ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT AND PRODUCTIVITY LEVEL OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *The study specifically examined the effect of organizational conflict on quality assurance, students' academic performances, and the reduced rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the University of Calabar and the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria. The survey research design was used while data were collected from 282 academic staff of the selected universities. The simple regression and independent t-tests were used for the hypotheses test. It was discovered that organizational conflict significantly affects the quality assurance of academic activities of the universities [tcal = 42.730 > t 0.05 = 1.96] and organizational conflicts lead to a reduced rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the universities. Discovered also was that the performance of the academic staff members during the pre-conflict era was low (M=1.3298, SD=.47266) compared to the performance of the staff in the post-conflict (M= 3.5765, SD=.56267). It was concluded that tertiary institutions should occasionally stimulate conflict by encouraging divergent views and rewarding staff and units/departments for outstanding performance.*

KEYWORDS: Organizational conflict; Productivity level; Quality assurance; Academic activities.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a feature of human society that takes many forms, from disagreements between individuals to global wars. It occurs within small groups, societies, and organizations. Organizational conflict arises as a result of a lack of synchronization of the goals and interests of the employees and the employers (Parashar & Sharma, 2020; Valdes, 2023). It is a state of disagreement or conflict brought on by people working together who have opposing needs, values, and interests—real or imagined. These are disagreements about how the work ought to be finished and the way that long and hard individuals ought to work. They are disagreements regarding jurisdiction between departments, individuals, unions, and management (Adham, 2023).

Tertiary institutions, like other organizations, are not free of conflict, as conflict is inevitable and endemic. Kharadze and Gulua (2018) added that universities are not without potential negative features, incompatible behaviors, and conflicts, which might be counterproductive and could give rise to inefficiency, ineffectiveness, or dysfunctional consequences in the achievement of their goals and objectives or productivity level.

Conflict is not in itself a bad thing. It is a necessary part of the growth and development of individuals, families, communities, and societies (Parashar & Sharma, 2020). It has a way of making the organizational climate cloudy if it is not properly handled, and it can constitute a barrier to the achievement of the organizational goals. However, organizational conflict has been viewed to be very harmful (Wu, Zhao & Zuo, 2017). It has been seen as an avenue for inflicting stress and pain on the employees by management, while little attention has been given to the positive side of organizational conflict on productivity levels in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

It could be inferred that in 2013, the University of Calabar was thrown into disarray when several numbers of its academic staff members, including professors, were either demoted or stagnated for erroneously submitting their articles in cloned journals and proceeding to submit the same and obtaining promotion in the process, while others were dismissed on the ground of gross misconduct of plagiarism (Premium Times, 2013; Afisunlu, 2013). The names of the affected staff were all published in the national dailies and other internet sources. In a similar vein, in 2019, the Governing Council of the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State embarked on what they regarded as proper placement, which resulted in the suspension and demotion of some academic staff (Oko, 2019). This led to hiccups among some of the affected staff and management in both institutions, as some of the staff sought redress in the relevant court of law. Other unaffected staff members were apprehensive of what would become of them when they applied for promotion, since the majority of their colleagues that applied for promotion or had been promoted to professorial or senior lecturer cadres, as the case may be, were demoted, sacked, or stagnated.

The resultant effect of this conflict is however incomprehensible by the majority of the university staff; this is because the contents of the articles were original, even when they were published in cloned journals, as in the case of the University of Calabar. This no doubt brought in a new age into the academic system, leading to several questions, as to what will become of lecturers' productivity level in the face of this conflict and afterwards. Will it cause lecturers to give their best in the achievement of quality assurance in research and teaching? Or will it lead to decreased productivity? To this end, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. Organizational conflict does not significantly affect the quality assurance of academic activities in the universities.

2. Organizational conflict does not significantly affect students' academic performance.

3. Organizational conflict does not significantly reduce the rate of plagiarism among the academic staff of the universities.

4. There is no significant difference in the performance of academic staff members between the pre- and post-organizational conflict era of the University of Calabar and the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Isaiah and Damilola (2023) opined that in most cases, organizational conflicts are required to defy people to perform and stimulate progress. This was underpinned by the contingency theory which regarded conflict as change-friendly. Organizational theory establishes that the most effective way to sort out a company, lead, or pursue choices is contingent on internal and external circumstances, with contingent leaders adjusting to changes. The organizational change might not necessarily be easily acceptable by the workers, which invariably leads to conflict situations.

