

Workplace Conflict and Employee Performance in Higher Education Institutions in Rivers State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between workplace conflict and employee performance in higher education institutions in Rivers State. The research was to examine the extent to which workplace conflict influence the measures of employee performance (efficiency and effectiveness). The survey was conducted with a population of 3,448 teaching staff drawn from eight higher education institutions in Rivers State with a sample size of 358 through the use of Taro Yamane formula with 95% confidence level. Primary data was generated using a structured self-administered questionnaire and the data was analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient aided with statistical package for social science (SPSS). The test for hypotheses revealed that there is no significant relationship between workplace conflict and employee performance. Consequently, all the null hypotheses were accepted as the evidence indicates no significant relationship in all instances. The finding indicates that workplace conflict has no significant relationship with employee performance.

Key Words: Workplace Conflict, Employee Performance, Efficiency, Effectiveness.

Introduction

Businesses nowadays are operating in a turbulent environment where organizations are searching for measures that will allow them to improve their performance and competitiveness (Dodd, 2003). There is no general overarching theory about employee performance. Performance can be defined as the ability of an employee to accomplish his or her mission based on the expectations of an organization. The effectiveness with which organizations manage, develop and stimulate their employees is an important cornerstone for how organizations perform. Because of this, people management has a significant impact on performance. Performance can be traced back to the behaviour of people on the shop floor. Employee works in a certain way or behaves in a way that contributes to the goals of the organization. Employee's behaviour in relation to organizational performance can manifest in different ways. Every employee makes an individual contribution to the performance of the organizational unit and thus to the entire organization. If the performance of an organizational unit or individual employee falls behind for too long as a rule this will lead to reorganization or redundancy (Olori, 2014). Draft (2002) notes that it is therefore the major task of management and leaders of organizations to put in place measures and structures that promote greater achievements and higher performance levels for the employees and institutions. Conflict is generally regarded as disagreement regarding interests or ideals (Esquivel and Kleiner, 2009). In addition, Workplace conflict is regarded as the discord that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible with those of individuals or groups block or frustrate each other in an attempt to achieve their objectives. Conflicts are inevitable part of organizational life since the goals of different stakeholders such as managers and staff are often incompatible (Jones et al, 2000). Higher education institutions as organizations are not spared of conflict either. Conflict occasionally arises among the various stakeholders of higher education institutions. It sometimes occurs among staff members, between management staff and employees, as well as lecturers and students.

The specific objectives of the study include:

1. To examine the effect of workplace conflict on employee efficiency in higher education institutions in Rivers State.

2. To examine the effect of workplace conflict on employee effectiveness in higher education institution Rivers State.

Consequently, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How does workplace conflict affect employee efficiency in higher education institutions in Rivers State?
2. How does workplace conflict affect employee effectiveness in higher education institutions in Rivers State?

Theoretical Foundation

The underpinning theory for this study is the social exchange theory which holds that human interaction and behaviour is fundamentally an exchange of both tangible and intangible activities (Homans, 1961). In relation to the assertion of Homans (1961), conflict exists as a result of interactions and behaviour of individuals or groups. Though, from definition, according to Otuya, (2003) conflict implies a clash of wills, principles, objectives, ideals or methods.

Workplace conflict

Workplace conflict or organizational conflict as the case may be, is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and interests between people working together. Conflict takes many forms in organizations. There is the inevitable clash between formal authority and power and those individuals and groups affected. There are disputes over how revenue should be divided and allocated, how the work should be done, how long and hard people should work. There are jurisdictional disagreements among individuals, departments, faculties, and between unions and management even in our higher educational institutions. There are crafty forms of conflict involving rivalries, jealousies, personality clashes, role definitions, and struggles for power and favour. According to Kazimoto (2013), workplace conflict is the existence of strife resulting from goals and purpose that are compatible or values of people or group that prevents or seems to avoid other parties from achieving their goals in an organization. Russel and Jerome (1978), states that conflict possesses both positive and negative consequences, they present arguments that even though conflict is sometimes viewed as dysfunctional, it can sometimes present favourable circumstances because it may present a situation where an issue will be further explored and be regarded in a different way. They further showed that workplace conflicts are regarded as being positive if conflict management propels an organization to look at established positions with fresh perspectives, which promotes creativity and ability of individuals to manage interpersonal differences. There is therefore a need for causes of the workplace conflict to be diagnosed and managed effectively to avert conflict's consequential destructiveness. . Ways of recognizing and resolving conflict amongst people is needed so that the conflict does not become so serious that co-operation is impossible. All members of any organization need to have ways of keeping conflict to a minimum and at solving problems caused by conflict, before conflict becomes a major obstacle to work.

