

Human Relations and Organizational Conflict Resolution: A Study of Manufacturing Firms in Nigeria

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D.O.I: 10.56201/ijebm.v8.no6.2022.pg1.13

Abstract

Increasing uncertainty and complexity in the operating environment of organizations provide fertile ground for the beginning of conflict in the workplace. This study was conducted to examine the effect of human relations in resolving conflicts in an organisation using manufacturing firms in Delta State as a case study. The study, anchored on the human relations theory, adopted the survey research design hence data were collected through the use of questionnaires as research instrument.

Findings of the study indicate that human resources management style, employee's job description and alternative dispute resolution strategies all have positive effect in organizational conflict resolution in surveyed manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The study therefore concludes that positive human relation is important in resolving conflicts in an organisation and recommends amongst others the need for management to adopt the use of alternative dispute resolution strategies to avoid the attendant costs and manhour lost inherent in litigations

KEYWORDS: *Human Relations, Human Resources Management, Organisational Conflict, Alternative Dispute Resolution.*

Introduction

The commencement of conflict in the workplace is made possible by the complexity and ambiguity that are becoming more and more prevalent in the operating environments of businesses. Conflicts at work, including those brought on by harassment, discrimination, and personality conflicts (between coworkers, between coworkers and their bosses, particularly recently assigned managers), are rife (Adilo, 2019). Conflict among employees in a company is unavoidable. It can have a beneficial effect on employee happiness and organisational performance if it is managed effectively and serves as a catalyst for change. On the other hand, unresolved disagreement has a detrimental influence on both job performance and employee happiness. Organizational managers transmit the message that subpar work performance and unacceptable behaviour are acceptable when they disregard workplace dispute (Abdul & Sehar, 2015; Akkerman & Torenvlied, 2011). Organizational life includes conflict, which can be between individuals, between individuals and groups, or between groups. Although conflict is typically seen as dysfunctional, it can also be advantageous because it may lead to various viewpoints on a given subject. Conflict can have both good and bad impacts. Industrial conflict, in the opinion of Dhiaulhaq, McCarthy and Yasmi (2018), can be advantageous if it fosters innovation, fresh perspectives on established issues, the articulation of opposing viewpoints, and the growth of interpersonal conflict management skills in people. According to Dhiaulhaq et al. (2018), conflict can be harmful if it breeds resistance to change, causes strife in interpersonal or organisational relationships, encourages distrust, heightens feelings of helplessness, or widens gaps in understanding. When different people or groups have goals, interests, or values that are incompatible with one another or with the organization's aims, there is conflict, which is defined as the presence of disharmony. It is a process of communication and a natural outcome of transactional relationships that manifests as disagreement and discord with and between individuals and groups at work. As long as people will compete for jobs, power, recognition, and security, workplace conflict will exist in any business (Gomathy, Alitha, Sowjanya, & Jahnavi, 2022).

In order to achieve or meet the goals and objectives of the organisation, it is crucial for the human resources department to effectively plan, control, design, and delegate authority and tasks to diverse employees. In order to avoid conflict in tasks, duties, obligations, and authorities, the human resources department in any firm is expected to employ human resources management skills and practises. Every facet of the human resources department, the line staff, the subordinate staffs, or the clerks must be taken into account as the company may wish to diverge from its initial objective (Gomathy & Hemalatha, 2021). This suggests that a properly handled dispute seeks to enhance organisations in order to encourage performance in the workplace. Effective conflict management techniques can reveal flaws in corporate decision-making, forcing the establishment to make changes and look for answers. Therefore, management has a responsibility to resolve conflicts effectively in order to improve organisational performance because doing so will lead to improved collaboration, communication, and time management, which will all boost business productivity (Ekankumo & Koye, 2014; Obasan, 2011; Iyamu & Salami, 2011; Oseremen & Osemeke, 2015).

