# Strategies Involvement in Conflict Management on Employee and Productivity in a Nigerian Kaduna State Civil Service

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**A b s t r a c t**

This study examines the role of conflict management strategies on employees' productivity in a Nigerian Kaduna civil service. Four conflict management strategies were considered which include collective bargaining, negotiation, avoidance and imposing. The descriptive survey design was adopted and self-developed questionnaire tagged Conflict Management Strategies and Employees' Productivity Questionnaire was used in the data collection. The reliability of the instrument was tested and Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.92 was obtained for the whole instrument. Taro Yamane formula was used in determining sample size and stratified random sampling technique was used in selecting 240 respondents from a cross-section of four ministries in Kaduna State Civil Service, Nigeria. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression were used to analyses the hypotheses. Collective bargaining and negotiation showed a significant positive contribution to employees' productivity while that obtained for avoidance and imposing were significantly negative. Also, collective bargaining and negotiation were significantly positively related to employees' productivity. Therefore, it was recommended that conflict in whatever level should not be ignored but should be effectively managed for better employees' productivity in the workplace. Workers at all level should be trained and given the right behavioural orientation on how to handle conflict. There is also a need for training and retraining of managers on how to effectively managed conflicts for better employees' productivity in the workplace.

**Background to the Study**
The structurally differentiated characteristics of contemporary work organizations, whether in the manufacturing or the service industry, inevitably generate conflicts of interest. These conflicts of interest arise in groups because of the scarcity of freedom, position, and resources (Abalaka, 2021). Workplace conflict is thus endemic despite the best management practices in organizations and manifests in various forms as an intrinsic and unavoidable feature of the employment relationship. It is, by definition, an ongoing process that is more likely to occur in hierarchical organizations where people with differing perspectives, opinions, and backgrounds interact. However, conflict in work-relations is not an aberration since it creates or provides an opportunity for correction and reconciliation for the betterment of both the organization and the workers (Sulaiman, 2022).

According to Kazimoto (2013), workplace conflict is the presence of discord that occurs when different individuals or groups' goals, interests, or values are incompatible and frustrate each other's attempts to achieve objectives in an organization. It is a communication process and an inevitable consequence of transactional relationships manifesting in disagreement and dissonance with and between individuals and groups in the work environment. In this context, workplace conflict is a fact of life in any organization as long as people compete for jobs, power, recognition, and security (Sulaiman, 2022). Therefore, the task of management is to resolve conflicts and manage them and not to affect the involvement of the organization. Based on Akanji (2005), managed conflict promotes productive performance, while destructively managed conflict creates dislocation and polarization of the entire group, reducing productivity and job performance. The above analysis suggests that effectively managed conflicts encourage organizational improvement to boost employees' performance at work. Furthermore, through good conflict management strategies, weaknesses in organizational decision-making are exposed, which may prompt the establishment to effect changes and search for positive solutions. Hence, management is duty-bound to resolve a conflict correctly for the sake of increasing employee involvement because the outcome of such action will result in good communication, time management, good cooperation, and increased corporate productivity (Sulaiman, 2022).

Conflict in an employment relationship has been an issue of continuing interest and debate. Conflict is a common occurrence in organizational life. It occurs when a desired goal or objective is the desire to obtain more in both economic (wages and benefits) and non-economic (contract provisions and operation practices) areas (Abalaka, 2021). The labour union also anticipates making these gains through collective bargaining, grievance and arbitration procedures, and management defaults. On the other hand, the organized private sector resists all efforts of the union to restrict management freedom to make the necessary to run the business profitably. Conflict in the organized private sector, like banks, is endemic, and various procedures have been developed to resolve these disputes. One of such procedures lies in the institutionalization of grievance devices like the collective resolution of these conflicts determines the organization's

success or otherwise. Organizational leaders need to manage conflicts between individuals to have a positive effect on an organization. Studies on conflict management and organizational involvement have been conducted Ajiteru, (2020). However, little or none appears to have established the influence of conflict management strategies in terms of competition results; this research was carried out to fill a knowledge gap.

