Evaluation of Conflict Management Styles and Employee Performance in the Academia: A Focus on Tertiary Institutions in Kwara State

Kamoru Lanre Akanbi, Kadiri Ismaila Bolarinwa & Rihanat Amuzat Taofeeq

Abstract
Conflict is an inevitable and integral part of the process of change in an organization which can be unhealthy and as well be problem-solving, and in both cases affect the performance of employees. Therefore, this study examined conflict management styles and employees' performance in selected tertiary institutions in Kwara State. The objective of the study was to evaluate the effect of conflict management styles on employee performance in the academia in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study employed survey research design with structured questionnaire to collect data from a population of 1,784 with a sample size of 317 from selected staff of the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State Polytechnic Ilorin, and Imam Hamzat College of Education, Ilorin. About 255 copies of questionnaire were successfully returned and used for final analysis and this represent 80.44% rate of response, while 25 copies of questionnaire were unused and 37 were unreturned. Thereafter, Smart PLS-SEM version 4 was used to analyze the data collected. The result from the analysis signifies that all the null hypothesized relationships were rejected while the alternate hypothesized relationships were accepted. Hence, there are significant relationships between conflict management styles (i.e., accommodation strategy, collaboration strategy, compromising strategy, competing strategy) and employee performance. The study recommends that the management of the institutions should ensure that employees are promoted based on merit and not on sentiments because it will not only encourage the hard-work but also reduce the waves of industrial disputes in the institutions.
Keywords: Academia, Conflict, Dispute, Institution, Performance

Introduction

The competence and aptitude of a business or academic institution to handle conflict and diversity within the organization determine its performance level (Fatimoh et al., 2021). Different groups of people from different backgrounds and with distinct philosophies, personalities, perspectives, attitudes; values, aspirations, and interests are brought together in each department. Conflict may arise from differences in goals and interests that occasionally conflict with those of other organizations. Conflict happens when one group attempts to forward its goals at the expense of the others. According to Onu and Hammed (2015), irrational behaviours, unhealthy rivalry, absurd paradoxes, and competition are all necessary for an organization to perform well. Positive and negative relationships arise between employees of different departments with varying professional qualifications and career progressions due to the dynamic structure of the organization (Zhu, 2013).

An essential and beneficial aspect of organizational life is conflict. It is unavoidable and essential to the changing process. In fact, rather than being a barrier, it promotes cooperation. The conflict has two sides: one is harmful and unhealthy, while the other is based on problem-solving and involves people willing to put aside personality differences, listen to other people's points of view, be honest and open with one another, and be supportive. The former undermines cooperation. Nonetheless, any organization's performance reflects and results from the combined efforts of all its stakeholders, each of whom plays a different role in advancing the business. An organization's capacity to welcome workforce diversity determines its competitiveness and success.

Since conflict naturally arises when people with different backgrounds, viewpoints, and points of view interact in hierarchical organizations, it is more likely to happen there. Conflict in the workplace, however, is not an anomaly. This facilitates employee commitment to their work since it provides a platform for reconciliation and rectification for the benefit of the company and its workforce.

Organisations should focus on work-related behaviour, essential to their growth and expansion. It is important to understand that any successful and ambitious organization, whether in the manufacturing or service sectors, the public or private, must have competent workers who can perform above and beyond their assigned responsibilities while also upholding the core values of the workplace (Kadri et al., 2019).

In spite of the fact that conflict in universities are known for negative effects, it can even now be utilized to create and elevate the foundation to a successful level if the best possible management strategy of the conflict is utilized. Sources of conflict in higher institution can be internal or external. Internal in the sense of arising among the students, staff or management of the institution which may be due to unfavorable policies such as unnecessary increase of school fees, or external with regards to the institution and the State Government which has been a major cause of conflict in the Nigerian universities. The stakeholders, that is, students and staff (academic, non - academic and administrators) engender conflict which may result in protest, revolts, unrest and violence, leading to closure of academic programmes for months (Adeyemi, Ekundayo & Alonge, 2009). The conflict between Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) or Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU) and the government has always been a re-occurring issue which if not well managed will continue to linger. Some causes of conflict in higher institutions of learning are poor funding mechanisms by the State Government to the institution (Umo, 2014) and rehabilitation of learning facilities, leadership styles in Nigeria universities (Alabi, 2002); likewise late remunerations of accrued allowances owed by the State government to the academic staff and non-academic staff of these institutions.