Statement of Problem

While workplace conflict does not currently receive much attention in the literature on people and human resources management, there is a solid consensus that firms will likely pay a significant price if workplace issues are not resolved successfully (Oseremen & Osemeke, 2015; Adilo, 2019; Gomathy, Alitha, Sowjanya, & Jahnavi, 2022). At the extreme, days can be lost as a result of some kind of strike, but more often, sickness and absence rates may rise, and management-employee relations may become tense, if not hostile. Workplace conflict may even prevent firms from designing flexible organisational structures that will help them flourish in the competitive business world of today. Although there is broad consensus regarding the potentially negative impacts of conflict, there is no universally accepted definition of what makes up an efficient system for managing or resolving conflicts.

Findings from empirical study have shed light on the causes of workplace conflict. According to Adilo (2019), the Nigerian service sector has had disputes because of a lack of resources, disparate expectations, competitiveness, a lack of cooperation, interconnectedness, and communication issues. In addition, Obasan (2011) identified a number of causal factors for workplace conflict in the Nigerian banking industry, including unacceptable employment terms, poor management-worker relations, a lack of employee consultation before important decisions that affect them, management's anti-union stance, and a lack of efficient conflict prevention mechanisms. Thus, economic and aim incompatibilities are the main causes of organisational conflicts at work. Internal (intrapersonal) and interpersonal disputes are occupying so much time and attention in many Nigerian enterprises today, especially in the manufacturing sector, that corporate businesses are beginning to appear as though conflict is their main business (Oseremen & Osemeke, 2015). This development is partly attributable to the leaders of Nigerian workplaces' incapacity to manage conflict as methodically as they manage information and human resources in order to improve and not hinder organisational performance. Instead, conflict is treated as a local issue and is evaluated and managed piecemeal. Conflict has become dysfunctional in certain businesses due to the inability to view, manage, and resolve workplace disputes in a systematic manner. This is demonstrated by a variety of workplace behaviours, such as the high frequency of strikes, unhealthy rivalry between and among sub-units and individuals within an organisation, sabotage at work, labour turnover, absenteeism, lack of productivity, general inefficiency, high rate of industrial accidents, low morale, withholding of critical information, and a host of others (Adilo, 2019; Oseremen & Osemeke, 2015). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the part that interpersonal relationships play in resolving conflicts inside an organization.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of human relations on organizational conflict resolution using manufacturing companies in Delta State. The specific objectives include:

- i. Examine the effect of human resources management style in resolving organizational conflict;
- ii. Find out the how employee task definition affects organizational conflict resolution; and

- iii. Ascertain to what extent alternative dispute resolution strategy influence organizational conflict.

Literature Review

Organizational Conflict

Disagreement, complaint, dispute, and crises are all synonyms for organisational conflict (Etim & Okey, 2013). Conflict is a state of affairs that people, groups, or nations believe to be unfair and which they oppose or complain about. Conflict is a disagreement between individuals or groups inside an organisation that results from their frequent separate work activities as well as their diverse preferences, objectives, values, or worldviews (Ekankumo & Koye, 2014). Conflict is a condition of intense disagreement and contention over a matter that at least one of the persons concerned considers to be significant (Schramm-Nealsen, 2022). Its presence causes discord inside the company. When there are people involved, conflict is said to be inevitable. Conflict is a constant and inescapable aspect of organisational existence. According to Obasan (2011), organisational or industrial conflict refers to the entire spectrum of actions and attitudes that are opposed between owners or managers and employees on the one hand, and each other. According to the Centre for Multiparty Democracy (2020), conflict arises when two or more people, groups, or organisations interact and at least one side perceives that the other side's thoughts, ideas, perceptions, feelings, or wills are in conflict with their own and that they are preventing them from achieving their goals.

In conclusion, conflict is described in the context of working relationships as unavoidable conflicts among any or all of the participants in the workplace. The perspectives of different authors on the idea of conflict and industrial disputes have proven that conflict is unavoidable and that it is not inherently dysfunctional; rather, its outcome relies on how the parties involved handle or respond to it. However, the conceptualization or broader view of the origins, role, and structure of this relationship will determine whether conflict is perceived as core or incidental to the employment relationship.

