



ESPOUSED ART OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES AND ENGAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC STAFF OF SELECTED TECHNOLOGY-DRIVEN PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is ubiquitous irrespective of business, society and country. The nature of conflict management strategies followed by managers is partly influenced by the context, personal characteristics, cultural and family background. But conflict has different dimensions. With an objective of spreading higher education in Nigeria at present 75 private universities are working. Most of the universities try to follow a structured organizational system as competition is there. As a result, diagnostic process requires different approaches depending on context. It is against this that the study examined espoused art of conflict management styles and engagement of academic staff. For primary data, copies of questionnaire were distributed to various categories of academic staff of different private universities. Besides that, a structured questionnaire (see appendix-1) has been used. A scale of preference (1 to 5) has been used for the close-ended questions. The analyses were done through the use of the SMART Partial Least Square (PLS). In foremost cases the top management of the private universities is found to use the collaborating style with contingency leadership approach. The collaborative approach helps them to identify a common ground to solve the problem. This common ground helps to build an atmosphere where the parties involved in conflict gain a sense of victory. The emerging leaders and top managers in this sector should follow these strategies to become successful. A further research could be conducted with a same view in the public universities of Nigeria to improve the conflict situation of these universities.

Keywords: Conflict, Engagement, Management Styles.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is inevitable given the wide range of goals existing in organizations. Conflict may also arise when the behaviour of the employees are at variance with the values of the organisation (Starks, 2006). Thus, Bankole (2003) suggested that the interest of the employer does not in most cases conform with the interest of workers, while employer seeks to make more profit at lowest cost, employees are more interested in maximizing their own gain through remuneration increase. This often leads to a clash of interest thereby resulting to conflict. Also in every organisation where employees and employers of different background and interest have to interact in the collective effort towards achieving a set of goals, conflict is bound to occur (Karatepe 2013). Conflicts arise when two or more individuals, groups, communities, or nations pursue mutually exclusive goals. Often times, the underlying factors include a scarcity of resources, a clash of interests, incongruence of values, standards and principles, and a perception of being displaced by other parties in pursuit of desired goals. Conflicts can originate within an entity resulting in intra-personal, intra-group or intranational conflicts; or they could reflect incompatible actions between contrasting groups or persons leading to interpersonal, intergroup or international conflicts.

Conflict can be positive or negative that is why there is need for effective conflict management strategies (Uwa, 2014). Contrary to the traditional view of conflict, It cannot be generally concluded that conflict is destructive, conflict can be constructive when properly managed and it can become destructive when parties fail to recognize and accept the diverse views of one another which results to destructive effect on the organisation, disrupting its goals and objectives (Igbino, 2015). So any conflict that is not properly managed can degenerate into dysfunctional conflict (Oni-Ojo and Roland-Otaru, 2013). Thus, there is the need to examine conflict management and its implication for the performance of staff in private universities.

But conflict has different dimensions. As a result, diagnostic process requires different approaches depending on context. With an objective of spreading higher education in Nigeria at present 75 private universities are working. Most of the universities try to follow a structured organizational system as competition is there. Considering the business rules, objectives and formal system each and every university must follow a hierarchy structure. According to that structure the top management plays the vital role to manage both administrative and academic personnel. Universities have achieved a position in and trust of the society by their performance. Like other business firms, top management is liable to earn profit as well as to meet the expectation of different groups: administration, students, faculties and owners. However, from 1999 to 2016, a very few unrest has been observed in these private universities. Definitely top management in these universities follow effective conflict management strategies.

The need for private universities in Nigeria has been enhanced by a number of factors such as incessant strike, increased in faculty-centred learning, infrastructural defects, and congestion of students in the classroom among other few. These among Other reasons could be responsible for the encouragement of private universities in Nigeria by National University Commission (NUC). Across the globe, it has become evident that the private universities have been responding to the changing and growing demand of admitting qualified candidates. A disturbing fact that has emerged is that many of the private universities make use of external research supervisors and enrol a large number of doctoral students. Studies have also revealed the following challenges faced by private universities in the order of seriousness: (1) High cost of faculty and staff development and training, (2) Lack of adequate finances needed for growth, (3) Lack of well-resourced libraries, (4) Inability to retain top quality faculty and

staff, (5) Lack of adequate teaching and learning equipment (projectors, computers, textbooks, etc.), (6) Inadequate infrastructure (lecture halls, residence halls, offices, etc.), (7) Problems with accrediting bodies, (8) Lack of adequate human resource (understaffing), (9) Low students intake, and (10) Low remuneration and welfare packages for employees.