The contingency theory sees conflict as normal, and as a solution rather than a disease. It regards conflict as result-oriented that can consciously bring about anticipated organizational change if properly managed. According to John-Eke and Akintokunbo (2020), conflict management is a high point for any workplace. While conflict has always been viewed as evil, it can be constructive.

Conflict is a constant in all human relationships, whether they are within a family, an institution, or an organization. The universities, similar to some other present-day organizations, is not without expected negative highlights, contrary ways of behaving, and clashes, which may be counter-useful and bring about failure, incapability, or broken outcomes in the accomplishment of objectives and targets (Isaiah & Damilola, 2023).

It could be likened to a means to expose all the circumstances of the fraud or tax evasion and to obtain evidence for possible prosecution (Beredugo, Azubike & Mefor, 2019). However it will not be out of place to lay emphasis that organizational conflict also brings about a potential positive feature, compatible behaviours and efficient consequences in the attainment of maximum productivity level. This is because conflict is pervasive and not dysfunctional.

According to Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019)'s study, the negative effects of conflict can lead to people or groups becoming hostile and withholding information or resources. It can make focused workers leave the association and can unfavorably affect authoritative execution. The organization's management decides whether conflict will have a positive or negative impact on performance because it is inevitable. According to some academics, it is necessary to occasionally encourage it in order to bring about innovations and advancements in organizations or society as a whole. As a result, it is regarded as a "necessary evil" that manifests itself in human interactions.

Valdes (2023) added that it is amiable solid since it urges resistance to the norm and gives conditions to social possibilities and a majority rules system originating from pluralism and regard to variety. Sound hierarchical environment is supposed to produce total concordance in working connections reliability and normal obligation to the objectives and targets of the association.

Lukman (2021) emphasizes this by stating that many organizations, if not all of them, require more conflict rather than less. Additionally, it was discovered that a lack of conflict may suggest autocracy, uniformity, stagnation, and mental fixity; conflict may be a sign of democracy, diversity, development, and self-actualization. Adham (2023) declared that contention carries both risk and opportunity to all stakeholders. In all, conflict can be damaging and helpful.

Strategies for Conflict Management

By understanding the essence and causes of conflicts, managers can either steer their resolution within manageable limits when necessary or avoid them altogether. Anything the particular strategy for struggle is addressing, three earlier activities could prompt more prominent odds of coming out on top:

a)   Determining the issue at hand in detail;

b)   Reducing the scope of the conflict;

c)   Widening the range of arrangement prospects.

In a few clashing circumstances, utilizing the procedure of restricted relaxation is prudent. It means coming to some kind of agreement on a certain number of individual issues that can be separated from the larger and more significant aspects of the dispute, which are harder to settle. According to Rana, Sharma, and Goel (2019), a conflict with a wider range of possibilities to be solved, from which both sides can benefit, is thus transformed from a total conflict situation in which the only option for resolving it is victory or defeat.

Some of the methods of crisis response mechanisms, as established in the works of Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019) and Adham (2023), include:

i.   **Avoidance/Denial:** This is the practice of ignoring the issue in the hope that it will improve over time. There are three primary reasons why individuals and institutions use these conflict response mechanisms: bystander syndrome, fear of direct intervention, and deliberate impunity

ii.   **Planned Withdrawal:** On the surface, this response mechanism resembles avoidance or denial, although it is not. It has to do with not making any quick move on the issue or making a gentle move but jumping all over the chance to purchase quality existence to plan and make a more unequivocal move.

iii.   **Making Decisions with Third Parties:** This has to do with alluding the contention to a higher body with dynamic power for settlement. Most of the time, this method involves settling through the court – a legitimate method of pacific question resolution.

iv. **Confrontation:** This has to do with the use of the police or the military to fix something that is wrong, like what happened in Maiduguri during the Boko Haram crisis and in Jos during the Jos crisis.

v. **Joint Critical Thinking:** This has to do with the contention gatherings cooperating to track down commonly fulfilling answers for the issue. Additionally, it involves the disputants and a neutral third party, typically a mediator, working together to resolve the issue. This is where exchange and intervention track down importance. This is interchangeable to the recent concerns of globalization and data correspondence innovation that energize viable compromise (Beredugo, Igbeng & Eze, 2013). According to Ebitu and Beredugo (2015), these issues should be resolved in an ethical manner, which should also guide the organizations' actions throughout their activities.