**Statement of the Problem**

Quite visibly, most organizations have devoted a greater part of economic time and effort to settle conflict related issues. This scenario has continued unabated, hence posing a negative challenge to industrial and economic growth of an organization. Although, scholars have reasoned that conflict cannot be completely ruled out in any organization (Abalaka, 2021) but then, frequent occurrence of organizational conflict could have an adverse effect on the organization in terms of loss of production hour, reduction in profits, unemployment and of course reduction in income level of the organization. Just like any other organization, Kaduna State Service is still confronted with various forms of conflict both interpersonal and conflict task conflicts (Sulaiman, 2022). The State civil service has also been criticized that they do not live up to expectation of the masses due to their poor productivity. Therefore, it is very important to examine which of the conflict management strategies could endanger increase in employees' productivity in the workplace given the fact that conflict is inevitable. This is because when conflict is not properly managed, there cannot be an increased productivity (Ajiteru, 2020).

**Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this study is to examine the contribution of different conflict management strategies on employees' productivity in the workplace. Specifically, the objectives of this study include;

1.  To examine the contribution of various conflict management strategies (collective bargaining, negotiation, avoidance and imposing) to employees' productivity in the workplace.
2.  To examine the relationship between various conflict management strategies (collective bargaining, negotiation, avoidance and imposing) and employees' productivity in the workplace.

**Research Questions**

The following are the research questions

1.  What is the contribution of various conflict management strategies (collective bargaining, negotiation, avoidance and imposing) to employees' productivity in the workplace?
2.  How do the different conflict management strategies (of collective bargaining, negotiation, avoidance and imposing) relate to employees' productivity in the workplace?

**Research hypothesis**

1.  There is no significant contribution of each of the conflict management strategies

(collective bargaining, negotiation, avoiding and imposing) to employees' productivity in the workplace.

2. There is no significant relationship between each of the conflict management strategies and employees' productivity in the workplace.

## Review of Literature
### Concept of Conflict Management
Conflict is unavoidable among humans, whether at home, church, or in an organization, especially when two or more individuals, groups, or organizations interact, owing to differences in individual perceptions, goals, interests, ideas, feelings, values, and so on that conflict with each other (Ajiteru, 2020). Therefore, every organization in society focuses on creating a conducive environment where employees can carry out their duties effectively without any negative influence that could hinder individual and organizational goals (Abalaka, 2021). Nevertheless, conflict in organizations has become unavoidable because employees contend for authority, position, recognition, limited resources. No wonder, Bercovitch (2019), posits that conflict is an inevitable part of living because it is connected to states of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role differentiation. These disagreements frequently result in conflict, which can be either dysfunctional or functional due to the employee's involvement.

Conflict management strategies refer to those techniques or approaches that can be used to prevent, control, or resolve conflicts. Conflict management strategies are essential for any school because, through these strategies, the adverse effects resulting from conflicts can be minimized or controlled. There exist several strategies that could be used to resolve conflicts in schools (Ajiteru, 2020). These include dominance, compromise, synergy, the culture of civility, win-lose strategy, lose strategy, win-win strategy Abalaka, (2021); adjudication, collective bargaining, confrontation, problem-solving, creation of the budget committee, separation device, neglect or silence, clarification of interdependencies, consultation, boxing the problem, clarification of goals, and prayer (Sulaiman, 2022). The focus of this study is on three conflict management strategies: arbitration, dialogue, and effective communication conflict management strategies.

### Conflict Management Strategies
The timely identification of the nature and significance of sources of conflicts in an organization is the significant step in developing conflict management strategies (Abalaka, 2021). The best technique for managing conflicts in an organization is to focus on enhancing constructive functions to optimize employee involvement. Therefore, it is essential to identify all levels of conflict in an organization, be they individual, interpersonal or intergroup conflicts. We should also bear in mind that every organization has its technique of managing conflict with the sole aim of survival. Ajiteru, (2020) argued that since conflict is unavoidable in organizations, management determines whether it positively or negatively affects employee involvement. Therefore, proper recognition and immediate clarification of the underlying tension before the conflict ensues or escalates translates to effective management of conflict in an organization.

Some of the early scholars who took an interest in conflict and conflict management strategies include Follett (1926-1940), Blake and Mouton (1964), Thomas (1976). Follett, as cited in Tabitha and Florence (2019), proposed three main strategies for managing interpersonal conflicts: dominance, compromise, and integration, as well as alternative dispute resolution and suppression strategies for organizations. Blake and Mouton, as cited in Tabitha and Florence (2019), categorizing their strategies based on the level of concern for individuals and production, assert that interpersonal conflicts can be managed through five strategies: forcing, compromising, withdrawing, problem-solving, and smoothing.