Nigerian educational institutions typically face many difficulties, from a lack of funding to construct infrastructure to paying salaries and other benefits to make money available for research and development (Alajekwu & Alajekwu, 2017). This is a widespread issue in publicly-owned universities that primarily rely on funding from the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), provided by fiscal allocations to the education sector. However, these institutions' employees devoted most of their productive time and efforts to addressing issues that could be considered unnecessary if prompt action is taken to prevent conflict. This is especially true for those tasked with monitoring employee welfare.

Conflicts in Nigerian tertiary institutions typically stem from the administration's and employees' failure to uphold their collective bargaining agreement, and they typically continue because of how the disagreement is handled. The Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics recently began a sixty-five-day (65) industrial action. As part of this action, they are demanding the creation of governing councils for all publicly owned polytechnics and the payment of CONTISS 15 arrears to all polytechnic staff, effective from 2107. As a result, employees are taking industrial action, which might take the form of a complete strike or a work-to-rule agreement. Employees who participate in industrial action typically experience low morale, decreased productivity, the loss of skilled workers, absenteeism, a lack of dedication to their jobs, and health problems from stress and depression. In light of this, the study evaluates how conflict management approaches affected employee performance in selected tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem
Organizations' economic time and resources have been primarily focused on resolving conflict-related issues resulting from disputes over welfare and other unrelated matters, which has decreased their capacity for productivity. This is mostly because people's collective interests are not considered. The unrestrained continuation of this scenario presents a negative obstacle to an organization's industrial and economic growth.

Higher education institutions in Nigeria have reportedly faced numerous crises for decades, including disputes between academic staff and administrators, student-teacher disputes, student-student confrontations with school officials, and student-administrator conflicts involving non-teaching staff. Similar to the issues above, there has been conflict recently over the IPPIS (Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System) for paying employee salaries, which has caused tension and a lack of cooperation between the federal government, different labour unions, and academic stakeholders.

The issues above have also led to mistrust and animosity between academics and professionals and hampered higher education institutions' efficient, effective, and seamless management. Additionally, stakeholders in the education sector were becoming apathetic regarding these conflicts despite these circumstances (Alajekwu & Alajekwu, 2017).

Literature Review

There are many studies which examined the issue in discuss that are reviewed so as to have a historical perspective of it and a balance understanding of the concepts.

Conceptual Review

Conflict in the Nigerian Tertiary Institutions

Conflicts in Nigerian universities are like growing monsters (Adeyemi & Ademola 2012). Prevailing crises that Nigerian universities are currently confronting are more than what they were in the past. Conflict has remained an instrument employed by students or groups in the pursuit of their personal or collective goals and the forums put in place by the management are much more far-reaching than ever before. However, the consequence of globalisation and dynamic changes in the management of organisations have contributed positively and negatively to the Nigerian university system (Adeyemi et al. 2010); therefore, it is required to curb crisis which has become more rampant in the Nigerian tertiary institutions resulting in poor academic performance of students and poor learning environment. In brief, conflicts in Nigerian universities vary from one institution to another in terms of capacity, environment, population, goal, specialisation, governance and unionisation, among others (Ogbona, Yusuf & Onifade 2013). It has been observed that the causes of conflicts in one university might differ from another (Ndum & Stella 2013). However, university-based conflicts are also linked to other factors. The challenge underlying the university system can be classified as internal and external forces which create the type and nature of conflicts in place (Okotoni 2002). Universities and other higher institutions experience countless conflict situations, and the absence of proper solution contributes to a highly adversary poor academic outcome.

Conflict Management Strategies

Accommodation Strategy

The parties participating in this type of conflict management must respect one another's opinions. Both parties are ready to give the other party or side what is needed. For example, in a workplace setting where workers are expected to wear professional attire every day of the week, an employee may request permission from the company to wear casual attire on Fridays. Because it can be a fundamental organisational value, this could lead to disputes between the employer and the employee. But the corporation may implement an accommodation approach by allowing the personnel to wear casuals on Fridays. When this tactic is used, people feel content and connected to one another.