Human Relations

The success of a person's profession depends on their understanding of the concept of human interactions. It is characterised as interactions with or between people, particularly at work. Developing these abilities is crucial because a company's organisational structure depends on positive interpersonal relationships. Human relations should aim to maximise employee happiness and productivity, not to boost the latter at the expense of the former. Human resources largely ignores employee interactions and views them as resources for the business (Adilo, 2019; Gomathy, et al., 2022; Uwa, 2014). Human relations refers to the study of how individuals interact with one another in social contexts, particularly at work, and how to enhance interpersonal skills and empathy. The goal of human relations, according to Adilo (2019), is to inspire teamwork among employees in businesses so that everyone can successfully accomplish their goals and those of the company. Human relations, according to Mizanur and Tanjela (2015), is the process of effectively motivating people in a situation in order to establish a balance of goals that would increase human satisfaction and support organisational objectives.

Human Resources Management Style

The strategic approach to managing people in a company or organisation effectively and efficiently so that they contribute to their organization's ability to compete favourably is known as human resource management (HRM). It is created to maximise worker performance in support of an employer's strategic goals (Elenkov, 2002). Employing cutting-edge HRM techniques will be necessary for firms to manage human resources effectively. From one organisation to the next and from one nation to the next, HRM practises vary. According to research, HRM approaches can be broadly categorised as "best practise," "high-performance," "sophisticated," or "professional" (De Kok & Uhlaner, 2011; Heneman & Berkley, 2009; Gnan & Songini, 2003). One open subject in HRM research, according to Chandler and McEvoy (2000), is if there is a particular set of guidelines or procedures that serves as a "universally superior strategy" to managing personnel. Some HRM strategies, either alone or in combination, are allegedly linked to increased organisational performance globally, according to best practise or high commitment beliefs. Employment security, selective recruiting, self-managed teams/teamwork, high compensation contingent on organisational performance, comprehensive training, reduction in status difference, and exchange of information were the seven strategies that Chien (2014) recognised as excellent practises. An "HRM bundle" of essential practises is identified by Redman and Matthews (2018) as supporting service organisations' quality strategies. Other crucial HRM practises mentioned by Saxena and Tiwari (2009) include career development, pay and benefits, interactions between employers and employees, recognition through rewards, and culture building.

Employee Tasks Description

Job descriptions for employees are written statements that outline the responsibilities, tasks, qualifications needed, working hours, and reporting structures for a specific position (Farahbod, Salimi, & Dorostkar, 2013). Job descriptions are created using objective data from job analyses, knowledge of the competencies and abilities required to do a task, and the requirement for an organisation to increase performance and productivity at work (Mollel, Mulongo, & Razia, 2007). Writing a job description that is effective gives employers the chance to explain their company's direction to employees and to let them know where they fit in the organization's overall scheme. In order to attain clarity of purpose and improved performance, an effective job description aids in coordinating an employee's goals with those of the business (Khan, Ishaq, & Nawaz, 2013).

In the areas of HRM such as job grading and classification, career routes, career advancements, addressing grievances relating to the duties and obligations at the workplace, work measurement, and working improvements, effective job descriptions are highly helpful. Employee responsibilities also include the establishment of performance standards, authority restrictions, training and development opportunities, creating a positive work environment, and fostering open lines of communication between employees and customers as well as between them and their employers (Farahbod, Salimi, & Dorostkar, 2013). Ishaq (2015) continued by stating that knowledge on effective job descriptions will be helpful for organisational change, performance management, job redesign, and job evaluation. Ishaq (2015) asserts that businesses should

arrange their job descriptions to support the achievement of their goals and objectives in order to prevent duplication of effort and overlap of responsibilities.

Alternative Dispute Resolution Strategy

Alternative Issue Resolution (ADR) is the practise of seeking out non-litigation alternatives to resolve a civil or business dispute because litigation may be expensive, time-consuming, and labor-intensive (Marchington et al. 2016). The use of ADR mechanisms and litigation must be done one at a time; they cannot coexist. ADR should typically be used before filing a lawsuit, but depending on the specifics of each case, it may even be used before a decision has been made. The Arbitration and Conciliation Act, which is applicable to the entire Nigerian federation, regulates alternative dispute resolution. Section 19 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended), which calls for the resolution of international conflicts by arbitration, mediation, conciliation, negotiation, and adjudication, also offers legal support for ADR.