Tabitha and Florence (2019) assets a two-dimensional framework of conflict handling strategies based on the assertiveness and cooperativeness of the parties concerned. He acknowledged five conflict management strategies: competing, compromising, collaborating, accommodating, and alternative dispute resolution. As cited by Tabitha and Florence (2019), Rahim posits that interpersonal conflict can be managed through five strategies: dominating, obliging, integrating, compromising, and avoiding, based on the level of the concerned individuals (Abalaka, 2021). All the scholars mentioned in this study agreed on using compromise as one of the strategies for conflict management. However, there is a considerable similarity between Thomas and Rahim strategies; no wonder even in contemporary studies, administrators have extensively applied their conflict management strategies.

Some essential strategies for organizational conflict management are collaboration, competition, bargaining, alternative dispute resolution, and compromising. A collaboration strategy aims to satisfy the needs of the parties concerned, especially when the members have mutually significant goals. Competition strategy refers to an individual or group's desire to meet their goals and objectives either moderately or to other groups' detriment. In an organization, individuals and groups compete for scarce resources, position, recognition, power. According to Issa (2009), a very competitive individual's use of power can only be reduced through higher external power, such as legitimate law or social taboos, when going overboard. The bargaining strategy is used primarily on a contractual agreement between management and employees for settlement when it becomes a legal matter (Ajiteru, 2020). It gives all aggrieved parties concerned the chance to have a similar expression of their minds, regardless of the hierarchy of those involved in the dispute, without prejudice.

**Concept of Employee Involvement**
Employee involvement is a management initiative concerned with how employees can be best and most appropriately engaged in participating in organizational processes to improve their organizations success (Heathfield, 2016). Ajiteru, (2020) defined employee involvement as a management initiative that allows employees to participate in decision-making and their empowerment to utilize their abilities to achieve improved performance for both the employee and his organization. Employee involvement allows employees to participate and contribute to managerial decision-making and

improvement activities appropriate to their levels in the organization. Employee involvement is concerned with different work design approaches and special activities; only one thing differentiates one company from another: its people.

**Conceptual Model**
A conceptual model that shows the interaction between compensation management practice and employee retention was proposed in figure 1.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model
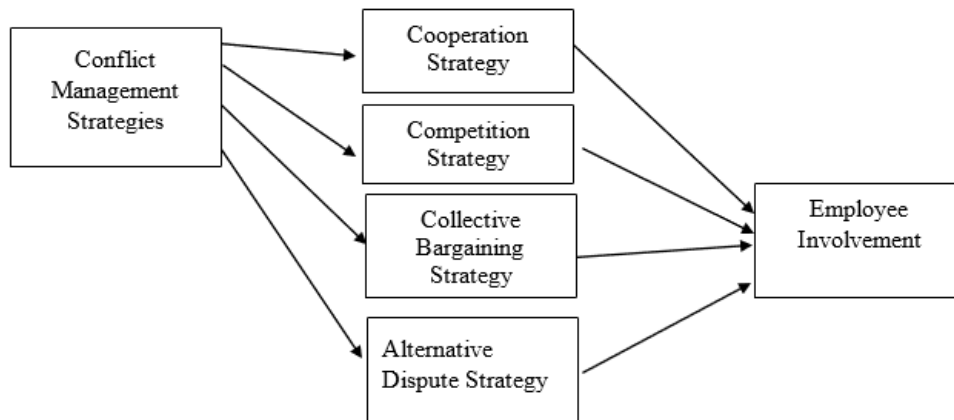


**Source:** Researchers (2021)

**Empirical Review**
The Ajiteru, (2020) study aimed to determine the principals' conflict management techniques for teacher job satisfaction in public secondary schools in Kaduna State Nigeria. The research employed a descriptive survey design to obtain information. The study found that incorporating obliging had a strong and positive correlation with teacher job satisfaction, whereas dominating and avoiding techniques had p, which was not statistically significant. The findings add to the existing body of knowledge and may help develop guidelines for principals and other stakeholders to manage schools effectively (Abalaka, 2021).

