Conflict Management Strategies and Organizational Competitiveness in Nigerian Banking Industry

B. M. Nwibere
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational competitiveness among employees in Port Harcourt's banking sector, Nigeria. A sample of 303 respondents was collected through purposive sampling, and data was gathered using a self-administered questionnaire. Analysis was conducted using PLS-SEM, revealing significant insights through the lens of organizational learning theory. The findings indicate a positive relationship between problem-solving strategies and competitive advantage, affirming existing literature. Additionally, avoidance, forcing, and compromise strategies all exhibited positive relationships with competitive advantage, contrary to null hypotheses. Practical recommendations suggest prioritizing problem-solving strategies for enhancing competitiveness, while cautioning against the long-term implications of avoidance and forcing. And theoretical implications highlighted the relevance of organizational learning theory in understanding conflict management dynamics and their impact on competitiveness. The study underscores the nuanced nature of different strategies and emphasizes a holistic approach considering both short-term gains and long-term sustainability. Integrating these insights into organizational frameworks can enrich theoretical understandings of organizational learning processes and strategic management implications.

Keywords: *Conflict, Conflict Management, Competitiveness, avoiding, compromise, forcing, problem-solving*

Corresponding Author: B. M. Nwibere

Background to the Study

Organisational competitiveness is heavily influenced by how they manage workplace disagreements. Despite being inescapable, disputes may be efficiently managed with early identification and suitable actions. Organisations must regularly monitor signals of conflict, since neglecting them might jeopardise the organization's well-being (Kazimoto, 2013). Workplace conflict, defined as conflicts between individuals or groups owing to conflicting goals, interests, or beliefs, remains a constant difficulty, even with good management practices (Ayoko, 2017). It's a normal part of working interactions, especially in hierarchical organisations where different points of view cross. Rather than being regarded as unusual, workplace conflict may be viewed as a chance for progress and reconciliation, benefiting both individuals and the organisation (Issa, 2009).

Workplace conflict is fundamentally driven by communication processes and relationships inside the organisation (Bercovitch, 2014). Individuals strive for status, power, recognition, and security, resulting in conflicts that must be managed rather than suppressed. Well-managed conflict may have a beneficial impact on organisational performance, but mishandling it can cause interruptions, lost productivity, and group division (Obasan, 2011). As a result, management is critical in establishing an atmosphere favourable to conflict resolution, eventually boosting organisational performance through improved communication, time management, collaboration, and productivity (Obasan, 2011). According to a study conducted in Bangladesh by Jahangir et al. (2022), conflict management practices are positively associated to organisational performance.
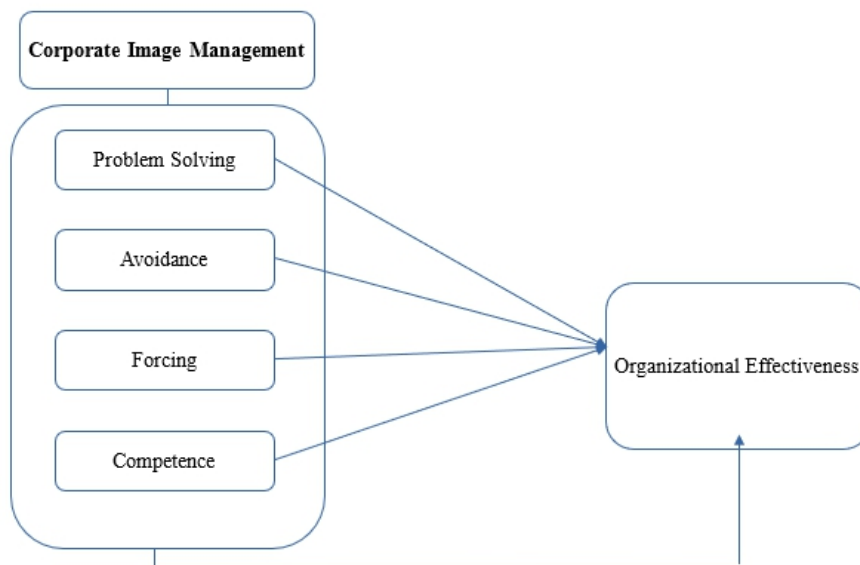
Problem Statement