Theoretical Framework

The human relations theory is the foundation of this study. Early in the 1920s, the human relations theory of management got its start. Today, it is essential to every firm, and employee success depends on their mastery of the relevant ideas and abilities. According to the human relations management philosophy, people want to be a member of a team that fosters growth and development. As a result, if workers feel appreciated and are driven to engage, they will view their work as important and become more productive, producing high-quality work (Colvin, 2012).

This theory is deemed suitable for this research study because managing people with various personality types, worldviews, and aims can make it very difficult, if not impossible, to attain universal agreement. Managers must therefore feel at ease and be knowledgeable about dispute resolution. Corporate management must be able to consider individual viewpoints and ensure that every person feels heard and understood when dissent occurs. Management must collaborate with all parties to develop a solution where everyone is at ease moving forward after analysing the supplied information. Even though it's hard to always make everyone happy, effective conflict resolution techniques help preserve or restore team cohesion when disagreements arise.

Empirical Review

The connection between human interactions and conflict resolution has received a lot of attention in management literature. For instance, Gomathy et al. (2022) aimed to establish the links that exist among conflict operation, communication, and connections at work by providing empirical defence. 132 employees from two major manufacturing enterprises in Ghana were tested using the cross-sectional check approach, and the findings showed a substantial beneficial association between conflict operation and communication at the plant. The study also showed a strong correlation between the functioning of conflict and relationships at work. Similar to this, Adilo (2019) examined organisational performance and conflict management with particular reference to a few breweries in the South East of Nigeria. The study demonstrated a strong positive association between organisational performance and all of the conflict management techniques

examined, including negotiation, collective bargaining, joint consultation, and alternative dispute resolution. As an evaluation research, Obasan (2011) conducted an empirical investigation of the effect of conflict management on company productivity. Utilizing a student t-distribution to determine the significance of 82 responses and a selective selection strategy to distribute the questionnaire to 150 respondents representing all First Bank of Nigeria Plc staff cadres (Lagos Branch). It was discovered that issues with perception and values are the main causes of conflict within the company. An empirical study on resolving labour disputes in the Nigerian teaching hospitals was conducted by Ekankumo and Koye (2014). They came to the conclusion that management would achieve greater results if they encouraged collaboration by establishing a labour management committee (LMC), which would meet frequently to debate and find solutions to concerns that might not be covered by collective bargaining. Olukayode (2015) used data from manufacturing companies in Nigeria to assess the effect of workplace conflict management on organisational performance. 250 employees were chosen as participants using the stratified random selection technique. The results of the empirical testing indicated a considerably favourable link between conflict management tactics (collective bargaining, compromise, and accommodation) and organisational performance using Spearman correlation analysis. Organizational performance was negatively affected by non-integrative conflict management techniques (competition, domination, and avoidance). The outcome of the regression analysis also showed that there was a strong positive link between collective bargaining approach and organisational performance. Additionally, the results of the study showed that conflicts in the workplace were caused by a variety of organisational experiences based on economic and goal incompatibility orientations. Dispute between the union and management was shown to be the most common kind of industrial conflict in the company. Osabiya (2015) investigated Nigeria's public sector's approach to handling conflicts. The study concentrated on the factors that influenced an organization's choice to seek out an alternative to standard disciplinary and grievance procedures for addressing conflict. It also examined the facilitators and barriers to integrating mediation into workplace culture and practise. To ascertain the cause of conflict and its resolution in the Nigerian Public Service, two hypotheses were developed. Descriptive statistics are used in the study to examine the information gathered from a sample of 170 Nigerian Public Service workers. The results demonstrated that disputes can be settled through agreements between employees and management. Conflict in a company might result from different leadership philosophies. Alternative dispute resolution and the effectiveness of Shell Nigeria Plc's Port Harcourt Branch were studied by Udoh, Opusunju, and Dusu (2016). The primary goal is to assess the effectiveness of alternative dispute resolution on the Port Harcourt branch of Shell Nigeria Plc. Data were gathered from primary sources at specific points in time. The Ordinary Least Square method was used, and the results show that mediation, arbitration, and other forms of alternative dispute resolution had a considerable positive impact on the Port Harcourt branch of Shell Nigeria Plc. Okpu and Jaja (2014) looked at worker commitment and group consultation in the Nigerian banking sector. A sample size of 357 employees from the banks in Nigeria's South-South region were used as respondents for the cross-sectional survey. According to the results of the Spearman Rank Order Correlation, Joint Consultation had a strong positive correlation with employees' affective commitment but no significant association with their continuation and normative commitment. According to the study, employees who participate in Joint Consultation show limited continuity and normative commitment but are emotionally engaged to their firms.