A study was conducted by Malak, Sukaina, and Norlena (2020), in Lebanon. The effect of conflict management on employee performance in some industrial firms in Lebanon was investigated. Descriptive statistics were obtained, and research hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The results obtained showed that, in general, conflict management has a positive and significant effect on employees' performance, but to a weak extent. Notably, only collaborative, compromising, and accommodating styles had a weak positive correlation with employee performance (Ajiteru, 2020).

John-Eke and Akintokunbo (2020), examine conflict management as a tool for increasing employee involvement. Their findings reveal that conflicts do not always put the organization in a bad light. However, a constructively managed conflict brings about healthy competition, strengthens team participation, and bridges communication. As a result, we recommend that organizations reeducate their employees on conflict management concepts, dispelling the popular but false notion that conflict is bad, destructive, and should be avoided at all costs. Instead, managers should adopt strategies or strategies based on the nature and the type of conflict.

In India, Zahid (2017) conducted a study on the impact of organizational conflict on employee performance in the private commercial banks of Bangladesh. The study examined the antecedents of organizational conflict and the circumstances under which organizational conflict affects employee performance. The study revealed that conflict hinders the performance of employees in an organization (Abalaka, 2021). In another study, Owan (2018) investigated conflict management strategies and secondary school teachers' job involvement. Six null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted correlational and factorial research designs. According to the findings, the level of job involvement of teachers in the Kaduna Local Government Area is significantly high. The findings also revealed that the four conflict resolution strategies (arbitration, dialogue, effective communication, and smoothing) had a significant combined influence on secondary school teachers' job involvement. It was based on this background that this study was considered pertinent to carry out.

Ajiteru (2020) discussed issues beyond leadership control in managing conflict in the Nigerian university system. To effectively examine conflict management, this study adopts desk research using mainly secondary data from textbooks, the internet, journals. The study uncovers that conflict is prevalent in human life and cannot be removed. Instead, its effect can be reduced to ensure that it does not impede the organization's activities and reduce employees' job performance. Sulaiman (2022) reported that empirical tests showed a significantly positive relationship between conflict management strategies (collective bargaining, compromise, and accommodation) and organizational performance. Conversely, non-integrative conflict management strategies (competition, domination, and alternative dispute resolution) had a negative statistically determinate effect on organizational performance. Also, the result of the regression analysis indicated that collective bargaining strategy displayed the highest significant positive correlation with organizational performance. Furthermore, study findings show that conflicts arise in the workplace over various organizational experiences based on economic and goal-incompatible orientations. The union-management conflict has been discovered as the most prevalent type of industrial conflict in an organization.

**Methodology**
This study adopts the descriptive research design of survey type. Self-developed questionnaire was used in data collection. The questionnaire was divided into three main

sections. Section A measures the demographic of the respondents; section B assessed each of the four conflict management strategies. The last section, which is section C, measured employees' performance. Section A comprised two items, section B was made of 16 items with four items each used to measure each of the four conflict management strategies considered (collective bargaining, negotiation, imposing and avoidance). Section C comprised 5 items. All items in section B and C were rated on a four point Likert Scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The population of the study comprised employees in the selected four ministries in Kaduna State Civil Service. The determination of sample size was done using the Taro Yamene formula and stratified random sampling technique was used to select 240 employees of Kaduna State Civil Service. These samples were selected from six ministries namely Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Ministry of Works (Abalaka, 2021). The instrument "Conflict Management Strategies and Employees' Productivity Questionnaire" was pretested for reliability and the Cronbach Reliability coefficient of 0.92 was obtained for the whole questionnaire. Multiple regression and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to test research hypotheses. Pearson correlation was used to examine whether there is a relationship between the variables. It provides an index of the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. Multiple regression was adopted for studying the relationship between one dependent variable and more than independent variables. It is applied to determine how well a set of variables are able to predict a particular outcome, and which variables are significant predictor of the outcome, (Sekaran, 2003). The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20.0) was used to facilitate data analysis.

## Results
### Hypothesis One
There is no significant contribution of each of the conflict management strategies (collective bargaining, negotiation, avoidance and imposing) to employees' productivity in the workplace.