Conflict in the University Context

Clashes in ivory towers are filling in number, and intricacy. It is evident that the current university environment is more difficult than in the past. Conflicts now span a much wider spectrum and can be managed through a wider variety of channels than ever before. Society has changed and so has the college (Igbinoba, Salau, Atolagbe & Joel, 2023). Lukman (2021) found that tertiary institutions are experiencing an increase in management crises, with varying degrees of positive or negative impacts on performance.

Conflicts involving universities vary from campus to campus and are influenced by factors such as the size, location, student body, mission, specialization, governance, and unionization of the institution. On one campus, what could cause large-scale conflicts may be inconceivable on another. In any case, college based clashes additionally share sufficient in like manner to be all around comprehended. For example, even in those cases where understudy assessments of personnel are not needed, they are a broadly figured out element of the scholastic work environment. Colleges are defying innumerable pushes and pulls from inward and outer sources which impact the sort and amount of struggles that arise. The college people group encounters endless clash circumstances. Without elective techniques, the contention circumstances can add to a profoundly ill-disposed climate. Disagreements regarding university rearrangement, personnel execution, multi million dollar awards, protected innovation, governmental policy regarding minorities in society, opportunity of data, to give some examples, all add to a perplexing clash scene.

Conflicts involving academic freedom, research, and peer micromanagement of personnel matters are, in fact, unique to the university setting. Additionally, campus-specific disagreements may arise over a wide range of issues, including campus dating standards, sexual harassment, policies, and student behavior guidelines (Okotoni & Kugbayi, 2024).

Isaiah and Damilola (2023) found that there are numerous similarities between university dispute cultures when it comes to conflicts involving these and other campus-related issues. Other times, things that seem to have nothing to do with the university may actually become major sources of conflict and play out on campus.

It has been seen that the reasons for emergencies in tertiary organizations incorporate a wide correspondence hole between the understudies and the school authority; issues between scholarly and nonacademic staff and the school authority; postponement in satisfying understudies' need by the school authority; disappointment with respect to the school power,

to mention just a few. An extraordinary reference to struggles between scholastic staff and the school authority and the resultant impact on execution is as introduced beneath.

Although it could be destructive, Lukman (2021) sees it as being constructive. The university system in the course of bringing out its best through quality assurance might be obliged to inculcate measures to achieve these goals – of producing globally competitive graduates and contributing to Nigeria's socio-economic development through teaching and research – by taking adequate measures to sanction erring academic staff members, though this might lead to strife, because these lecturers may not be duly informed of the impeding sanction that might befall them should their actions fall short of specified guidelines, even when the guidelines are not communicated. This conflict would cause both the affected and non-affected staff to fully observe these guidelines to achieve quality administrative conduct, teaching and research.

It was also observed in addition that conflict has a positive effect on the organization, especially in building cooperation among the employees and encouraging organizational innovativeness (Aghaei, Haghani & Limunga, E., 2022). It also improves quality decisions in resolving conflicts. Conflict can improve efficiency when it empowers inventiveness, new ganders at old circumstances, the explanation of perspectives, and the advancement of human capacities to deal with relational contrasts. When it leads to resistance to change, chaos in an organization or interpersonal relationships, mistrust, a sense of defeat or an increase in misunderstanding, conflict can be harmful.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed survey research design through the administration of questionnaires to academic staff and the principal officers of the University of Calabar and the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike to evaluate their perceptions and assessments of the effect of organizational conflict on staff productivity level. A stratified sampling technique was used to select the sample size of 282 respondents from the two institutions. The questionnaire was developed on 4-point Likert scales. The data analysis techniques were simple regression and independent t-test.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The response rate of the 282 copies of the questionnaires administered in the course of this research showed that 264 questionnaires were retrieved. This means that the analysis of primary data was based on a 93.61 % rate of response. These responses consist of 143 from the University of Calabar and 121 from the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State.

Hypothesis One

Using data from Table 1a, the R^2 value shows that about 88 percent (.875) of the variation in quality assurance of academic activities of the university is explained by organizational conflict, while the overall relationship between the dependent and independent variables are significant, with an F-value of 1825.892 in Table 1b.