When it comes to today's business, companies are more concerned with being competitive in order to remain relevant and long-lasting in the modern world. Due to high levels of competition, many people have difficulty establishing a strong market position. This can lead to stagnation or decrease in market share, profitability, and growth compared to competitors. This situation is frequently the result of difficulty in innovating, meeting the increasing demands of consumers, and effectively distinguishing goods and services. These issues are exacerbated by internal disagreements between teams or leadership, resulting in inefficiency, low morale, and a lack of clear strategic direction.

This is the outcome of issues like low consumer satisfaction, high employee turnover, and a lack of growth opportunities. Whether disputes within departments or between people worsen operations and make it more difficult to collaborate, which is essential for gaining a competitive edge. If these problems are not fixed, they might harm the company's viability, reputation, and brand. The main issue is that it might jeopardise the organization's competitiveness and ability to survive in a highly competitive global market. An organization's ability to innovate continuously, simplify operations, and foster agility and resilience are essential to its success. Its inability to resolve competitive issues jeopardises the market's importance, investors' difficulty, and the market's end.

Objective of the Study

The core objective of the study was to:

i. Evaluate the relationship between problem solving strategy and organizational competitiveness

ii. Examine the relationship between avoiding strategy and organizational competitiveness

iii. Evaluate the relationship between forcing strategy and organizational competitiveness

iv. Examine the relationship between compliance strategy and organizational competitiveness evaluate the relationship between compromise strategy and organizational competitiveness

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Theoretical/Literature

Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational learning is a crucial concept in today's dynamic business environment. It refers to the continuous process by which organizations acquire, share, and utilize knowledge to improve their capabilities (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). This ongoing learning cycle allows organizations to adapt to changing circumstances, innovate effectively, and ultimately achieve a competitive advantage (Easterby & Gellatly, 2014). One critical area where organizational learning plays a significant role is in conflict management. Conflict, often perceived as a negative force, can be a valuable source of diverse perspectives and ideas (Jehn, 1997). However, unmanaged conflict can lead to decreased productivity, employee dissatisfaction, and ultimately, hinder organizational competitiveness (Schweitzer, Cachena, & Ingram, 2010).

Organizational learning encourages a culture of inquiry and reflection and by analyzing past conflicts, organizations can identify underlying issues that contribute to them. This knowledge

allows for the development of targeted conflict management strategies that address the root causes, preventing future occurrences (Armstrong & Cole, 2002). Effective conflict management involves understanding the viewpoints of all parties involved. Through open communication forums and knowledge sharing, organizations can learn from the different perspectives within a conflict. This fosters a collaborative environment where creative solutions are developed, leading to more effective conflict resolution (Lewis, 2003).

Organizational learning promotes experimentation with different conflict management styles and techniques. By analyzing the outcomes of these interventions, organizations can adapt their approach to conflict resolution, ensuring a continuous improvement process (Van de Ven, 1993) Learning from successful conflict management strategies across different departments and teams within the organization allows for the development of best practices. This knowledge sharing fosters a more unified approach to conflict, leading to a more efficient and competitive organization (Hansen, Møller, & Christensen, 2003).

By studying how organizational learning facilitates effective conflict management, researchers can gain valuable insights into the factors that contribute to organizational competitiveness. A well-managed conflict environment can lead to increased innovation, improved decision-making, and a more engaged workforce, all of which are essential for achieving a sustainable competitive advantage (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992).