The phenomenon of brain drain is worsened by the low reward of staff increasing workloads and teacher-pupil ratio—a corollary of system expansion, student's irredentism and teacher militancy. Brain drain has in turn been compounded by lack of capacities for managing the dynamic and complex university system. As a result, the private universities have engaged in several forms of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts with serious consequential-effects on the engagement of faculty resulting in job dissatisfaction, low optimism, depression, frustration, reduced collaboration, passive/aggressive behaviour (Cram & MacWilliams, 2011), inefficient management credibility, lack of commitment, distrust and low productivity. It is against this background that this study espoused the art of conflict resolution styles and engagement of academic staff.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conflict defined

Conflict is a procedure that is mandatory to occur wherever individuals communicate with each other (Mohammed Alzahrami, 2013). Conflict is an intricate entity that arises frequently and has an unavoidable social presence which pervades the very essence of human and organizational life (Wanyonyi, Kimani, Amuhaya, (2015). Conflict is the differences between individuals which could be has a result of opinions, beliefs and resources (Cross, Names and Beck, 1979). Rahim (2001) explained conflict as a diverse way in which there is a struggle which could be internal or external among the social entities. According to Albert (2011), emphasized that there are prolific and disastrous conflicts in work place, conflict is optimistic when practically deliberated by the individuals involved and agreeable terms are grasped. He averred also that when conflicts is well handled there is a positive response from the employees, but if it is the other side there will be a lack of commitment from the employees.

2.2. Conflict Management defined

Conflict management is the application of resolution and stimulation techniques to regulate the level and impact of disruptive conflict within an entity, while harnessing the more positive and constructive aspects of collaboration, cooperation and compromise. It is a process that seeks to remove cognitive barriers to agreement and group synergy. Thus, Ekpou explained that it is the way one handles, manages conflict that will determine its effects. According to Roger (1997) conflict has its positive aspect: it generates energy, encourages initiatives and promotes new ideas. However, it also has its negative aspect of depriving an organisation from achieving its goals by causing effort to be misdirected against colleagues. The best solution for the attainment of organisational goals and objectives should be the strategy chosen to manage the conflict. Ogunbameru (2008) identified five interpersonal conflict-handling styles that are made up of different combinations of cooperativeness and assertiveness.

2.3. The Avoidance Styles

The avoidance strategy is that response which is unconfident and unreasonable and a person using this strategy tries to stay out of conflict. This strategy might show the commitment to let the conflict work itself out, or it might display the person's dislike to stress, pressure and frustration. Avoidance style sometimes is suitable whereby there is need to minimise the hike

or upsurge of a conflict. According to McMahon (1994) it is when an individual extracts itself from any matter that involves conflict and also abandons individual objectives including the affiliations involved in the conflict. This style is also known as retreating or disregarding style (Abdul Fattah, Yaser Hasan and Yahya Abdul, 2017). According to Muhammad Asyraf and Hazril Izwar (2014) avoidance style is a process of by-passing an actual situation and it is suitable when an employee wants to reduce stress. Some individuals sometimes think that conflict is evil, irrelevant or destructive for its own, so this individuals shuns any contact with conflict (Certo, 1997). This individual's show lack of interest as if the conflict is not relevant and it hides its idea (Robbins, 1991). Employees who get involved in conflict with their employers are likely to react in avoidance behavior (Drake, Zammuto and Parasuaman, 1982). When both parties involved in conflict need to reflect on the causes of conflict Short-term avoidance is considered effective (Sashkin, 1995).

2.4. The Forcing Style

This style shows a win-lose approach whereby one side must win, and by necessity, one side must loose. It refers to the behaviour that is confident and reasonable. People who employ this style attempt to achieve their personal goals with no concern for others. The forcing style often involves element of power and dominance thereby facilitating the achievement of individuals' personal goals. This strategy occurs when an individual contemplates that his or her perception is harmful to others (Friedman et al., 2000). According to Alzawahreh and Khasawneh (2011) dominating manners are associated to hostility. This is a domination strategy where the competitors have controls and powers to enforce their views and interest over other parties (Muhammad Asyraf and Hazril Izwar, 2014). While executing this strategy employees are mandated to follow their superior's instruction (Muhammad Asyraf and Hazril Izwar, 2014). This strategy is more useful when there are emergency needs that requires fast response with limited time, although this strategy is always resisted by employees (Muhammad Asyraf and Hazril Izwar, 2014). However, like avoidance, forcing tends to result in unfavourable evaluations by others.