This style is characterized by a lack of assertiveness and a high degree of cooperation; the objective is to yield (Bonnie, 2001). The aim of accommodating is to achieve the result "I lose, you win." Individuals that adopt the accommodating model exhibit passive conduct (Verderber & Sellnow, 2012). Accommodating style is described by a person's lack of regard for his own interests and excessive concern for the interests of the other party (Madiha & Shazia, 2015). One side is able to put the conflicting party's interests ahead of their own. When one

party to a conflict prioritizes the interests of the other party and tries to assist their adversary in meeting certain needs, this is referred to as accommodating. Maintaining the relationship is more important to the self-sacrificing party in this conflict scenario than pursuing the conflict

Compromising Strategy

Because of this management approach, parties are almost, if not equally, capable of pursuing problems that might lead to conflict. However, they both gave in and agreed to explore how a compromise might be reached. When parties realise there is a chance, they may lose something of value in the issues that sparked the argument, most businesses will accept this method of resolving the disagreement. In areas like contract negotiations, customer service, and large investors, you will witness companies lowering their standards in order to collaborate with the other side.

This approach is a balance flanked-by assertiveness and cooperation; the objective is to reach a middle ground. When two sides are evenly matched and equally committed to opposing viewpoints, the compromising tactic is used. This technique is often used where a person needs temporary findings or needs to resolve disputes easily and without engaging in a critical power struggle (Schyns & Hansbrough, 2010). Compromise is another method of resolving conflict in which the person resolves the conflict by making a sacrifice (Madiha and Shazia, 2015).

A compromising conflict resolution technique entails attempting to reach a "common ground" that suits both sides in part (Bonnie, 2001). All sides accept a partial satisfaction of their desires in exchange for anything of worth. When parties reach an agreement, no one side emerges victorious. All sides are willing to make a satisfaction and consider a solution that only partially meets their needs (Commonwealth Youth Programme, 2007).

Employee Performance

The way your employees act in the office and how successfully they carry out the tasks you have assigned them are two aspects of their employee performance. The value that a worker contributes to a business over a given period of time is also known as employee performance.

It is hard to find a clear-cut definition of the concept in the literature, rather it is often a subject of confusion. It is equated with performance or sometimes even with labour intensity. (Choobineh, 2017). The way we have defined the concept of employee productivity is an attempt to holistically consider the phenomenon. While individual studies focuses on single aspects, for instance, work, labor, contributions, creativity, employees' well-being, and so on. The need to integrate singular factors is becoming increasingly important with a paradigm shift in manufacturing. Considering the concept, we focus more on the micro-level productivity of employees' which encompasses smaller systems on the level of individual industries and organizations.

Theoretical Review
The Modern Conflict Theory

This theory was developed by Wright Mills in 1964, according to Mills, conflict arises when individuals with different goals and resources try to establish new social structures. These institutions affect people and resources, and the "unequal distribution of power and resources in society" affects people as well. (Knapp, 1994). The combination of the executive branch of government, the pentagon, and the cooperative elite resulted in the emergence of the power elites in American society. According to Mills, the people's interests were at odds with those of these elites. According to his theory, the actions of the ruling class would lead to a "possible extinction of humanity" as well as a "greater escalation of a war of weapons of mass destruction" (Knapp, 1994). The conflict hypothesis has been articulated more recently in Alan Sears' book, "A Guide to Theoretical Thinking." As stated by Sears (2008), inequality that leads to conflict, as opposed to consensus and order, defines societies.

The only way to resolve this inequality-based conflict and foster the development of new social relationships is to radically alter the current structures that govern society. 88 Once they are accepted, the structural interests of the underprivileged will cause social change since they are in opposition to the status quo. As a result, they are seen as change agents as opposed to targets that deserve compassion. - In every community where there is an equitable division of labour, conditions of exploitation and oppression are necessary, but they also inhibit human potential, such as the ability for creativity. The so-called "civilization process" or "functional need" constraints may not always have to stifle these and other attributes. In actuality, creativity is a catalyst for change and economic progress. Rather than upholding the status quo, philosophy serves to realise human potential and improve society. Positivism, which sees theory as an unbiased means of explanation, is the opposite objective of theory in that it values objectivity and detachment.