Conflict Management Strategies
In organizational settings, divergent viewpoints are a common occurrence stemming from the varied approaches and perspectives of individuals and groups (Jones & George, 2003). When two individuals express differing opinions, it often leads to conflict as a result of contrasting thinking styles and behaviors. Conflict, simply put, arises from discrepancies in thoughts and understandings between parties (Jones & George, 2003). The term "conflict" finds its origins in the Latin word "conflicyus," denoting trouble between two or more individuals (Balawi, 2005). Balawi (2005) defines conflict as a disagreement, friction, or dispute among people. Given the significant role of organizations, conflicts have become crucial in facilitating informed decision-making processes. Various definitions of conflict exist in the literature. According to Schramm-Nielsen (2002), conflict denotes a state of serious contradiction in arguments concerning a matter deemed essential by at least one party involved. Industrial conflicts typically involve identifiable parties, including owners, administrators, and workers (Azamosa, 2004). Dzurgba (2006) underscores the social dimension of conflict, viewing it as a substantial challenge to the cohesion of social groups.

Addressing conflicts entails employing a systematic approach known as conflict management, aimed at resolving conflicts to the greatest extent possible (Jones & George, 2003). This involves acquiring expertise in conflict resolution, understanding various conflict modes and sources, honing communication skills, and establishing a framework for managing conflicts. Conflict management encompasses interventions designed to either mitigate conflicts or, in certain instances, stimulate insufficient conflict. Effective conflict management necessitates managers to formulate and implement plans, strategies, and policies to ensure the efficient resolution of conflicts.

Problem-Solving Strategy

Problem-solving as a strategy of conflict management within organizational settings has garnered significant attention in both theoretical and practical domains. Drawing from the seminal work of Thomas and Kilmann (1974), conflict management strategies have been categorized into five main approaches: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Among these, problem-solving, also known as collaborating, has emerged as a proactive method that emphasizes mutual understanding and joint resolution of conflicts. Problem-solving entails identifying the root causes of conflicts, generating multiple solutions, evaluating these solutions, and selecting the most suitable course of action through cooperation and consensus (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). This approach aligns with integrative conflict resolution principles, promoting not only resolution but also the enhancement of relationships and organizational outcomes (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986).

In organizational contexts, the efficacy of problem-solving as a conflict management strategy lies in its ability to address underlying issues rather than merely treating symptoms. By fostering open communication channels and encouraging stakeholders to express their perspectives, problem-solving facilitates the exploration of divergent viewpoints, leading to innovative solutions that accommodate various interests (Rahim, 2011). Moreover, the collaborative nature of problem-solving cultivates a sense of ownership and commitment among involved parties, thereby promoting the implementation and sustainability of agreed-upon solutions (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Research by Jehn (1995) underscores the positive impact of problem-solving on team cohesion and performance, suggesting that organizations adopting this approach are better positioned to navigate conflicts constructively and achieve strategic objectives.

However, while problem-solving offers numerous benefits, its successful application within organizations necessitates certain conditions. For instance, a supportive organizational culture characterized by trust, respect, and psychological safety is essential for individuals to engage in candid discussions and contribute effectively to the problem-solving process (Edmondson, 1999). Additionally, effective leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering an environment conducive to collaborative conflict resolution, wherein leaders serve as facilitators, mediators, and role models of constructive behavior (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Furthermore, the complexity of organizational conflicts may sometimes exceed the capacity of problem-solving alone, requiring complementary strategies such as compromising or avoiding in certain situations (Pondy, 1967). Thus, while problem-solving remains a valuable tool for conflict management, its application should be contextually informed and complemented by other approaches as needed.

Avoidance

Avoidance as a conflict management strategy within organizational contexts has garnered significant attention due to its implications for workplace dynamics and productivity. According to Thomas and Kilmann (1974), avoidance entails sidestepping or ignoring the conflict altogether, often stemming from a desire to maintain harmony and evade potential confrontations. While avoidance may seem beneficial in the short term by preserving

superficial peace, it can lead to unresolved issues festering beneath the surface, potentially exacerbating tensions in the long run (Rahim, 2017). Additionally, De Dreu and Gelfand (2008) argue that prolonged avoidance may hinder organizational innovation and inhibit the constructive resolution of conflicts, ultimately impeding organizational growth and development.