Table 1a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
dimension	.935ᵃ	.875	.874	1.62272

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Conflict

Source: *SPSS Result, 2024*

Table 1b: ANOVAᵇ

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4807.998	1	4807.998	1825.892	.000ᵃ
	Residual	689.907	262	2.633		
	Total	5497.905	263			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Conflict
b. Dependent Variable: *Quality Assurance*

Source: *SPSS Result, 2024*

Table 1c: Coefficientsᵃ

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.826	.323		5.661	.000
	Organizational conflict	.906	.021	.935	42.730	.000

a. Dependent Variable: *Quality Assurance*

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Data from Table 1c above, the t-statistics for the equation used for Hypothesis One, is positive for quality assurance of academic activities of the university and equally significant at five percent with a t-value of 42.730.

It follows therefore that since the t-value is reasonably high and equally significant at 0.05 level [tcal = 42.730 > t $_{0.05}$ = 1. 1.96] and the magnitude of the effect of organizational conflict on quality assurance of academic activities of the university is positive, the alternative hypothesis, which states that organizational conflict significantly affects the quality assurance of academic activities of the universities, is accepted.

Hypothesis Two

Using data from Table 2a, the R^2 value shows that about 87 percent (.869) of the variation in students' academic performance is explained by organizational conflict, while the overall relationship between the dependent and independent variables are significant with an F-value of 1733.850 in Table 2b. The data from Table 2c below shows the t-statistics for Hypothesis Two to be positive for students' academic performance and significant at five percent, with a t-value of 41.640.

Table 2a: Model Summary

Model			Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	R	R Square		
Dimension 1	.932[a]	.869	.868	1.71049

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Conflict

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 2b: ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	5072.882	1	5072.882	1733.850	.000[a]
Residual	766.557	262	2.926		
Total	5839.439	263			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Conflict

b. Dependent Variable: Student

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 2c: Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.436	.340		4.223	.000
Organizational conflict	.931	.022	.932	41.640	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Student

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

It follows therefore that since the t-value is reasonably high and equally significant at 0.05 level [tcal = 41.640 > t $_{0.05}$ = 1. 1.96] and the magnitude of the effect of organizational conflict on students' academic performance is positive, the alternative hypothesis, which states that organizational conflict does not significantly affect students' academic performance, is accepted and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Three

The data from Table 3a shows the information of the R^2 value of (.760), which means that 76 percent of the variation of reduced rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the university students' academic performance is explained by organizational conflict, while the overall relationship between the dependent and independent variables are significant with an F-value of 830.403 in Table 3b. The data from Table 3c below shows the t-statistics for Hypothesis Three to be positive for reduced rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the university and significant at five percent, with a t-value of 41.640.

Table 3a: Model Summary

Model		R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
dimension0 1		.872ᵃ	.760	.759	2.27019

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Conflict

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 3b: ANOVAᵇ

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4279.699	1	4279.699	830.403	.000ᵃ
	Residual	1350.285	262	5.154		
	Total	5629.985	263			

a. Predictors: (Constant), Organizational Conflict

b. Dependent Variable: Plagiarism

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 3c: Coefficientsᵃ

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.124	.451		4.707	.000
	Organizational conflict	.855	.030	.872	28.817	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Plagiarism

It follows therefore that since the t-value is reasonably high and equally significant at 0.05 level [tcal = 28.817 > t $_{0.05}$ = 1. 1.96] and the magnitude of the effect of organizational conflict on organizational conflict does not significantly reduce the rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the universities being positive, the null hypothesis, which states that organizational conflict does not significantly affect students' academic performance, is rejected, while H_1 is accepted.

Hypothesis Four

Table 4b below shows the result of the independent sample t-test conducted to compare the difference in the performance of the academic staff members between the pre and post organizational conflict of the University of Calabar and the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State.

The Levene's test for equality of variances gives a significant value of .017.