Employee Performance

Employee performance means how well an employee can perform on the job and assignments assigned him measured against the general accepted measure of performance standards set by the institutions. Employee performance can also be seen as a product of quality and quantity of work achieved by the employee in executing out his/her duties in accordance with the responsibilities. However, Barilee (2005) defined performance as the manipulative function of individual's attitudes, work efforts and organizational supports. He went further to explain the components of these three variables, individual attitudes according to him, consist of demographic, competency and psychological characteristics. This means there are general expectations expected of employees in relation to their performance in every organization. An employee can be said to have performed when he/she has met the expectations and performed up to standard. It is noteworthy that performance measures should all progress against objectives to be measured. It should indicate what is expected and how well people are doing in attaining their objectives. Performance measures should be clear, concise, easy to collect and interpret, and relevant in that they should provide information that tells you and the organizations how well you are performing (Wright and Davies, 2004). The measures are usually related to efficiency (how quickly you deliver) effectiveness (how

good, accurate or relevant the service delivery was to customer), cost efficiency and cost effectiveness. Performance measures usually cover information relating to finance, customers, market, resources, and processes. Performance measures should be agreed between job holder and his or her manager and should be reviewed regularly. There are number of benefits to the organization and the individuals in terms of personal development and corporate achievement (Collins and Holton, 2007).

Measures of Employee performance

Efficiency

Efficiency is the quality of being able to do a task successfully, without wasting time or energy. Efficiency looks at the quality of work done, which usually includes creating output with less waste, spending less money and fewer resources. In other words, efficiency signifies a peak level of performance that uses the least amount of inputs to achieve the highest amount of output. Efficiency requires reducing the number of unnecessary resources used to produce a given output including personal time and energy. According to Nwachukwu, (2009) efficiency means the ability of an organization to derive maximum output from a minimum input or a given quantity of resources. Onuoha, (2013) defined efficiency as the ability of an organization to act or produce effectively with minimum of waste expenditure or unnecessary effort. Efficiency means “doing the thing right”.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness is the capability of producing a desired result or the ability to produce desired output. When something is deemed effective, it means it has an intended or expected outcome, or produces a deep, vivid impression. Fraser, (1994) defined effectiveness as a measure of the match between stated goals and their achievement. It is always possible to achieve easy, low-standard goals. In other words, quality in higher education cannot only be a question of achievements (outputs) but must also involve judgments about the goals (part of inputs). Effectiveness is the degree to which objectives are achieved and the extent to which problems are solved. According to Erlendsson, (2002) effectiveness is the extent to which objectives are met (doing the right things). Ordinarily, effectiveness predicts the policy objectives of the organization or the degree to which an organization realizes its own goals (Zheng, 2010).

Relationship between workplace conflict and employee performance

The situation in which the impression is created that conflict has only negative and devastating repercussion is just unfortunate. Conflict is like a double-edged sword and so has equally positive and negative implications. Mankoe, (2007) confirms this opinion when he claims that, in everyday life, there has traditionally been emphasis on the negative and dysfunctional aspects of conflict. He explains that, the definition of conflict as the existence of incompatible goals, thoughts or emotions, may portray at once that all conflicts are bad therefore exert negative impact on organizational effectiveness. Conflict can be positive or negative. Even though it may be obvious that conflict often comes with a cost, what may not be known is the extent to which the cost can go. Experts in the field of conflict have however, established that, it has a devastating impact on any given society. Mankoe (2009), observe that, frequent and powerful conflicts can have a devastating impact upon the behaviour of people in organizations as well as their performance.

Consequently, this study sought to test the following hypothesis:

H01: There is no significant relationship between workplace conflict and employee efficiency in higher education institutions in Rivers State.

H02: There is no significant relationship between workplace conflict and employee effectiveness in higher education institution in Rivers State.

