

## The Intersection of Organizational Performance and Conflict Management at EB Poly Resources Limited (EBPRL), Gombe State, Nigeria

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<https://doi.org/10.61090/aksujacog.2024.007>

### Abstract

*The emergence of conflict in organizations has been observed for a long time to be inevitable with a far-reaching implication for the survival, growth and development of organizations. Although different shades and intensities of conflict may be experienced by different organizations, the effective handling of these conflicts remains sacrosanct for the continuous survival and improvement of these organizations. The goals of this were to ascertain whether the conflict management system is in place in EBPR and whether conflict management and organizational performance were related in EBPRL. This study used primary sources for data collecting as it is a descriptive survey. To address the research topics, a quantitative method of data analysis using mean descriptive statistics was applied. According to the study, there is a significant correlation between organizational success in EBPRL and conflict management. It was therefore recommended that organizations should be encouraged to institutionalize conflict management systems with a functional reporting mechanism in their workplaces and always provide adequate supervision to employees to guarantee efficient and effective organizational performance.*

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Development, Organizational Performance, EB Poly Resources Limited, Gombe State-Nigeria

### Introduction

The efficient performance of an organization is the goal companies aim to achieve to actualize sustainable strategic advantage in the open and competitive market. Many manufacturers suffer from poor organizational performance, resulting in lower production volumes, loss of market share, and eventual closure of most factories. The sustainability of an organization is a function of efficient organizational performance. Organizations as transparent systems depict that inefficiencies in business units can negatively impact on overall performance. Runde (2014) argued that firm effectiveness can be explained as the firm's ability to acquire the necessary resources. There is no consensus on what constitutes success for an organization but the ability to manage human and material resources is

essential to any organization that must stand the test of time. A company's ability to outperform its competitors speaks volumes to its organizational performance. However, employees are the organization's most important resource and are therefore responsible for ensuring the organization's performance. With this in mind, it is important to ensure that employees direct their efforts towards increasing organizational performance.

However, because humans are special beings with different characteristics, conflicts in the workplace seem to be inevitable. Therefore, an organization's ability to adequately address disagreements increases people's synergy and increases organizational performance. It is therefore arguable that tension exists in all human organizations, and entrepreneurs who cannot manage conflicts in their workplaces unavoidably may suffer from inefficiency. Therefore, employee satisfaction and morale suffer when conflicts are not managed effectively. Achieving organizational performance is a must for any company hoping to weather tough times. Thus, several scholars have looked into the various ways in which various constructions might be applied to improve organizational performance. They discovered that worker engagement boosts businesses' productivity. Anyakie (2018) examined the connection between organizational performance and conflict management but focused on the service industry. Few scholarly studies have looked at the connection between conflict management and organizational performance in a manufacturing firm in Gombe State, Nigeria, despite a wealth of studies on enhancing the organizational performance of manufacturing firms. This study was motivated by this disparity.

### **Research Problem**

Historically, Nigerian manufacturing companies have been the lifeblood of the economy. The contribution of the manufacturing sector to the economy's GDP has declined steadily in recent years. Again, high failure rates in the manufacturing sector have adversely affected Nigeria's economic health. The phenomenon of manufacturing inefficiency leads to high rates of the sectors' slow obliteration, intensifying poverty, undernourishment and social delinquency. Corporate inefficiency leads to a loss of market share in the industry and, in turn, a loss of competitive advantage, leading to corporate bankruptcy in a short period, resulting in a decline in regional economic activity.

Conflicts in the workplace can negatively impact employee morale and lead to discourteous behaviour that undermines organizational performance. Over the years, poor organizational performance has manifested in incessant occurrences of workplace incidents and accidents caused by uncontrolled hazards due to poor systems of work, unfavourable working conditions et cetera. The resultant effect of this is manifested in high rates of labour turnover, absenteeism, increase in man-hour losses, high sickness rate, negative organizational reputation and general organizational inefficiencies. Several studies have dealt with conflicts and organizational performance in recent times. Despite many efforts to address organizational performance issues, the dilemma remains.

Many studies on conflict resolution techniques and performance improvement have been conducted as a result of the apparent substantial impact that the management of organizational conflicts has on workers' performance. The study revealed a substantial correlation between job features, conflict management approaches and employee performance. This underscores the importance of employee performance for organizations as it drives productivity growth and enhances the quality of customer service. However, none of these studies looked at whether conflict management is used in any manufacturing settings in Gombe State, Nigeria, or whether there is a connection between organizational performance and conflict management in the state's manufacturing sector. The research gap this study attempts to fill is the paucity of the empirical literature on conflict management and organizational performance in EB Poly Resources Limited.

### **The Study's Objective**

Examining the relationship between organizational performance and conflict management in EB is the main goal of this study. The specific goals of this investigation are:

- a. To check if a dispute resolution system exists in the EBPRL
- b. To ascertain whether organizational performance in EBPRL and conflict management are related.

### **Research Questions:**

- a. Does EBPRL have a conflict management system?
- b. Is there a connection between organizational performance and conflict management at EBPRL?

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Conflict Management**

The term "conflict management" lacks a widely recognized definition. As a result, opinions and perceptions on conflict resolution vary. Conflict is a complex, common social phenomenon that happens and takes place in an organization (Aoun et al., 2020). He also emphasized that the organization's objectives will be impeded by a lack of experience in conflict management. Therefore, the essence of conflict management is a strategy or course of action that maximizes the positive aspects of conflict while minimizing or eliminating its negative impacts. Accordingly, Olukayode (2015) sees conflict management as the process by which groups and individuals deal with complaints or disagreements to promote resolution, strive for agreement, and demonstrate sincere commitment to decision-making. Workplace conflict is unavoidable, but you can mitigate its effects and keep your company safe by identifying its warning indicators early.

Employee disputes are seen as normal and unavoidable in businesses. Conflict is perceived as undesired, clashing, or something to be avoided in all cultures. Conflict was discouraged in the early 20th century because it was seen to be an indication of bad organizational management. It was viewed as usual and anticipated by the middle of the 1950s and was quietly accepted. The management concentrated on settling the conflict. Conflict was seen as necessary in the 1970s, not always harmful, and even beneficial to progress. Managers had to face and handle conflict in the 1990s (Alger & Watson, 2002). Everywhere in social life, there is conflict. