good of the establishment rather than insisting on personal goals.

KEY WORDS: Business educators, Conflict management, Employees productivity

INTRODUCTION

The success of every establishment resides with the employees. Establishments like Colleges of Education(COE) constitutes employees with varying backgrounds (both educational and otherwise), opinions, views, mindsets, intellects and goals/objectives brought under one umbrella with the sole aim of producing credible graduates.

To ensure success, George and Jones (2013) opined that, human resources at the disposal of the organization must be properly harnessed to effectively and efficiently utilize other organizations resources in driving the organization forward. The human resources (employees) in this case are business educators who are tasked with the delivery of different activities such as strategic workforce planning, leadership development,

Agnes Awoli Ewuru, Department of Business Education, Faculty of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

Maureen Barong Abang, Department of Business Education, Faculty of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

Usman Shehu, Beulah International School, Econ Iman Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

Catherine Abua, Department of Business Education, Faculty of Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education, University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

diversity, equity and inclusion, employee engagement, etc to ensure the achievement of institutional set goals; whose productivity may be evaluated in terms of output within a specific period of time. Typically, the productivity of a given employee can be assessed relatively to an average with employees doing similar work (Tochukwu & Ikenna, 2018). A highly productive workforce is essential to the success of any establishment, as it is the foundation upon which organizational achievement is built.

Employees' productivity means achieving more with less time and effort. It can also be referred to as an assessment of the efficiency of a worker or group of workers. According to Huttunen (2019), employee productivity it means that the members of staff will use their hours efficiently to undertake significant and relevant tasks which drive revenue and contribute to achieving goals. It therefore, means that being productive is more than accomplishing tasks rather it is getting important tasks completed consistently. Huttunen outlined the following as benefits of employee productivity thus: greater fulfillment, greater revenue generation, improved engagement, building a positive culture, among others.

The productivity of Business Educators is a key performance indicator, reflecting their ability to balance teaching, research and community development. According to Egbuta (2016), it is the employees that put into use all the resources and all factors of production for the achievement of the organization goals and objectives that can be termed productive. In trying to work effectively, a lot of things come to play such like disagreements or disputes between employees and within the organization. This is due to the fact that no two humans are the same as they vary in lifestyle, personality, beliefs, value systems and religion. The congregation of employees in an organization may see conflict arise regularly (Larey, 2014). Conflicts connote disagreement, quarrels, and disapproval. It is a situation where two or more parties are at loggerheads; not agreeing on a particular or range of situations or things. Mba (2013) points out that the word conflict brings to mind images such as antagonism, struggles between parties, opposition processes and threats to cooperation. It is a disagreement over social issues, beliefs and ideologies (Tillett and French, 2006 as cited in Okoli, Okeke and Nuel-Okoli, 2017). Conflict exists when there is a problematic situation, differing perceptions and desired

outcomes, interdependence, potential to adversely affect the relationship if unaddressed and a sense of urgency (Cahn and Abigail, 2007 as cited in Okoli et al, 2017). Conflict may arise because of litany of issues in Colleges of Education. Mgbekem (2004) posits that conflict could be as a result of task interdependence, scarce resources, goal incompatibility, communication failures, individual differences and poorly designed reward system. It could also be because of a clash between formal authority and power, disputes over how revenues should be divided, how the work should be done and how long and hard people should work (Oseremen and Osemeke, 2015). The authors further added that, there are also subtler forms of conflict involving rivalries, jealousies, personality clashes, role definitions, and struggles for power and favour.

This has necessitated the need for conflict management since the concept has become a hotly discussed topic in organizations around the globe. Furthermore, Nigeria is particularly volatile to conflict at workplaces in various organizations due to the diverse nature of its population and its acceptance of multiculturalism (Owolabi, 2015). Therefore, a clash of cultural values, beliefs and lifestyle can also lead to conflict among employees which can escalate if not properly managed.

In institutions like Colleges of Education, conflict occurs between various individuals because of their frequent interaction with each other. This can occur between employees, between the management and its employees, and between employees and the government. For instance, when employees go on strike it represents an escalated conflict between the management of the institution and the employees or the employees and government. Conflicts that occur in work places must be properly handled and resolved. Failure to do this can result in the conflict being blown out of proportion and this can lead to discord among employees (Okafor, 2015). Conflict presently constitutes a menacing factor in academic life in Nigeria. Schools frequently appear to be at the centre of tension, this could be attributed to a manifestation of problems in the general policy. Examples can be seen in the frequent ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) strikes that occur in tertiary institutions in the country almost on a yearly basis. According to Egberigbe (2009), a major cause of this repeated conflict is the failure of the Nigerian

Government to meet the demands of Nigerian Lecturers and provide them with the necessary motivation to be able to carry out their duties effectively. This has negative effect on the lecturers' productivity which on a long run affects the students as well since they are the major stakeholders. The need for conflict management is even more pressing in the academic sector where the "leaders of tomorrow" are raised because they need to be imparted with knowledge in a safe and serene environment free from distraction or disturbance (Ojiafor, 2013). Therefore, it is vital that conflicts are efficiently managed and/or reduced to the barest minimum in these institutions.

Conflict management is a skill every individual should possess especially for leaders or intending leaders (Waters, 2021). Conflict management can be defined as the use of processes, tools, and skills to find creative and respectful ways to manage disagreements and disputes (Alimba, 2017). It includes the ability to resolve conflict collaboratively through effective communication skills, such as active listening and assertive speaking. Alper, Tjosvold and Law (2000) defined the concept as the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting using various strategies, styles or approaches.

Conflict management strategies/styles would therefore mean the measures used to manage conflict in order to improve staff performance (Igbino, Odunayo, Falola, Olokundun and Opeyemi, 2019). Application of these measures would ensure conflict is managed to its barest minimum without affecting employees' productivity negatively and at the same time improve their performance. Thomas and Kilmann (2007) as cited in Benoliel (2017) identified five styles of managing conflict to include: competing, compromising, collaborating, avoiding and accommodating. These styles are generally accepted but for the purpose of this study, three of these strategies will be considered viz: collaborating, competing and compromising strategies/styles respectively.

Collaboration style of conflict management is a combination of being assertive and cooperative, those who collaborate attempt to work with others to identify a solution that fully satisfies everyone's concerns. This style of conflict management has

high concern for relationships and achievement of goals. Collaboration conflict management style is an excellent tool for helping resolve conflicts in the workplace amicably while ensuring the set goals and objectives are achieved (Fiori, 2021). This style of conflict management focuses on coming up with the most cooperative solution to conflicts. That means having an honest discussion about important issues with all the parties involved making sure that they all have their say. It also means listening carefully, exploring alternatives and maintaining a nonthreatening environment so everyone feels comfortable laying out their concerns in the open. Alimba (2017) reported that, there was a significant relationship between conflict level and teachers' productivity and that conflict level was found to make a significant relative contribution to teachers' productivity. In affirmation, Assbeihat (2016) also reported a positive relationship between collaboration among members and team performance. Similarly, May (2021) opined that, collaborating conflict style makes everyone feel heard and understood, fosters mutual respect, creative problem-solving; and strengthens working relationships. May further stated that the collaboration conflict style is ideal for situations where the conflict is about something significant, commitment is needed, or a relationship needs to be preserved. Quain (2018) highlights the following advantages of collaboration in conflict management: valuing and understanding all parties; fostering empathy and respect; and ensuring mutual satisfaction.

A study was conducted by Assbeihat (2016) on the impact of collaboration among members on team's performance in Al-Balqa Applied University, Jordan revealed that, teamwork has more importance in organizations as compare to the work done individually, to get the results efficiently and effectively. Also, there is a positive relationship between collaboration among members and team performance. In another study by Mboya, Kiplagat, and Ernest (2016), the scholars also reported that collaboration conflict management strategy was rated the best strategy of solving and averting conflicts in schools. It is a method that allows for togetherness with the administration, sacrifice of time, energies and resources.

Competition **style** of conflict management involves one party prioritizing their interests, pursuing their goals without regard for the needs, concerns, or perspectives of the other party

involved in the conflict. According to Ewuru and Ushie (2021), compensation is one of the key leading human resource management practices. Those who engage this style of conflict management are assertive, uncooperative and willing to pursue one's own concerns at another person's expense. Eilerman (2006) asserted that, while competing in conflict situations can be productive it can also lead to negative consequences such as strained relationship leading to resentment and retaliation, causes intimidation which inhibits important communication, discussion of alternative ideas and attempts at problem solving, and prioritizes the outcome over the relationship. Adding to the above, Shonk (2021) reiterated that, rather than recognizing the value of ensuring that each party walks away satisfied, disputants who adopt this style of conflict management focus narrowly on claiming as much as they can for themselves. Work conflicts can be very destructive and have negative impact on employees affecting their productivity for which they were employed for in the first place.

Compromise style of conflict management exhibit moderate concern for others and the ultimate goal, with a focus on achieving a reasonable middle ground where all the parties will be happy. It addresses an issue more directly than avoiding it but at the same time does not explore it in as much depth as collaboration (Assibeiha, 2021). It is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. This style aims to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties while maintaining some assertiveness and cooperativeness. Organizations will get high engagement from their employees if communication and relationships between employers and employees are done well, so that a positive perception is created Hasan, Nikmah, Nurbiya, Fiernaningshish and Wahyu (2021). Khatter, Bhatia and Rathore (2019) in a study revealed that, there was a significant impact of organizational culture on employee performance and certain attributes of organizational culture such as conflict management that have a significant positive impact on the performance of employees. Nowadays institutions are witnessing unprecedented change with many of its employees seeking greener pastures in places other than their mother land. As the challenge persist, the ability to attract, engage, develop and

retain employees has become increasingly important. Shankari and Subha (2016) observed that, the recent trend of increasing demand for work/life balance and changing relationship between employers and engaged employees are driving the need of understanding employees' engagement. This call for immediate settlement between employers and employees should any disagreement arises. Bamson and Zeb-Obipi (2019) in their study revealed that there is a positive and significant association between compromise conflict management style and cohesiveness; and problem solving. Engaged employees are an asset for the organization to achieve competitive advantage.

Every successful organization must create the capability to absorb conflict which is conflict management mechanism in order to minimize the rate of conflict occurrence and improve performance (Hart, 2000). Conversely, Rum, Troena, Hadiwidjono and Surachman (2013) opined that, one knowledge and skills that needs to be owned by leaders, managers, and administrators is conflict management skills. This is because unmanaged conflict may result in withdrawal of individuals and unwillingness on their part to participate in other groups or assist with various group action programmes in the organization (Mba, 2013). School setting is a living case where conflict is endemic and manifesting at different stages; with tendencies to induce either positive or negative outcome, depending on the level at which it is been operated. It has become necessary to investigate into various ways conflict can be successfully managed without leaving negative impacts on employees.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The aim of every organization is to have a workforce that is productive with the view to place the organization at an advantage over others. This is in view of the fact that productivity is needed for the survival of any organization. However, certain factors can hinder the organizational performance. In an academic institution such as college of education, productivity can be measured based on quality graduates' output. Therefore, considering the challenge of unemployment among Nigerian university graduates, business education graduates inclusive, it pertinent to raise concern whether low quality graduates, and of course, the perceived low productivity could be attributed to

organizational conflicts, especially those related to employer and employees.

