

## Conflict Management Strategies and Tertiary Institutions Management in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper discussed conflict management strategies in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The paper used documentary research methods, hence secondary sources of data were collected from both print and online publications. The paper revealed that accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, competition and compromise are the conflict management strategies available for management, staff union and staff of tertiary institutions to adopt to fulfil the purpose of establishing and siting tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Based on this, the paper recommended that the managers of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should organize conflict management strategy workshops regularly for both management and staff of tertiary institutions to enhance efficiency in the workplace and achieve its mandate of socio-economic development which is the rationale for creating tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Tertiary education, Tertiary institution, Nigeria



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## INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education management is the deployment of both human and material resources of the institutions to realize the objectives of the institutions through organized planning, organization, control and coordination. Tertiary education management deals with the operation of other sub-organizations. It is the process of planning, organizing and directing activities in a tertiary institution, effectively utilizing human and material resources, to accomplish the tertiary institution's objectives. Tertiary education management refers to the administration of the institution's resources (human and material resources) to supervise, plan, strategise, and implement structures to execute the institution's goals and programme.

Tertiary education is seen as post-secondary school education that embraces advanced teaching, research and community service (Ogunode, Ayeni, & Ogwuche, 2024; Ogunode & Ayeni, 2023). Tertiary education management objectives and goals include; resource allocation; teaching implementation, research programme implementation, community service implementation, student service, budgeting, community-school relationships, staff administration, plant management and curriculum planning and management. For the above to be achieved, good conflict management must be put in place to ensure access to education that is expected to empower people to enable them to provide for their basic needs (Ayeni, Sani, Idris, & Uzoigwe, 2019). The reason is that tertiary institutions are a micro section of the larger society (Ogunode & Ayeni, 2024).

The inability of any structure to perform its function will cause the system to malfunction (Ayeni & Nwaorgu, 2018). Consequently, the inability of the governance system to perform its roles is also hurting the educational system (Ogunode, Ayeni, & Olorundare, 2024). The above is corroborated by scholars who argued that the extent of success or failure of any human society or organization has its roots in leadership at all levels (Muhammed, & Ayeni, 2018). Tertiary institutions in Nigeria appear to be facing various institutional conflicts that may affect the tertiary education management goals and objectives.

Tertiary institution conflict is an internal misunderstanding or disagreement that can occur between colleagues or leaders. These kinds of disagreements can lead to a lack of cohesion and collaboration in the workplace. When staff do not get along with each other or disagree, it can make it challenging to get everyone aligned with the institution's goals. Conflict can arise in tertiary institutions due to differences in work styles, communication styles, values, expectations, or interests. Conflict is a negative force that can undermine productivity and morale in an academic institution; it can also be a necessary driver of change, growth and innovation. Conflict among academic staff and non-academic staff in most tertiary institutions appears to have slowed down the level of job performance in the various institutions across Nigeria. It is based on this issue that this paper aims to discuss conflict management strategies and tertiary education management.

### Literature Review

#### Concept of conflict management

The concept of conflict management defies a unified definition. However, some scholarly definitions as they relate to this study shall be examined. Conflict management is an umbrella term for the way we identify and handle conflicts fairly

and efficiently. The goal is to minimize the potential negative impacts that can arise from disagreements and increase the odds of a positive outcome. Conflict management refers to the way that an individual or institutions handle disagreements. Conflict management according to Humaans (2022) is the practice of identifying and addressing conflict productively and efficiently. It involves the use of various strategies and techniques to minimize the negative impact of conflict on individuals and organizations and to promote positive outcomes. Conflict management aims to foster healthy communication, understanding and collaboration among conflicting parties, to reach a mutually beneficial resolution. Conflict management skills are essential in both personal and professional settings, as conflicts can arise in any type of relationship or environment. Effective conflict management can lead to improved relationships, increased productivity, and a more positive work culture (Humaans 2022). There are many reasons people disagree, many conflicts revolve around Personal values (real or perceived), perceptions, conflicting goals, Power dynamics and Communication style.

For this study, conflict management referred to all the methodologies employed by individuals and groups to address violent conflict or conflict as the case may be to ensure that there is a peaceful atmosphere that gives room for people to carry out their day-to-day business.