Empirical Review

Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) investigated conflict management tactics and administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in the Sokoto metropolitan. The population included students from the area's eight tertiary institutions. A total of 168 academics from four tertiary institutions were chosen as respondents. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the data. On the one hand, the study found a link between conversation, competition, prevention, and communication, and on the other side, administrative effectiveness. It is suggested that higher institutions institutionalize dialogue as a dispute resolution approach since discourse allows team members to learn to think together and tolerate differences, preventing crises and enhancing performance.

Mwaniki and Muathe (2021) looked into the effects of organizational conflict management approaches such as negotiation, mediation, collaboration, and avoidance on employee performance in Kenyan public universities. The research was conducted using a descriptive research approach. Employees from Kenya's designated public universities made up the study's population. Stratified and simple random sampling procedures were used to choose a sample of 160 participants. With the help of SPSS, the collected data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (ANOVA and regression analysis).

Nwokolobia, Nwaghodoh, and Abanobi in (2021) investigated conflict management and organizational effectiveness in Nigeria to ascertain if compromising and collaborating strategies had any effect on client/customer satisfaction. The Descriptive survey research design was utilized involving a population study of 15 firms and 200 employees with a sample size of 120 employees. The hypothesis was tested using regression analysis which revealed that conflict management had positive relationship with organizational effectiveness in Nigerian firms. The study concludes that conflict management strategies be imbibed in organizations to help reduce conflicts.

Using a survey research design, Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) investigated conflict management tactics and administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in the Sokoto metropolitan. The population included students from the area's eight tertiary institutions. A total of 168 academics from four tertiary institutions were chosen as respondents. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the data. On the one hand, the study found a link between conversation, competition, prevention, and communication, and on the other side, administrative effectiveness. It is suggested that higher institutions institutionalize dialogue as a dispute resolution approach since discourse allows team members to learn to think together and tolerate differences, preventing crises and enhancing performance.

Amaeshi, Ugwu, and Okoye (2021) used a descriptive survey research design with a sample size of 166 academic staff to investigate the effects of conflict management on organizational performance in Nigeria. The data were examined using descriptive statistics, and the Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation was used to test the hypotheses and establish the relationship between conflict management practices and their

effects on the performance of organizations. The findings revealed that conflict management strategies had a considerable positive impact on organizational performance. According to the findings, power, culture, style, and goal all play important roles in resolving organizational conflicts. As such, private university administrators should establish additional lines of contact with employees to collect timely input on organizational policies and avoid any conflicts of interest.

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Methodology
The research design used for this study is a survey research design, which collects data by using a self-designed questionnaire. In line with the survey research design, a sample of the University of Ilorin, Kwara State Polytechnic, and Imam Hamzat College of Education staff provided primary data, which was used to assess the relationship between employee performance and conflict management styles in a particularly tertiary institutions in Kwara State.

Population of the Study
The population of this study was the combine population of the staff of the three selected tertiary institutions in Kwara State that is, University of Ilorin, (1,283), Kwara State Polytechnic Ilorin (437), and Imam Hamzat College of Education, Ilorin (64). Therefore, the overall population of this study will be one thousand seven hundred and eighty-four (1,784).

Sample Size Determination
The study adopted used the Taro Yamane formula to determine the sample size. Yamane (1967) provides a simplified formula to calculate sample size.

Assumption:
 95% confidence level
 P = .5

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

n= 1,784/1+1,784(0.05)2
n= 1,784/1+1,784(0.0025)
n= 1,784/1+1,720.16
n=1,784/1,721.16:   n=317

In addition, the study made use of proportionate and simple random sampling techniques. As shown, the sample selected in each institution was determined through the proportionate sampling method. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used to select the sample from each of the institution as calculated from the proportion of the population to be chosen in each institution. This type of sampling technique allows every member of the population to have equal chance of being selected.

Evaluation of PLS-SEM Results

Based on suggestions from the literature, this section presents the PLS-SEM results in two phases (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2011). According to Hair et al. (2011), the two stages are measurement model assessment and structural model evaluation. Results of the examination of convergent and discriminant measurement models are especially presented about construct validity, construct internal consistency reliability and question reliability. The outcomes of collinearity, path coefficients, variance explained (R2), effect size (f2), predictive validity (Q2), and impact size (q2) are displayed in the structural measurement evaluation. The moderating effects of the interaction between exogenous and endogenous components are also evaluated in this section.