It is a truism that conflicts occur in organisation. It is equally a truism that productivity of employees such as business educators in colleges of education can be hindered with consequences on students' performance, thus creating skill mismatch that is largely reported as a major cause of unemployment among graduates. The enhancement of productivity is therefore observed to have been hinged on effective conflicts management but this has however not been the case with conflicts occurring in tertiary institutions particularly Colleges of Education. Oftentimes, conflicts are mismanaged and the resultant effect is not always healthy. When it escalates, it leaves devastating effects on both the lecturers' productivity and students' academic performance. The researcher wonders if there are no better ways of resolving this endemic occurrence in Colleges of Education. It is in view of this that the researcher saw the need to carry out this study. The major problem lies in the inability of both employers and employees to manage these conflicts. This is a major problem which this research seeks to address.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Specifically, the study sought to

1. Determined the relationship between collaboration style of conflict management and employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.
2. Determined the relationship between competition style of conflict management and employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.
3. Determined the relationship between compromise style of conflict management and employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.

Statement of hypotheses

1. Collaboration style of conflict management does not significantly relate to employees'

productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.

2. Competition style of conflict management does not significantly relate to employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.

3. Compromise style of conflict management does not significantly relate to employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study adopted correlational research design and was carried out in Cross River State. The population of the study comprised of 38 Business Educators from two Colleges of Education (College of Education, Akamkpa -8 and Federal College of Education, Obudu - 30) in Cross River State. There was no sampling in this study as all the Business Educators (38) were involved in the study. The instrument for data collection was a researcher made questionnaire titled: Conflict Management and Employees' Productivity Questionnaire (CMEPQ). The questionnaire was designed under a four-point rating scale with the responses of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) and was made up of 20 items containing information on the research variables. The instrument was validated by three experts from Department of Business Education, University of Calabar. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of .91 using test retest method and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis. Data was analyzed using mean to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using PPMC at .05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Hypotheses

Collaboration style of conflict management does not significantly relate to employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.

Data for testing the null hypothesis above is presented on Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing relationship between collaboration style of conflict management and employees' productivity

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	r-value	Sig-value	Decision
Collaboration (X)	38	13.50	3.07	36	.424	.008	*
Employees' productivity(Y)	38	14.16	4.57				

* = significant, $P > .05$

Analysis in Table 1 shows a weak positive relationship ($r = .42$). This implies that there is a weak positive relationship between collaboration style of conflict management and employees' productivity. Data on Table 1 also revealed that the calculated r-value is .424 with the significant value of .008, when compared with the significant level of 0.05 at 36 degree of freedom it was less. It was concluded that there is a significant relationship hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. There is therefore, a significant positive

relationship between collaboration style of conflict management and employees' productivity.

Competition style of conflict management does not significantly relate to employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.

Data for testing the null hypothesis above is presented on Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing relationship between competition style of conflict management and employees' productivity

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	r-value	Sig-value	Decision
Competition (X)	38	13.06	4.04	36	-.32	.001	*
Employees' productivity(Y)	38	14.16	4.57				

* = significant, $P > .05$

Analysis in Table 2 shows a negative relationship ($r = -.32$). This implies that there is a negative relationship between competition style of conflict management and employees' productivity. Data on Table 2 also revealed that the calculated r-value is -.32 with the significant value of .001, when compared with the significant level of 0.05 at 36 degree of freedom it was less. It was concluded that there is a significant relationship hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. There is therefore, a significant negative relationship between

competition style of conflict management and employees' productivity.

Compromise style of conflict management does not significantly relate to employees' productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education in Cross River State.