#### **Concept of conflict management strategies**

For this study, conflict management strategies are approaches adopted by employees, groups and management of an organisation to resolve conflict in the workplace so as not to hinder the flow of work or service delivery.

## **METHOD**

The objective of this article is to discuss conflict management strategies among staff in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The researchers used secondary data. The researcher relies on published secondary data from reputable sources including reviews of published articles from reputable international journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, LearnTechlib SAGE, Nebraska and Springer amongst others. This work used the Content Analysis and elimination method in the selection and analysis of papers, journals and abstracts used for the article. The design adopted for this article was to show an understanding of conflict management strategies among staff in Nigerian tertiary institutions. This study employed the content analysis method by selecting the relevant content of the various literature related to this study; and the literature review enables the overall development of the study, which is ordinarily centred on theoretical and conceptual exploration (Ogunode & Ajape 2021).

#### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on role theory that was developed by George Herbert Mead in 1934. Other theories like Merton (1957), and Simmel (1991) among others contributed to the development of the theory. This theory assumes that each social status involves not a single role but an array of roles (Uche, & Uche, 2014). The role theory hinges on the principle that the developing social role theory focuses on how well individuals adopt and act out their roles during interactions. Individuals do not necessarily embrace all the identities associated with their roles, though; the extent to which they are committed to identifying with the expectations placed on them can vary. As an outcome of these interactions, individuals may identify themselves or be identified by others as holding particular statuses or positions

This theory is relevant to the subject matter under discussion because management, staff unions and staff have the responsibility of engaging in conflict management to ensure sustainable peace in organisations so that the organisation can achieve the purpose for which it was created. These roles of management, staff unions and staff or the organisation will go a long way in complementing the roles being performed by the government, which has created tertiary institutions for a particular purpose.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

There are many types of approaches to conflict management in the workplace like tertiary institutions. The following are the main strategies of conflict management; accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, competition and compromise (Humaans, 2022; Stiffler, Mckinney & Scalia, 2023).

#### **Accommodating**

Accommodation is a conflict strategy being used in both organisations and society as a whole. Conflict management strategies like accommodation become necessary because the chief duty of actors of governance in Nigeria has been the frustration of public institutions (Ayeni & Sani, 2021). The fact that public institutions have been frustrated by public officeholders by not meeting the needs of those institutions makes employees in institutions of government frustrated. The fact that employees in most public organisations are already frustrated by actors of government that are supposed to do the needful necessitates a conflict between the employees and the management, hence the need for a conflict management strategy to ensure productivity in institutions of government like higher institutions does not stop. An accommodating mode of conflict management tends to be high in cooperation but low in assertiveness (Coursera, 2020). Although accommodation might be optimal for some conflicts, others require a more assertive style. Harvard School (2022) maintained that accommodation as a conflict management strategy is one in which staff agrees to the other party's needs. Accommodation is integrity personified because integrity should not hurt others (Ayeni, 2018).

Stiffler, Mckinney and Scalia (2023) concluded that this strategy of conflict management focuses on one person's needs and prioritizes their side of the disagreement. The above is validated by scholars who asserted that the provision of financial security for people undergoing structural violence is an attempt to ensure that there is a peaceful atmosphere since a hungry man is an angry man (Ogunode & Ayeni, 2024). The provision of a robust welfare package to encourage employees in an

organisation at the expense of a reduction in the organisation's profit margin is a good example of accommodation. The above is further corroborated by a scholar who contended that Infrastructure can empower people (Ayeni, 2017). The provision of needed infrastructure to employees who require it is a conflict management strategy as this will make agitation of lack of infrastructure by staff unions (that has to do with the welfare of staff) end. The person willing to accommodate allows the other person to essentially 'win'. Here, the management allows the employees to win by providing them with a conducive environment and better financial support to the detriment of increasing profit. Humaans (2022) asserted that accommodation emphasizes meeting the needs and desires of the other party, often at the expense of one's interests. Another good example is the provision of infrastructural development that enhances human security (Ayeni, Andeshi, & Uzoigwe, 2022). The provision of infrastructure in tertiary institutions will ease the work of employees and make them feel good and embrace peace with the management. However, accommodating a conflict management strategy might be an uphill task when there is no laid down guiding principle that is sacrosanct, what is referred to as institutions. Conflict management strategy is made difficult when weak institutions are prevalent. According to Ayeni and Sani (2021), the challenges of maintaining peace in Nigeria are characterized by weak institutions that have negative implications for the well-being of people. Accommodating is an effective strategy for maintaining harmony and showing goodwill. This method is beneficial when preserving harmony and relationships is more important than the issue at hand.