Data Analysis and Results of Findings
This section involves with analyzed results using PLS-SEM path modeling. Thereafter, the study carried out the main data analysis, starting with measurement model analysis. While also conducting reliability as well as validity tests. Similarly, the analysis and results of the structural model were also performed and presented in the form of path coefficient.

Assessment of Measurement Model
As previously mentioned, this research used the Smart-PLS version 3.2.7 software to predict the model using PLS-SEM (Ringle et al., 2015). Factor analysis and multiple regressions are two crucial multivariate methods that are components of PLS-SEM.

In PLS analysis, the measurement model—also referred to as the outer model—is looked at first. Validity and reliability are the two main factors that PLS analysis considers when assessing a measurement model (Ramayah, Lee, & In, 2011). Based on these two measurement model evaluation criteria, reports were made for individual item reliability, construct internal consistency reliability, convergent validity using outer loading, composite reliability, and average variance explained (AVE). The triple criteria of HTMT, Fornell-Lacker, and cross-loading were used to evaluate the discriminant validity of the constructs. A PLS measuring model is shown in this Figure:
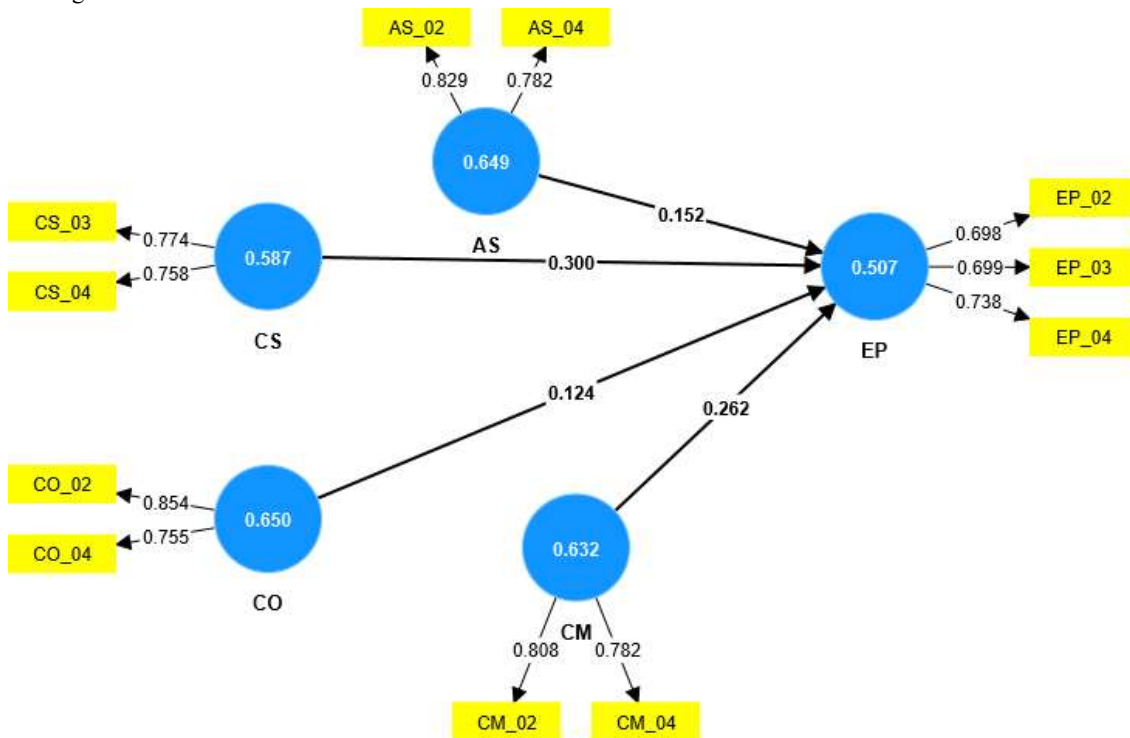
PLS measurement model

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The figure above displays three different kinds of values. Values pointing toward the yellow box indicate item loadings, values pointing toward the long arrow lines indicate path coefficients, and the value within the circle indicates the average variance extracted (AVE).

The table below displays the outcome of the structural model for the direct correlations between the independent and dependent variables in this investigation.