Methodology

The research is a quantitative study that seeks to explain the relationship between workplace conflict as the predictor (independent) variable and employee performance as the criterion (dependent) variable. The study is a survey of higher education institutions in Rivers State and primary data was generated from the sample. The primary data were derived from the answer respondents gave in the self-administered questionnaire prepared by the researchers. The study was conducted at the micro level of analysis hence, the data was collected from the individual members of the institutions. The total number of teaching staff in the higher education that constituted the population of the study was 3,448. From the population a sample size of 358 teaching staff was obtained using the Taro Yamane formula with 95% confidence level. A structured questionnaire with items drawn from literature and subsequently tested for reliability was used to obtain data. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to examine the stipulated relationship with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Data Analysis and Results

The secondary data analysis was carried out using the Pearson's product moment correlation at a 95% confidence interval. The analyses were geared towards testing the two hypotheses, which were stated in the null form. The 0.05 significance level adopted the criterion for either accepting the null hypotheses at ($p > 0.05$) or rejecting the null hypotheses at ($p > 0.01$).

Tests of hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 focused on the relationship between workplace conflict and employee efficiency and the result is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Analysis of correlation between workplace conflict and employee efficiency.

		Workplace Conflict	Employee Efficiency
Workplace Conflict	Pearson Correlation	1	.051*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.019
	N	358	358
Employee Efficiency	Pearson Correlation	.051*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	
	N	358	358

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data Survey

Interpretation

Table 1 presents the relationship between workplace conflict and employee efficiency. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.051$), this shows that there is a very low positive correlation between both variables. Since the p-value $0.19 > 0.01$, the correlation between workplace conflict and employee efficiency is not significant at 0.01% significant level.

Decision: We accept the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between workplace conflict and employee efficiency.

Test of Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 focused on the relationship between workplace conflict and employee effectiveness and the result is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of correlation between Workplace Conflict and Employee Effectiveness

		Workplace Conflict	Employee Effectiveness
Workplace Conflict	Pearson Correlation	1	.11
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.540
	N	358	358
Employee Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	.11	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.540	
	N	358	358

Table 2 presents the relationship between workplace conflict and employee effectiveness. The Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.11$), this shows that there is a very low positive correlation between both variables. Since the p-value $0.540 > 0.01$, the correlation between workplace conflict and employee effectiveness is not significant at 0.01% significant level.

Decision: We accept the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between workplace conflict and employee effectiveness.

Discussion of Findings

Based on the analyses earlier done certain findings were made which form the basis for our discussions in line with existing literature. It showed how work place conflict relates to employee performance of higher education institution in Rivers state.

The finding of the test of hypothesis one (workplace conflict and employee efficiency) showed no correlation between workplace conflict and employee efficiency of higher education institutions in Rivers state. Implication of this is, as workplace conflict increases in organization employee efficiency tend to decrease. The finding of the above hypotheses supports the finding of Deutsch (1969) who asserted that workplace conflicts decrease goodwill and mutual understanding, which

hinders the completion of organizational tasks. To this end, Workplace conflict interfere with task-related effort because members focus on reducing threats, increasing power, as well as attempting to build cohesion rather than working on the task and this limit the information processing ability of the team (Simons and Peterson,2000). The second finding on the test of hypothesis two (workplace conflict and employee effectiveness), showed no correlation between workplace conflict and employee effectiveness of higher education institutions in Rivers state. What this implies is that workplace conflict decreases employee effectiveness. This study opposed the study of Simons and Peterson (2000). They concluded that organizations that experience workplace conflict tend to make better decisions because such conflict encourages greater cognitive understanding of the issue being considered. The finding also opposed the finding of Jehn (1995). He suggested that moderate levels of workplace conflict are constructive; since they stimulate discussion of ideas that help employees perform better.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the discussions above, the researcher thus concludes as follows:

Workplace conflict has no significant relationship with employee efficiency of higher education institutions in Rivers State

Workplace conflict has no significant relationship with employee effectiveness of higher education institutions in Rivers State.

Based on findings, this recommendation is made:

Employer should give sufficient freedom to employee to do what they want. By doing so, employees will become more motivated and can speak out their' idea, this could make them feel that they are more valuable even to the organization. Also, management should make use of work-place conflict based theories to access the employee's performance.

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