2.5. The Accommodation Style

The behavior that is mutual and collective but lacks strong-will or confidence concerning the person's own outcome or result is referred to as the accommodating strategy. Accommodation may depict a selfless act, a long-term strategy to promote collectiveness and interaction by the other person, or an acceptance of the wishes of others. However, accommodating people are favourably evaluated but may also be perceived as weak by individuals. According to Igbino (2016)) this strategy is utilized when an individual /party forfeits its needs for the other party/individual. It is known as accommodative strategy and also a lose-win approach. Relationship is more important to one party then the other, so it's willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the other party, just to see the other satisfied (Robbins, 1991).

2.6. The Collaborative Style

The collaborative strategy shows a win-win approach to interpersonal conflict. Collaboration refers to a behavior that is both mutual and strong-willed or confident. Collaborating occurs in situations whereby each party to a conflict collectively desires to fully satisfy the interest of all parties. Hence, the collaborative strategy depicts an intention to maximize the joint outcomes of the conflicting parties. According to Rahim (2002) this strategy is associated with sincerity, dissemination of information, problem solving, analysis of differences and seeking for substitutes that are satisfactory to both parties. However, this strategy is concerned with partnership amidst parties to reach a satisfactory solution (Rahim & Magner, 1995).

Integrating strategy refers to the competence of a manager to collaborate with his or her workers to profile a solution that satisfy their expectations (Igbinoba, 2016). 2002). this strategy is also known as collaboration whose major aim is to satisfy the wants of the both parties (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2007). Integrating strategy is much more appropriate in solving complex problems that a party can't solve only but collaborates with another party to provide solutions by trading opinions, information (Rahim, 2002). According to Alok, et al (2014) integrating strategy is considered to be the best in handling conflict because it prevents role conflict and motivates the employees within an organization through exchanges of ideas and transparent communication.

2.7. The Compromise Style

Traditionally, the compromise strategy involves a series of modification and consultations and it is based on a “give-and-take” process. It moderately but partially satisfies each person or group and it refers to the behavior that is collective and confident. People who use compromise strategy are likely to be evaluated favorably. According to Rahim (2002) it is a condition in which parties involved part with something in order to reach a joint suitable agreement. It is an approach that involves when both parties endeavors to handle their conflict by recognizing an answer which is partly pleasing to the parties but not completely pleasing to the parties (Igbinoba, 2016). Compromising approach refers to splitting the similarities, substituting and pursuing a quick middle-ground position (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Compromise can be recognized as “negotiating or transaction” (Muhammad Asyraf and Hazril Izwar, 2014). It can be administered when the disagreeing parties have equivalent authority and objectives with same importance. So therefore, no party can enforce its views over the other party and compromise is the only alternative. Moreover, in a case where there is limited time, this approach is very useful (Victor, David A, 2012). Compromise approach would permit both parties to rearrange the flow of work and agree to take on shared aspects of the duty so neither side is overloaded (Maughan, n.d). According to Girard and Koch (1996) this approach is only considered effective when the matters involved are temperately important. Unlike the collaborative style, compromise strategy does focus on the maximization of joint satisfaction, rather, it achieves moderate, but only partial, satisfaction for each party.

3. METHODOLOGY

Survey design was adopted and population of this study comprised academic staff of randomly selected private universities in Southwest Nigeria. Out of all the 75 private universities, only three top private universities were selected based on certain parameters which include quality of their education, technology adoption as well as the quality of their graduates as presented in Table 1. For primary data, copies of questionnaire were distributed to various categories of academic staff of technology-driven private universities. Besides that, a structured questionnaire (see appendix-1) has been used. A scale of preference (1 to 5) has been used for the close-ended questions. The analyses were done through the use of the SMART Partial Least Square (PLS).

Table 1 Academic Staff Population and Sample Size

S/N	Name of University	Academic Staff Population	Sample Size
1	Covenant University, Ota	535	111
2	Babcock University, Ilishan Remo	364	75
3	Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti	202	43
Total		1101	229

A sample size of 229 staff (academic) was achieved Using Mason (1978) formula for sample size determination. The use of adapted questionnaire was employed and it contained both open and close ended questions and also have sections that helped to achieve the research objectives. For external validity of the study, both internal and external reviewers will be employed to monitor the quality of the data-collection and the analyses processes so as to establish validation of evidences for significant findings and conclusions drawn in the study. The items were further validated using measurement models to establish construct reliability and validity as presented in Table 2 and Figure1 and 2 respectively.