Direct Path Coefficients

Paths	Beta	STDEV	T Statistics	P Values	Remark
AS -> EP	0.152	0.065	2.352	0.019	Rejected
CM -> EP	0.262	0.064	4.092	0.000	Rejected
CO -> EP	0.124	0.059	2.118	0.034	Rejected
CS -> EP	0.300	0.068	4.432	0.000	Rejected

The table shows the results of the hypothesis testing for the direct relationship as proposed in this study. The discussion for the results in this table is as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The table above shows the route connecting AS to EP, which illustrates the major impact accommodation strategy has on employees' performance at certain tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. The route estimates for the association between AS and EP are included in the table along with the beta (β = 0.152), t-statistic (t = 2.352), and p-value (p = 0.019). Based on the results, hypothesis H1 was rejected, indicating a positive and substantial association between AS and EP.

Hypothesis 2: The collaboration strategy has a noteworthy impact on the performance of employees at certain tertiary institutions located in Kwara State, Nigeria. This is by the route that connects CM to EP in Table 4.12. The relationship's route estimations show that the p-value (p = 0.013), t statistics (t = 2.228), and beta (β = 0.134) are all present. The proposed link between CM and EP is rejected based on these data, which show a positive and significant association at the 5% significance level.

Hypothesis 3: As seen in the table above, the compromise approach has a noteworthy impact on the performance of employees at specific tertiary institutions located in Kwara State, Nigeria. The route connecting OC to SMEP is characterized by estimates of beta (β = 0.124), t statistics (t = 2.118), and p-value (p = 0.034). At the 1% significance level, the data indicates a positive and significant association between CO and EP, meaning that the suggested hypothesis H3 is rejected.

Hypothesis 4: Employee performance at certain tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria, is significantly impacted by competing strategies. This is shown in the route that links CS to EP, which has path estimates of beta (β = 0.300), t statistics (t = 4.432), and p-value (p = 0.000). These findings provide substantial support for the link that this research predicted, which states that competing strategies significantly impact employees' performance at a 5% level of significance in a subset of tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Coefficient of Determination (R-squared)
The coefficient of determination R-squared (R2), a measure of how much of the variance in the dependent variable is jointly accounted for by the independent variables, is part of the structural model evaluation (Hair et al., 2012). This metric represents the percentage variance in the dependent variable jointly induced by the latent variables or the combined effects of separate latent components on the dependent variable. The ability to optimize a model's R2 to take endogenous latent variable prediction into account is one of the benefits of using PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2016; Lei & Chu, 2015). However, R2 values range from 0 to 1. The higher the R2

number, the more of the dependent variable's variance the set of independent factors can explain. Chin (1998) classifies R^2 values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 as weak, moderate, and noteworthy, respectively. Consequently, the study's model yielded an R^2 value of 0.389 (38.9%), indicating that the exogenous factors in the model, namely the independent variables AS, CM, CO, and CS, together accounted for 38.9% of the variation seen in the dependent variable (EP).

Conclusion

The study concludes that employee performance at tertiary institutions in Kwara State is significantly impacted by conflict management techniques, while the best approaches for raising employee performance were compromise and collaboration in dispute resolution techniques.

Recommendations

Therefore, the study recommends that tertiary institutions in Kwara State should adopt a collaborative conflict management approach to enhance employee performance.

In addition, Institutions should implement a conflict management policy that outlines the steps to take when workplace conflicts arise.

Moreover, the policy should emphasize the importance of collaboration, communication, and respect in resolving conflict. Institutions should create a work culture that promotes open communication, respect, and collaboration among employees. This can be achieved through team-building activities, employee recognition programs, and regular feedback sessions.

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Kamoru Lanre Akanbi (Ph.D), Department of Business and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Kwara State University, Malete. Nigeria, Tel no: +234 08063783585, e-mail: akanbikam@gmail.com

Kadiri Ismaila Bolarinwa is a Professor from Department of Business and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Kwara State University, Malete. Nigeria, Tel no: +234 08030726339, E-mail: bolakadiri@yahoo.com

Rihanat Amuzat Taofeeq, Department of Business and Entrepreneurship, Faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Kwara State University, Malete. Nigeria, Tel no: +234 09025210701, E-mail: amuzatrihanat7@gmail.com