Table 4a: Group Statistics

A_D		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Performance	PRE_ORG_CONFLICT	94	1.3298	.47266	.04875
	POST_ORG_CONFLICT	170	3.5765	.56267	.04316

Source: *Field Survey, 2024*

Table 4b:Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
							Mean DifferenCe	Std. Error DifferenCe	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)			Lower	Upper
Performance	Equal variances assumed	5.787	.017	-32.82	262	.000	-2.2466	.06844	-2.3814	-2.1119
	Equal variances not assumed			-34.50	221.13	.000	-2.2466	.06511	-2.3749	-2.1183

Source: Field Survey, 2024

This means that the respondents that opted for increased performance were higher in the post 2013 organizational conflict, which shows the violation of the assumption of equal variance since it is less than .05. There is a significant difference in the performance of the academic staff members between the pre organizational conflict (M = 1.3298, SD = .47266), and the post organizational conflict of the universities (M = 3.5765, SD = .56267); t (262) = -32.445, p = .000. Thus, for Hypothesis Four, H_o is rejected and H_1 is retained.

DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: To what extent does organizational conflict affect the quality assurance of academic activities of the university?

Empirical findings from the survey analysis of the elicited data from respondents using simple regression revealed that organizational conflict significantly affects the quality assurance of academic activities of the university level [tcal = 42.730 > t $_{0.05}$ = 1.96]. The magnitude effect of organizational conflict on the quality assurance of academic activities of the university level could be seen as the overall F statistics was significantly high, while the R^2 value shows that about 88 percent (.875) of the variation in quality assurance of academic activities of the universities is explained by the organizational conflict. This is in congruence with the studies of Aghaei, Haghani and Limunga (2022), who specified that conflict is ubiquitous, and can be required to defy people to perform and stimulate progress. This is also in consonance with the contingency theory that conflict is normal and is a solution rather than a disease.

Research Question 2: To what extent does organizational conflict affect students' academic performance?

The empirical result shows that organizational conflict significantly affects students' academic performance [tcal = 41.640 > t $_{0.05}$ = 1.96]. The extent of the effect was seen from our R^2 value which shows that about 87 percent (.869) of the variation in students' academic performance was explained by organizational conflict. This shows a gigantic effect of organizational conflict on students' academic performance. This organizational conflict will bring academic staff to be conscious of their responsibilities, clarification of points of view, and the development of human capabilities, encouraging opposition to the status quo. The result also conforms to the contingency theory.

Research Question 3: Can organizational conflict lead to reduced rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the university?

The empirical result shows that organizational conflict significantly reduces the rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the universities [tcal = 28.817 > t $_{0.05}$ = 1.96]. The magnitude of the effect was revealed in our R^2 value which shows that about 76 percent of the variation in reduced rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the university students' academic performance could be explained by organizational conflict. This no doubt is associated with findings from Valdes (2023) who opined that conflict positively affects the goal of an organisation and improves its performance.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference in the performance of the academic staff members between the pre and post organizational conflict of the University of Calabar and the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture?

The result from our empirical finding shows that the performance of the academic staff members between the pre organizational conflict was low compared to their performance in the post conflict era. The result of the independent sample t-test conducted shows that there is a significant difference in the performance of the academic staff members between the pre (M = 1.3298, SD = .47266) and post (M = 3.5765, SD = .56267) organizational conflict of the University of Calabar and the Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture. Staff were conscious of what could befall them if they fell victim. Hence, they were propelled to put in their best in both teaching and research, while emulating the quality assurance ideology of the university. This also conforms with the contingency theory which encourages people to perform, and this stimulates progress.

CONCLUSION

Organizational conflict inspires the consciousness of responsibilities, clarification of purpose, and the encouragement of opposition to the status quo. It was discovered from this study that organizational conflict does not only positively affect the quality assurance of academic activities of the universities, it also brings about favourable students' academic performance.

Organizational conflict also leads to a reduced rate of plagiarism among academic staff of the university, causing them to positively improve their performances in terms of doing what is right. The performance of the academic staff in the period after the post organizational conflict

shows a predominant increase compared to the pre organisational conflict of the two universities. University academic staff members are now conscious of what could befall them if they fell victim. They are propelled to put in their best in both teaching, research and community service, while emulating the quality assurance ideology of the university. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that efforts should be made by school management to occasionally stimulate conflict by encouraging divergent views and rewarding staff and units/departments for outstanding performance; and that proper communication procedures should be put in place to resolve conflict.

To enhance further investigation, it is fitting to consolidate extra performance measurements discovered in other academic investigations. These metrics may encompass factors such as doctorate-awarded-to-academic-staff ratio, institutional income and research environment.

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