Table 2 Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach_Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Reliability
Threshold	> 0.7	> 0.7	> 0.7	> 0.5
Accommodation	0.763	0.770	0.782	0.691
Avoidance	0.811	0.819	0.857	0.692
Collaboration	0.886	0.888	0.841	0.634
Competition	0.839	0.851	0.803	0.603
Compromising	0.794	0.815	0.830	0.691
Productivity	0.763	0.775	0.782	0.692

Basically, five (5) research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested in the study. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics of percentages, frequencies, and means while the hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics such as, measurement and structural models. The analyses were done through the use of the SMART Partial Least Square (PLS).

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The PLS-SEM path model was adopted to establish the impact of conflict management strategies (avoiding strategy, dominating strategy, compromising strategy, integrating strategy and obliging strategy) on the productivity of academic staff of a selected private University in Nigeria as presented in Figure 1.

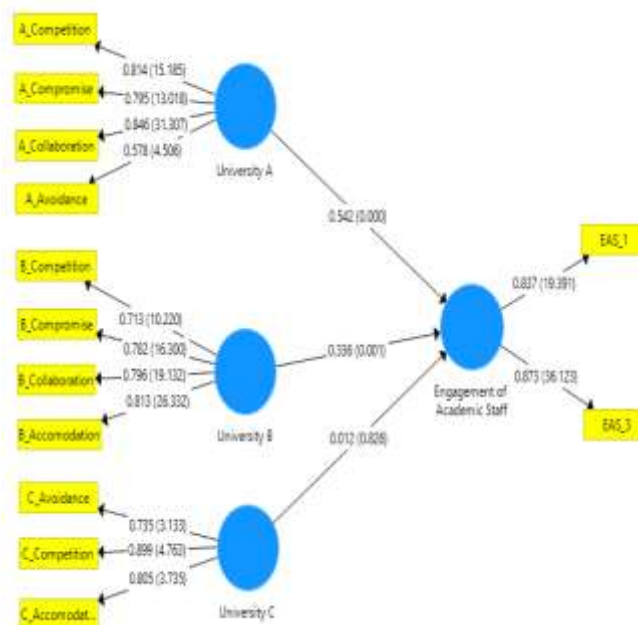


Figure 1 PLS-SEM Path Co-efficient Model

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Technology-Driven Private Universities in Nigeria

All the findings were held significant at 0.05 probability level. The idea of standardization was extended to a multivariate system, which possesses many properties, called partial regression coefficients. The term "path coefficient" indicates the use of a diagram-based (see Figure 2) approach to consider the possible causal linkage between of a variable assumed to be a cause on another variable assumed to be an effect) as presented in Table 3.

PATH CO-EFFICIENTS

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (OI/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
University A	0.542	0.555	0.093	5.845	0.000	Significant
University B	0.336	0.327	0.104	3.224	0.001	Significant
University C	0.012	0.002	0.053	0.219	0.826	Not Significant
R-Square	0.675					
R-Square Adj.	0.665					
Chi Square	261.159		SRMR = 0.063		NFI = 0.918	

Under each null hypothesis, bootstrapping resampling which indicates the statistical power of the proposed tests and their sensitivity with respect to size of the co-efficient has been performed to obtain the bootstrap approximation using the histogram path co-efficient. Hence, the histograms of the bootstrap approximations of the GoF distributions for testing the null hypotheses were presented in Figures 2, 3 and 4 respectively.