**Table 1:** Multiple Regression Analysis of the contribution of various conflict management strategies on employees' productivity

| Conflict Management Strategies | B | S.E | Standardized Beta | t | p value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collective bargaining | 0.778 | 0.050 | 0.626 | 15.69 | <0.001** |
| Negotiation | 0.572 | 0.062 | 0.364 | 9.19 | <0.001** |
| Avoidance | -0.043 | 0.033 | -0.364 | -1.30 | 0.196 |
| Imposing | -0.091 | 0.033 | -0.066 | -2.71 | 0.007** |
| Constant | -2.612 | 0.538 | | -4.86 | <0.001 |

**significant contribution at 0.01 (p<0.01), R = 0.94, $R^2$=0.88
Employees' productivity = -2.612+0.778*collective bargaining+0.572*negotiation -0.043*avoidance -0.091*imposing.

The results presented in table 1 showed that collective bargaining (B = 0.778, t calc. =15.69, p <0.001) has a significant positive contribution to employees' performance. Negotiation as a conflict management strategies showed a significant contribution to employees' productivity (B =0.572, t calc. = 9.19, p<0.001). Avoidance showed an insignificant positive contribution to employee' productivity B = -0.043, t calc.= -1.30, p=0.196, p>0.05). For imposing, the results revealed a significant negative contribution to employees' productivity (B =-0.091, t = -2.71, p = 0.007, p<.001). It therefore means that collective bargaining and negotiation can be term to be an effective means of conflict management strategies that will trigger a better employee's productivity when conflicts are properly managed, it results to an improved productivity. Based on the result of the standardized beta, the conflict resolution strategy that influenced the varaince in employees' productivity the most is collective bargaining.

**Hypothesis Two**
**Table 2:** Pearson Product Moment analysis of the relationship between conflict management's styles and employees' productivity in the workplace

| Variables | Collective bargaining | Avoidance | Negotiation | Imposing | Productivity |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Collective bargaining | 1 | | | | |
| Avoidance | 0.197** | 1 | | | |
| Negotiation | 0.81** | 0.119 | 1 | | |
| Imposing | 0.09 | 0.29** | 0.13* | 1 | |
| Productivity | 0.91** | 0.12 | 0.86** | 0.03 | 1 |

*significantly related at 0.05(p<0.05), ** significantly related at 0.01 (p<0.01).

The results in table 2 showed a significant positive relationship between collective bargaining and employees' productivity in the workplace (r =0.91, p<0.001) and negotiation and employees' productivity (r =0.86, p<0.001). The results obtained for avoidance and imposing were not significant (r = 0.12, p>0.05 and r =0.03, p>0.05 respectively). This means that when collective bargaining and negotiation are used to manage workplace conflict, it will result to an improvement in performance unlike avoidance and imposing method which does not enhance employees' productivity.

**Discussion of the Findings**
This study has shown a significant positive contribution of collective bargaining and negotiation as conflict management strategies to have a significant contribution to employees' productivity. Finding has also revealed that imposing as a conflict management strategy has a negative significant contribution to employees' productivity . Avoidance showed an insignificantly negative contribution to employees' productivity. This therefore means that collecting bargaining and negotiation are the conflict management strategies that can enhance employees' productivity while imposing and avoidance will discourage employees' productivity (Ajiteru, 2020). In addition, collective bargaining and negotiation were significantly positively related to employees'

productivity while imposing and avoidance are insignificantly related with employees' performance in the workplace. The results of this study have been supported by other similar studies.  Meyer (2004) observed that cooperative conflict management strategies (collective bargaining, negotiation, compromising) tends to yield beneficial outcomes in the workplace unlike the uncooperative conflict management styles like forcing and imposing.

**Conclusion**

This study has examined the contribution as well as the relationship between different conflict management strategies and employees' productivity in the workplace**.** Cooperative conflict management strategies which are collective bargaining and negotiation revealed a significant positive contribution to employees' productivity. A significant positive relationship was also obtained between collective bargaining and employees' productivity as well as between negotiation and employees' productivity. Imposing on the other hand showed a significant negative contribution to employees' productivity, while avoidance was insignificantly related. Therefore, collecting bargaining and negotiation can enhance employees' productivity unlike the use of force.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following are the recommendations:
1. Organizations be it private or public, small or big should formulate and execute policies, programmes, rules and actions that are legal and employees based.
2. Conflict in whatever level should not be ignored but should be effectively managed for better employees' productivity in the workplace.
3. Workers at all level should be trained and given the right behavioural orientation as to reduce the occurrence of conflict at workplace.
4. There is a need for training and retraining of managers on how to effectively manage conflict to enhance employees' productivity.

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