### **Avoiding**

Avoiding is a strong conflict management tool in contemporary Nigerian society and even in organisations. For instance, Ayeni, Sani, Idris and Uzoigwe (2019) noted that vote buying has not been able to reduce poverty. Actors of governance in Nigeria have focused more on stomach infrastructure, by avoiding the challenges of poverty that is the root cause of many violent conflicts. In contemporary Nigeria society developmental projects have been avoided for stomach infrastructure like vote buying. For instance, Ayeni, Doosuur and Kefas (2021) have argued that vote buying has all along been a strong instrument employed by politicians to get citizens' support during elections. When avoiding, you try to dodge or bypass a conflict in the workplace. This style of managing conflicts is low in assertiveness and cooperativeness (Coursera, 2020). Avoidance is unproductive for handling most disputes. This is because avoidance does not address the issue at stake. For instance, it has been noted that infrastructural development, industrialization and good economic policies are the only things that can reduce poverty that causes conflict to a minimum level, rather than vote buying (Ayeni, Doosuur & Kefas, 2021). Vote buying is a strategy of conflict management in Nigeria society because it enables the giver to leave the root cause of conflict and the conflict unattended to.

The above development also takes place in public institutions in Nigeria. For conflict management in an organisation, Harvard School (2022) noted that avoiding is a strategy best suited for situations in which the relationship's importance and goal are both low. While you're unlikely to encounter these scenarios at work, they may occur in daily life. For instance, imagine you are on a public bus and the passenger next to you is loudly playing music. You will likely never bump into that person again, and your goal of a pleasant bus ride isn't extremely pressing. Avoiding conflict by ignoring the music is a valid option. Humaans (2022) observed that in a work setting, avoiding trivial conflicts can prevent unnecessary tension. For example, if there's a minor disagreement among team members about the layout of a shared workspace, it might be more productive to avoid escalating the issue into a significant conflict. Instead, team members can agree to rotate the arrangement periodically or find a neutral solution that doesn't favour any particular preference. This approach is useful when the issue is minor and not worth the time and energy that would be expended in resolving it.

### **Collaborating**

Collaborating as a conflict management strategy is synonymous with the participatory theory of development that advocates for the involvement of the local people who are directly affected by government programmes (Asaju & Ayeni, 2021, p. 166). There is a need for the local government to be actively involved in the development agenda of a federal system, just as there is a need for management and employees of an organisation to work together cooperatively to ensure sustainable peace in an organisation. Harvard School (2022) opined that where compromise is a lose-lose strategy, collaboration is a win-win. In instances of collaboration, your goal and the relationship are equally important, motivating both you and the other party to work together to find an outcome that meets all needs. For instance, it has been argued that effective communication is when subordinates are carried along in the decision-making process (Ayeni, Sani, & Uzoigwe, 2019). There is a conflict management strategy of collaboration when subordinates in organisations are involved in decision-making that affects them. A collaborating conflict management style demands a high level of cooperation from all parties involved. Collaborating works best if you have plenty of time and are on the same power level as the other parties involved. If not, you may be better off choosing another style (Coursera, 2020). Humaans (2022) observed that collaboration involves working together to find a win-win solution that fully satisfies the interests of both parties. This approach is most effective in complex scenarios where the relationship is important. It requires time, open communication, and a high level of trust but often leads to innovative and lasting solutions. Collaboration is essential in managing conflicts within professional projects.