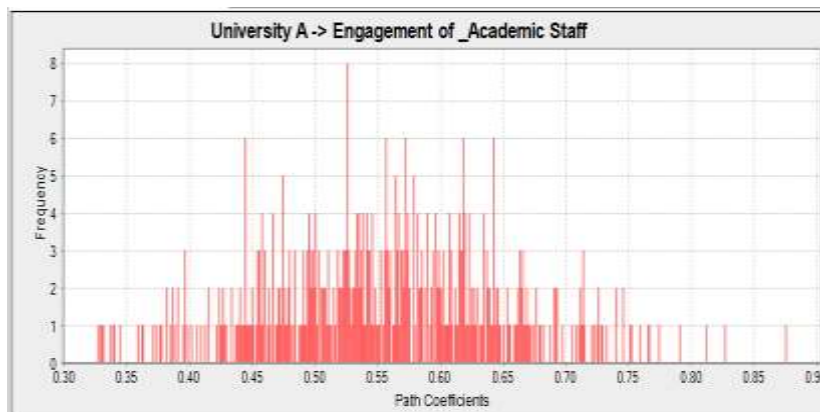


Figure 2 Histogram Path Co-efficient of Conflict Management and Engagement of Academic staff of University A

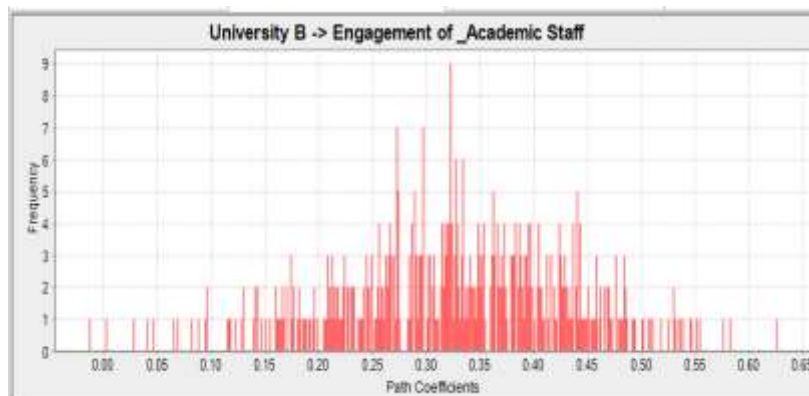


Figure 2 Histogram Path Co-Efficient Conflict Management and Engagement of Academic staff of University B

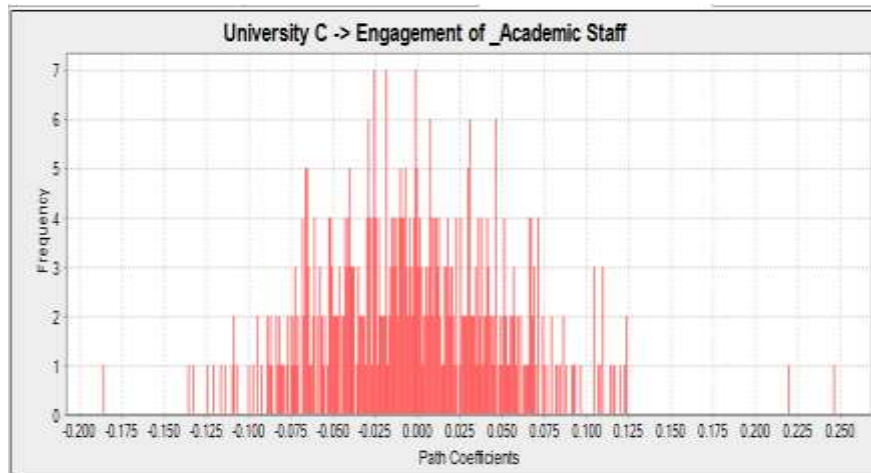


Figure 2 Histogram Path Co-Efficient Conflict Management and Engagement of Academic staff of University C

5. CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings revealed that management of the private universities is found to use the collaborating style which consistently helped them to identify a common ground to solve the problem. This common ground helps to build an atmosphere where the parties involved in conflict gain a sense of victory. Using these strategies the top management of the private universities have become successful to maintain a congenial environment in the organization where different interest groups actively involved in satisfying their needs and facilitate job engagement. A further research could be conducted with a same view in the public universities of Nigeria to improve the conflict situation of these universities. The finding of this study supports the works of Marsano (2003), Adebayo (2009) and Albert (2005) who asserted high relationship between the strategies employed in resolving conflict and staff engagement.

It was recommended that to facilitate a culture of openness, subordinates must first build new relationships to authority and management should make themselves more vulnerable to their subordinate. Moreso, The top management of the private universities follow Collaborating Style which is desirable because a university is the place of openness and of course the place of sharing information. With the present results, competing is not suitable for the university especially when people try to win the conflict at other's expense. Hence, collaborating and accommodating styles should be the major predictors of conflict management and this will go a long way in creating future strategies aimed at attracting and engaging staff in our universities.

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