Finally, Turkalj, Fosic, Dujak, and Strossmayer (2013) analysed conflict management in organisations by analysing several conflict management approaches and illustrating visually the link between the intensity of conflict and organisational performance. They used structured questionnaires and secondary sources to get their data. According to the study's findings, managers and employees should be able to discern between conflicts that are personality-focused and those that are business-focused. They should then work to maximise conflict that is business-focused while minimising conflict that is personality-focused.

Gap in Literature

Numerous empirical studies have been carried out to investigate the connection between organisational conflict resolution. Many of the research focused on the impact of conflict management and resolution on organisational performance, as can be observed from the literature review. It is also noted that the majority of earlier studies on the relationship between employee commitment, productivity, and performance used a range of conflict management strategies.

The analysis of the literature also revealed that there is no agreement among researchers about how conflict resolution affects organisational outcomes. Given that the majority of earlier studies focused on how conflict management or resolution can affect employees' productivity and, consequently, business success, a gap in the literature has emerged. By studying how human interactions inside the company, as proxied by human resources management styles, job description, and alternative dispute, aid in minimising conflict within the business, this study clearly departs from earlier studies.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted the survey research design. The population of the study is made up of employees of manufacturing companies in Delta State, Nigeria. Using a simple random sampling technique, 10 employees were selected from 20 manufacturing companies in Delta State. A structured questionnaire was adopted as an instrument of data collection for the study. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentages while the hypotheses formulated for the study were tested using the chi-square analysis at 5% level of significance.

Data Analysis and Results

There were 200 copies of the questionnaires issued in all. Eighty-nine percent of the completed questionnaires—128 total—were collected and used for the study. According to the respondents' demographic breakdown, men make up 54% of the population while women make up 46%. The distribution also reveals that age groups 30 and under have the highest percentage (38%) and 51 and older have the lowest percentage (11%) of respondents.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: Human resources management style does not assist in resolving organizational conflict.

Table 1. Hypothesis One Table Statistics

Questions➔	1	2	3	4	5	OE	EE	(OE-EE)	(OE-EE) ²
Strongly Agree	79	72	81	79	48	359	222.5	136.5	18632.3
Agree	35	15	24	32	20	126	222.5	-96.5	9312.25
Disagree	7	54	47	9	49	166	222.5	-56.5	3192.25
Strongly Disagree	57	37	26	58	61	239	222.5	16.5	272.25
Total	178	178	178	178	178	890	890		31409

X² cal. (OE-EE)²/EE	35.291
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KEY: X² = Chi-square, OE = Observed Frequency, EE = Expected Frequency.

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Decision: From the table, the calculated X² is 35.291. The X² table value, given a degree of freedom of 12 and 0.05 significant level is 21.026 Since the calculated chi square value is more than the table value (35.291>21.026) we therefore have enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. This implies that human resources management style does assist in resolving organizational conflict in manufacturing firms in Delta State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two: Employee tasks definition does not have positive effect on organizational conflict resolution

Table 2: Hypothesis Two Table Statistics

Questions →	1	2	3	4	5	OE	EE	(OE-EE)	(OE-EE) ²
Strongly Agree	96	96	101	115	89	497	222.5	274.5	75350.3
Agree	49	34	39	43	46	211	222.5	-11.5	132.25
Disagree	11	29	27	11	14	92	222.5	-130.5	17030.3
Strongly Disagree	22	19	11	9	29	90	222.5	-132.5	17556.3
Total	178	178	178	178	178	890	890		110069
X² cal. (OE-EE)²/EE									123.67

KEY: X² = Chi-square, OE = Observed Frequency, EE = Expected Frequency.