### **Competing**

Competing is very rampant among levels of government in Nigeria. For instance, the state government has continued to deny Local governments the statutory allocation they need to enable them to function effectively as a tier of government (Asaju & Ayeni, 2021)...When you use a competitive conflict management style (sometimes called 'forcing'), you put your own needs and desires over those of others. This style is high in assertiveness and low in cooperation. In other words, it's the opposite of accommodating (Coursera, 2020). Harvard School (2022) observed that Competing is another strategy that, while

not often suited for workplace conflict, can be useful in some situations. This conflict style is for scenarios in which you place high importance on your goal and low importance on your relationships with others. It's high in assertiveness and low in cooperation. You may choose a competing style in a crisis. For instance, if someone is unconscious and people are arguing about what to do, asserting yourself and taking charge can help the person get medical attention quickly. Humaans (2022) maintained that this strategy focuses on assertively pursuing one's interests at the expense of the other party. It can be useful in situations requiring quick, decisive action, or in high-stakes scenarios where vital interests are at stake. However, it can strain relationships if used excessively. Healthy competition in the workplace can be a form of conflict management, especially when it's channelled towards collective goals rather than personal gains. For instance, an organisation can organize a contest where departments compete in a friendly sales contest to motivate team members to excel, but this competition must not lead to unethical practices or workplace hostility. This is why scholars have noted that when a structure is not performing its function optimally; vices often appear (Joseph, Cinjel & Ayeni, 2017). Here, a structure can mean an organisation ensuring that departments in an organisation perform optimally. Ensuring that competition remains friendly and constructive, with clear guidelines and fair play, is key. Competing in this way can foster a dynamic and energetic work environment while maintaining positive relationships among colleagues.

### **Compromising**

Compromising demands that both parties in the conflict sacrifice something for the sake of peace. Harvard School (2022) opined that Compromising is a conflict resolution strategy in which you and the other party willingly forfeit some of your needs to reach an agreement. Compromise is a good conflict management strategy that promotes a sense of belonging and long-term peacebuilding for society or organisations that embrace it. Nigeria had the chance to ensure that her constitution served as a compromise that would unite the federating units that made up Nigeria. For instance, Ayeni, Ikwuoma, and Obatayo (2018) argued that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was not formed by consensus of existing political units of Nigeria, rather it was a constitution that was forced upon Nigerians by the military government. The inability of the Nigerian constitution to serve as a conflict management strategy of compromise is denying the country the expected peaceful atmosphere necessary for sustainable development. The constitution of Nigeria favours a particular region over the other, a development that has resulted in a win-loss situation. Nigeria's constitution negates a lose-lose strategy of compromise that does not favour one party over the other.

In an organisation, compromise is a conflict management strategy that is known as a "lose-lose" strategy since neither of you achieves your full goal. This strategy works well when your care for your goal and the relationship are both moderate. You value the relationship, but not so much that you abandon your goal, like in accommodation. Stiffler, Mckinney and Scalia, (2023) submitted that this strategy allows both sides to 'win' by having both parties relinquish some of their wants for the other person to gain some of theirs. It is not a perfect strategy, but compromising enables issues to be resolved quickly and move forward with production. Often, both sides will feel understood and relatively satisfied, and it can help people be able to recognize the other side's argument. Humaans (2022) noted that compromising seeks a middle ground where both parties make concessions to reach a mutually agreeable solution to achieve a common goal. The leadership style is germane in achieving a compromise between the management and employees. This is why scholars have argued that the quality of leadership is the bedrock of development in every country of the world, whether a unitary or federal system (Ayeni, 2018b). Good leaders compromise to provide a conducive atmosphere for peace, a development that allows for an increase in productivity and growth. Compromise in this context promotes progress and cooperation, essential in a collaborative work environment.

### **Findings**

The study revealed that accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, competition and compromise are the conflict management strategies available for both management and staff of tertiary institutions to adopt to fulfil the purpose of creating and siting tertiary institutions. The finding of this study correlates with the findings of the previous study carried out by Ayeni and Ezirim (2023), the scholars found that siting a tertiary institution brings about socio-economic development to the host community.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper discussed conflict management strategies and tertiary education management in Nigeria. The paper concluded that accommodation, avoidance, collaboration, competition and compromise are the conflict management strategies available for management, staff union and staff of tertiary institutions to adopt to fulfil the purpose of establishing and siting tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Based on this, the paper recommended that the management of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should organize conflict management strategic workshops regularly for both management and staff of tertiary institutions to enhance efficiency in the workplace and achieve its mandate of socio-economic development which is the rationale for creating tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

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