However, proponents of avoidance as a conflict management strategy contend that in certain situations, it can be strategic and pragmatic. Rahim (2017) suggests that when the stakes are low or when the issue at hand is deemed inconsequential to organizational goals, avoidance may serve as a viable means of conserving time and resources that would otherwise be expended on resolving minor conflicts. Furthermore, Tjosvold (1984) posits that avoidance can provide individuals with the necessary breathing space to reflect on the conflict objectively, potentially facilitating more informed and constructive engagement at a later stage.

Despite its potential advantages, the overreliance on avoidance can pose significant risks to organizational effectiveness. Research by De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001) indicates that unresolved conflicts resulting from avoidance may escalate over time, leading to increased hostility and decreased employee morale. Moreover, Thomas (1992) highlights that while avoidance may temporarily alleviate discomfort, it often perpetuates a cycle of unresolved tensions, ultimately undermining trust and collaboration within the organization. Thus, while avoidance may serve as a temporary coping mechanism, it is crucial for organizations to recognize its limitations and implement proactive measures to address conflicts constructively, fostering a culture of open communication and conflict resolution.

Forcing
Forcing, also known as competing or dominating, is a conflict management strategy employed by organizations to assert their position and achieve their objectives at the expense of the opposing party's interests (Thomas, 1976). This strategy is characterized by a high level of assertiveness and a low level of cooperativeness, where one party aims to win the conflict at any cost, often disregarding the concerns and needs of the other party (Rahim, 2002). In organizational settings, forcing may be used when immediate action is required, or when one party perceives itself to be in a position of power or superiority (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974).

Research suggests that while forcing can lead to quick resolutions and decisive outcomes, it may also result in negative consequences such as damaged relationships, decreased trust, and long-term resentment among parties involved (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Additionally, the unilateral nature of forcing may hinder collaboration and cooperation in the future, leading to a breakdown in communication and teamwork within the organization (Jehn, 1995). Despite its drawbacks, forcing remains a prevalent strategy in organizational conflict management, particularly in situations where compromise or collaboration is deemed impractical or undesirable (Deutsch, 1973).

Forcing serves as a double-edged sword in organizational conflict management, offering expedient solutions at the expense of interpersonal relationships and long-term organizational

harmony. While it may be necessary in certain circumstances, organizations must carefully weigh the short-term benefits against the potential long-term costs of employing a forcing strategy. Future research should focus on identifying contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of forcing, as well as exploring alternative conflict management strategies that prioritize collaboration and mutual benefit.

Compromise

Compromise is widely recognized as a key strategy for conflict management within organizational settings. It involves negotiating and reaching agreements that satisfy the interests of multiple parties to some extent, thus promoting harmony and cooperation. Research by Pruitt and Rubin (1986) highlights the importance of compromise in resolving conflicts by emphasizing the role of concessions in achieving mutually acceptable solutions. Compromise allows conflicting parties to acknowledge each other's perspectives and concerns, facilitating the restoration of trust and collaboration (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997). Furthermore, studies have shown that effective compromise strategies lead to improved organizational performance and employee satisfaction (Olekalns & Druckman, 1993).

Moreover, compromise serves as a constructive approach to conflict resolution that fosters a conducive organizational culture. By encouraging open communication and empathy, compromise enables individuals to explore common ground and generate creative solutions (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991). This collaborative process not only addresses immediate conflicts but also cultivates a sense of collective problem-solving and solidarity within the organization (Wall & Callister, 1995). Additionally, research suggests that organizations that prioritize compromise as a conflict management strategy exhibit higher levels of resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges (Jehn, 1995).

However, it is important to recognize that compromise is not always a panacea for resolving conflicts in organizations. While it can lead to temporary resolutions, excessive compromise may overlook underlying issues or perpetuate power imbalances (Kelman, 1997). Furthermore, the effectiveness of compromise depends on the willingness of all parties to engage in genuine dialogue and negotiation (Kriesberg, 1998). Therefore, organizations must complement compromise with other conflict management strategies, such as collaboration or confrontation, to address complex and persistent conflicts comprehensively (Thomas, 1992). By integrating various approaches, organizations can develop holistic conflict management frameworks that promote long-term stability and productivity.

Organizational Competitiveness

Organizational competitiveness refers to the ability of a company or organization to maintain and improve its position within its industry or market by effectively utilizing its resources, capabilities, and strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. This advantage enables the organization to outperform its rivals, attract customers, and achieve superior financial performance. Organizational competitiveness encompasses various dimensions, including innovation, efficiency, quality, customer service, and responsiveness to market changes. It involves a continuous process of identifying and leveraging strengths while addressing weaknesses to stay ahead in a dynamic and competitive business environment.

In their study, Porter (1990) emphasized the significance of organizational competitiveness in the global marketplace, highlighting the role of strategic positioning and competitive advantage in achieving superior performance. Porter argued that organizations must adopt unique strategies that differentiate them from competitors and create value for customers. Similarly, Barney (1991) discussed the concept of sustainable competitive advantage, emphasizing the role of valuable, rare, and non-substitutable resources and capabilities in driving organizational competitiveness over the long term.

Focusing on the role of innovation, Prahalad and Hamel (1990) highlighted the importance of organizational capabilities in fostering competitiveness, particularly through continuous innovation and adaptation to changing market conditions. They argued that organizations should build dynamic capabilities that enable them to sense market opportunities, mobilize resources, and rapidly respond to emerging threats and challenges. Furthermore, Teece et al. (1997) introduced the concept of dynamic capabilities, emphasizing the role of organizational routines and processes in enabling firms to reconfigure their resource base and adapt to environmental changes, thereby enhancing their competitiveness.

Organizational competitiveness is a multidimensional concept that involves the effective utilization of resources, capabilities, and strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace. Scholars such as Porter, Barney, Prahalad, Hamel, and Teece have contributed valuable insights into the drivers and mechanisms of organizational competitiveness, emphasizing the importance of strategic positioning, sustainable advantage, innovation, and dynamic capabilities in achieving superior performance and long-term success in today's competitive business environment.

Empirical Review
Problem Solving and Organizational Competitiveness
Jahangir et al. (2022) investigated the connection between organisational performance and conflict management techniques in a Bangladeshi textile company. Using a stratified random sample technique, they gave structured questionnaires to 200 respondents; 153 of them completed them, and 150 of them were considered legitimate for study. The study discovered a strong positive link between conflict management techniques and organisational performance using descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. On the other hand, it was discovered that non-integrative conflict resolution techniques had a detrimental effect on organisational performance. Regression study revealed that the collective bargaining technique had the largest positive connection with organisational success. Furthermore, the study highlighted aim and economic incompatibility as key elements impacting conflict resolution inside the organisation, with union-management conflict appearing as a common type of industrial conflict.

In a 2019 study conducted in the United States by Thomas and James titled "Problem-solving as conflict management strategy and organisational competitiveness: An empirical analysis," researchers have sought to understand how the problem-solving techniques used by businesses relate to the competitiveness that results from them. 300 participants from a range of industries

have participated in the research, which used a randomised stratification method. After using regression analysis to analyse the collected data, the results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between an organization's performance and its use of problem-solving techniques as conflict management tools.

Johnson and Williams (2020) investigated this connection in a Canadian study titled "Enhancing Organisational Competitiveness through Effective Problem-Solving Strategies". Using a mixed-methods strategy, the researchers collected information from 250 employees working in various fields using convenience sampling. Their study, which included qualitative content analysis and quantitative regression modelling, revealed a significant correlation between the use of effective problem-solving techniques and increased organisational competitiveness.

Furthermore, researchers found a correlation in a study titled "The Impact of Problem-Solving Methods on Organisational Competitiveness: Evidence from the United Kingdom" by Brown & Garcia (2021), which was conducted in the United Kingdom. Using a purposive sample technique, 150 individuals from various industries were included in the study. The outcome of data analysis using structural equation modelling (SEM) has shown that problem-solving techniques have a significant impact on an organization's ability to compete. These findings imply that businesses that use proactive problem-solving techniques are more competitive.

However, the studies above lacked a the Nigerian banking perspective, highlighting a gap in understanding the implications of problem-solving on organizational competitiveness across within the banking industry. Therefore, the null hypothesis can be stated as:

$H_{OI:}$ *"There is no significant relationship between problem-solving and organizational competitiveness in the Nigerian banking industry."*

Avoiding and Organizational Competitiveness
Rhoades and Miner (2008) did a study on conflict management styles and team performance in public service organizations in United states. They used a survey design with a convenience sample of 120 employees. The study employed factor analysis and regression to analyze data. Interestingly, their findings revealed a nuanced relationship. While avoidance did correlate with lower team performance, the negative impact was less pronounced in highly cohesive teams.

Behfar et al. (2013) explored the influence of conflict management styles on knowledge sharing and innovation in manufacturing firms in Iran. Their study utilized a cross-sectional design with a sample of 200 managers obtained through stratified random sampling. Data analysis involved structural equation modeling. Their results supported the negative effects of avoidance. They found that avoidance hindered knowledge sharing, which in turn, stifled innovation, ultimately impacting competitiveness.

A study by Liu et al. (2016) on "conflict management Ssyles and employee creativity in Chinese knowledge-intensive enterprises investigated conflict and creativity. They adopted a survey design with a purposive sample of 250 employees. The study analyzed data using correlation analysis and regression. Their findings aligned with Behfar et al. (2013). Avoidance was negatively associated with employee creativity, suggesting a potential link to reduced competitiveness.

However, a gap remains in understanding the specific conditions under which avoidance might be detrimental or even beneficial.

Based on the reviewed studies which may not be applicable within the Nigerian context, the study proposed the following null hypothesis:

H_{o2}: There is no significant relationship between avoidance and organizational competitiveness in the Nigerian banking industry.

Forcing and organizational Competitiveness
In an investigation conducted by Smith and Johnson in 2018 on the impact of forcing as a conflict management technique on organisational competitiveness, this relationship was examined at an American multinational corporation. Using a quantitative research approach, the researchers conducted a stratified survey of 300 employees who worked in various departments. They examined the data using regression analysis and discovered that there was no significant positive correlation between business competitiveness and the frequent use of force as a conflict management strategy.

Jones et al. (2020) conducted a study entitled "Forcing Strategies and Organisational Competitiveness: Insights from the UK Banking Sector." The study was done in the United Kingdom and using a mixed-methods strategy that included surveys and semi-structured interviews. The sampling approach was used to choose 150 employees from various banks. Qualitative data was analysed using themes, whereas quantitative data was analysed using correlation. The results show a complex relationship, indicating that while using force might help resolve conflicts in the present, its regular use can have a negative impact on an organization's competitiveness over time..

In addition, an international study conducted by Chen et al. (2019) examined cultural differences in pushing methods and organisational competitiveness: "A comparative analysis of Chinese and American contexts" has provided valuable information on how cultural differences may influence this relationship. This study was done in both China and the United States, and it used a comparative research methodology; 200 workers from each nation were polled using convenience sampling. In their attempt to analyse the data, the authors used structural equation modelling (SEM) to discover that the impact of forcing on business competitiveness differed significantly across the two cultures. The study discovered that there was a gap in the literature on cultural factors in conflict management strategies. The null hypothesis formulated for this study was: "

H$_{o3:}$ There is no significant relationship between forcing as a conflict management strategy and organizational competitiveness within the Nigerian banking industry.

Compromise and Organizational Competitiveness
In a study conducted by Adjei, et al (2018) on compromise as a conflict management strategy and organizational competitiveness: A Case of manufacturing firms in Ghana," the authors explored the relationship between compromise as a conflict management strategy and organizational competitiveness within the Ghanaian context. Employing a quantitative research design, the study sampled 200 manufacturing firms in Ghana through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using regression analysis. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between compromise as a conflict management strategy and organizational competitiveness, suggesting that organizations employing compromise tend to be more competitive. However, the study identified a gap in the literature regarding the specific mechanisms through which compromise enhances competitiveness.

A study conducted by Okumu and Lagat (2017) titled "the relationship between compromise as a conflict management strategy and firm performance: Evidence from Kenyan Financial Institutions" explored similar dynamics within the Kenyan financial sector. Adopting a mixed-methods research design, the study combined survey data from 15 financial institutions with qualitative interviews. The sample size comprised 300 employees from various levels within the institutions. Quantitative data were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between compromise and organizational competitiveness. However, the study identified a gap in understanding the role of organizational culture in shaping the effectiveness of compromise as a conflict management strategy.

In another study conducted by Tadesse and Fanta (2019) examined the impact of conflict compromise on firm competitive advantage: Insights from Ethiopian service organizations," the authors investigated the relationship between compromise and organizational competitiveness within the Ethiopian service sector. Employing a cross-sectional research design, the study sampled 150 service organizations in Ethiopia through purposive sampling. Data were collected using structured interviews and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. The findings revealed a positive relationship between compromise and organizational competitiveness. However, the study identified a gap in understanding the cultural factors that influence the effectiveness of compromise as a conflict management strategy within the Ethiopian context.

Overall, these studies contribute to understanding the relationship between compromise as a conflict management strategy and organizational competitiveness within the African context. However, there remains a need for further research to the organizational conflict dynamics that were conducted didn't reflect the position of banking industry in Nigeria.

Hence this study postulated that

$H_{O4:}$ There is no relationship between compromise as a conflict strategy and organizational competitiveness of the Nigerian banking industry

Methodology

The study focused on employees within Nigeria's financial sector, specifically those working in banks located in Port Harcourt. A sample of 303 respondents was gathered through purposive sampling. The questionnaire employed a 4-point Likert scale and comprised two parts: one capturing demographic information like age, gender, education, status, and income, and the other addressing variables pertinent to the study. Prior to distribution, respondents were briefed on the study's objectives and the questions. After collection, responses were coded and entered into SPSS version 22 for analysis. PLS-SEM analysis was then utilized to explore the relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational competitiveness.
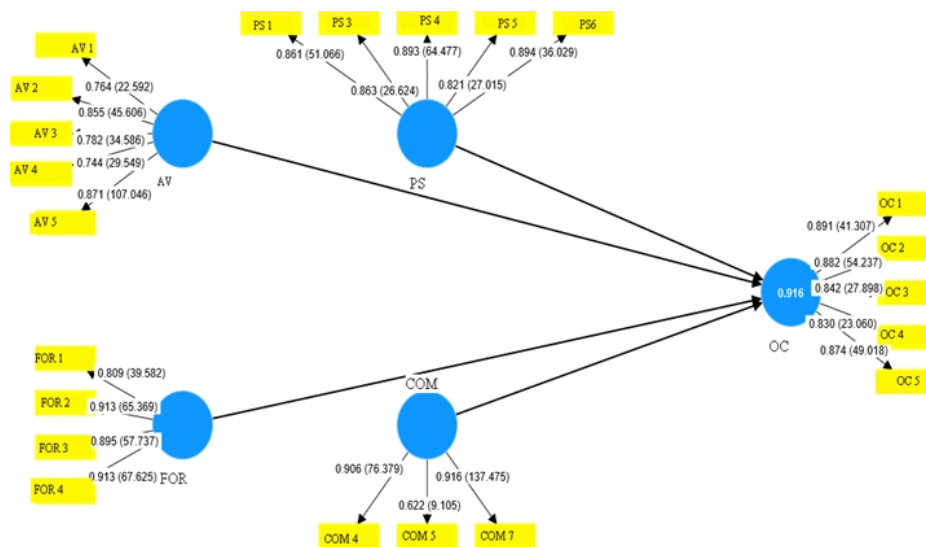
Results and Discussion of Finding

Table 1: Path Analysis Result of Relationship between dimension of conflict management strategies and organizational competitiveness

S/n	Hypothesized Path	Path Coefficient (β)	P-Value	Standard d	T Value	Decisions	f-Squared	Effect size
1.	PS ->CO	0.492	0.000	0.039	6.072	Not Supported	4.116	Large
2.	AV -> CO	0.574	0.003	0.062	1.993	Not Supported	3.621	Large
3.	FOR -> CO	0.416	0.000	0.067	9.169	Not Supported	7.514	Large
4	COM -> CO	0.534	0.000	0.033	7.034	Not Supported	3.055	Large

*P<0.05

Source: The Researcher's Computation (2024).

The first structural path demonstrates a favourable correlation between problem solving and competitive advantage. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. Finally, the findings support the findings of Jahangir et al. (2022): there is a significant positive correlation between conflict management strategies, which include collective bargaining, confrontation, compromise, and accommodation, and organisational performance. Furthermore, the research backs up the findings of Thomas and James (2019), who demonstrated that problem-solving tactics have a significant positive impact on business competition.

The second structural analysis revealed a positive correlation between avoidance and competitive advantage. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results support Rhoades and Miner's (2008) findings, which show a good relationship between the two variables. Furthermore, the study supports the findings of Behfar et al. (2013), who found that avoiding knowledge sharing hinders innovation and, as a result, affects competition.

The third structural approach demonstrated a favourable link between force and competitive advantage. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. The conclusion is consistent with the findings of Jones et al. (2020), who discovered a complex connection, suggesting that while the occasional use of force may temporarily settle disagreements, its regular application may have long-term detrimental consequences for organisational competitiveness. This conclusion confirms the study of Chen et al. (2019), who discovered that the influence of pushing on organisational competitiveness differed considerably across the two cultures while accepting that a link existed.

The fourth structural approach demonstrated a favourable link between compromise and competitive advantage. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Adjei et al (2018), who discovered a substantial positive association between compromise as a conflict management method and organisational competitiveness, implying that organisations that use compromise tend to be more competitive.

The outcomes of this study suggested that all null hypotheses were rejected and the alternative accepted, revealing that conflict management practices had a positive relationship with the organisational competitiveness of banks in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations
The findings of this study, analyzed through the lens of organizational learning theory, provide significant insights into the relationship between conflict management strategies and competitive advantage within organizations. Firstly, the positive relationship observed between problem-solving and competitive advantage supports existing literature, indicating that effective problem-solving strategies contribute positively to organizational competitiveness. Similarly, the study reveals that avoidance, forcing, and compromise all exhibit positive relationships with competitive advantage, thus rejecting the null hypotheses associated with these structural paths.

Drawing practical recommendations from these results, organizations should prioritize the development and implementation of problem-solving strategies to enhance their competitive advantage. Additionally, while occasional use of avoidance and forcing may offer short-term benefits, organizations should be cautious about their long-term implications and instead focus on fostering environments that encourage knowledge sharing and innovation. Moreover, embracing compromise as a conflict management strategy can foster collaboration and contribute positively to organizational competitiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings underscore the relevance of organizational learning theory in understanding the dynamics of conflict management and its impact on competitive advantage. They highlight the nuanced nature of different conflict management strategies and their varying effects on organizational competitiveness, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that considers both short-term gains and long-term sustainability. Integrating insights from this study into organizational frameworks can enrich theoretical understandings of organizational learning processes and their implications for strategic management.

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