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Decision: From the chi square table, the critical value is 21.026 using 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 12. The X² calculated from the above table is 123.67. Since the calculated value is more than the critical value, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative which states that employee tasks definition does have a positive effect on organizational conflict resolution

Hypothesis Three: Alternative dispute resolution strategy does not have a positive influence in resolving organizational conflict.

Table 3: Hypothesis One Table Statistics

Questions →	1	2	3	4	5	OE	EE	(OE-EE)	(OE-EE) ²
Strongly Agree	92	23	63	41	88	307	222.5	84.5	7140.25
Agree	36	120	43	51	32	282	222.5	59.5	3540.25
Disagree	39	25	46	57	24	191	222.5	-31.5	992.25
Strongly Disagree	11	10	26	29	34	110	222.5	-112.5	12656.3
Total	178	178	178	178	178	890	890		24329
X² cal. (OE-EE)²/EE									27.33

KEY: X² = Chi-square, OE = Observed Frequency, EE = Expected Frequency.

Source: Fieldwork, 2022.

Decision: From the chi square table, the critical value is 21.026 using 0.05 level of significance and degree of freedom of 12. The X² calculated from the above table is 27.33. Since the calculated value is more than the critical value, we therefore reject the null hypothesis and accept

the alternative which states that alternative dispute resolution strategy does have a positive influence in resolving organizational conflict.

Discussion of Findings

The study examines the association between human relations and organizational conflict resolution using manufacturing companies in Delta State as a case study.. Findings of the study are discussed below:

Firstly, the study revealed that a good human resources management system is well practiced in the surveyed manufacturing firms. It was also observed that there is an effective job description schedule in place which defines employees' roles and responsibilities. Based on survey results, it can be established that the manufacturing firms implement the use of alternative dispute resolution strategy before thinking of escalating any official issues to the law court. Secondly, the study is also able to establish that human resources management styles and practices have a significant influence on the resolution of organization conflicts in the bank. The implication of this finding is that when a firm adopts the inclusive human resources management style, it encourages harmony and reduces conflict in the organization. Okpu and Jaja (2014), Ekankumo and Koye (2014), and Adilo (2019) in their separate empirical studies reported similar results.

Further, the study also revealed from the statistics that employee's job description enhances harmony and reduces the likelihood of conflict in the organisation. The implication of this finding when an employee's job is clearly specified, there will be minimal conflict resulting from encroachment or neglect of duties. Studies such as (Turkalj, Fosic, Dujak & Strossmayer, 2013; Okereke, 2014) conform with this result. Finally, the study revealed that effective implementation of alternative dispute resolution strategy enhances harmony and can help in minimizing organizational conflict. This implies that when management ensures that disputes are resolved amicably without recourse to courts, there will be goal alignment in the organization thus promoting peace among staff. This result is in agreement with Gomathy et al. (2022).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this research was to empirically examine the role of human relations in resolving conflicts in an organisation. In achieving this aim, the study obtained data through survey on variables which were believed to have relationship with human relations and organizational conflict resolution. The factors this study focused on are human resources management style, employee job description and alternative dispute resolution strategies.

Findings showed that human resources management style, employee's job description, and alternative dispute resolution strategies all have a positive effect in resolving conflicts in the organization. In conclusion, the study found that positive human relations is important in resolving conflicts in an organisation and recommends that:

1. Human resources managers should imbibe the culture of getting close to members of staff to understand where and when there are grievances.
2. There is need for managers of banks to continue to make use of employee job description. This has become important due to the fact that it will clearly spell out job functions and reduce conflicts among staff.
3. Management should adopt the use of alternative dispute resolution strategies to avoid the attendant costs and manhour lost inherent in litigations in the courts.

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