Data for testing the null hypothesis above is presented on Table 3.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing relationship between compromise style of conflict management and employees' productivity

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	r-value	Sig-value	Decision
Compromise (X)	38	12.42	4.38	36	.35	.031	*
Employees' productivity(Y)	38	14.16	4.57				

* = significant, $P > .05$

Analysis in Table 3 shows a positive relationship ($r = .35$). This implies that there is a positive relationship between compromise style of conflict management and employees' productivity. Data on Table 3 also revealed that the calculated r-value is .35 with the significant value of .031, when compared with the significant level of 0.05 at 36 degree of freedom it was less. It was concluded that there is a significant relationship hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. There is therefore, a significant positive relationship between compromise style of conflict management and employees' productivity.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results of the test of hypothesis 1 revealed that there is a weak positive relationship between collaboration style of conflict management and employees' productivity. This means that there is a significant relationship between the two variables. This also implies that the adoption of this style of conflict management could foster mutual respect, encourage active listening, promotes creative problem solving collaboration, improves work environment, enhances communication and so on among dispute parties bringing about increased productivity and job satisfaction. This finding agreed with the findings of Alimba (2017) who reported that, there was a significant relationship between conflict level and teachers' productivity and that conflict level was found to make a significant relative contribution to teachers' productivity. The finding also agreed with the findings of Assbeihat (2016) who reported that, there is a positive relationship between collaboration among members and team performance. Similarly, May (2021) also reported that, collaborating conflict style makes everyone feel heard and understood, fosters mutual respect, creative problem-solving; and strengthens working relationships.

Results of the test of hypothesis 2 showed that there exists a negative relationship between competition style of conflict management and employees' productivity. This means there is a significant relationship between the two variables. This implies that competition style of conflict management can drive productivity in Colleges of Education in Cross River State. a balanced competitive approach encourages individualism, drives ambition, promotes innovation, fosters accountability, which is likely to promote productivity among Business Educators. This finding agreed with the findings of Eilerman (2006) who reported that, while competing in conflict situations can be productive it can also lead to negative consequences such as strained relationship leading to resentment and retaliation, causes intimidation which inhibits important communication, discussion of alternative ideas and attempts at problem solving, and prioritizes the outcome over the relationship. The finding also agreed with the findings of Shonk (2021) who reported that, rather than recognizing the value of ensuring that each party walks away satisfied, disputants who adopt this style of conflict management focus narrowly on claiming as much as they can for themselves.

Results of the test of hypothesis 3 showed that there exists a positive relationship between compromise style of conflict management and employees' productivity. This means there is a significant relationship between the two variables. This implies that compromise style of conflict management can positively impact productivity among Business Educators fostering cooperation, reduced conflicts, increased job satisfaction, and supports work-life balance. This finding agreed with the findings of Hasan, Nikmah, Nurbiya, Fieraningshish and Wahyu (2021) who reported that, organizations will get high engagement from their employees if communication and relationships between employers and employees

are done well, so that a positive perception is created. The finding also agreed with the findings of Khatter, Bhatia and Rathore (2019) whose study report revealed that, there was a significant impact of organizational culture on employee performance; the study reports also revealed that, certain attributes of organizational culture such as conflict management have a significant positive impact on the performance of employees.

CONCLUSION

Effective conflict management is crucial for boosting employee productivity among business educators in Colleges of Education. When conflicts are managed well, educators can focus on their core responsibilities, leading to enhanced teaching quality, research productivity, and student satisfaction. Adopting effective conflict management styles such as collaboration, competition and compromise can create a positive work environment, foster healthy relationships, and increase overall productivity. Moreover, Colleges of Education can benefit from providing conflict management training and resources, leading to improved job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and enhanced institutional reputation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The college administration should foster a collaborative culture that promotes teamwork, mutual respect, and trust among Business Educators, reducing the likelihood of conflicts occurrence.
2. Staff development office of the institution should provide regular trainings and development programmes for staff on effective conflict management techniques, communication skills, and emotional intelligence geared towards enhancing the achievement of institutional goals and relationship rather selfish interests.
3. Heads of Department tasked with the responsibility of overseeing departmental affairs should help identify shared goals and interests to find mutually beneficial solutions for parties involved in conflict during settlement within the shortest time frame to prevent the havoc conflict inflicts on employees and the organization as a whole.

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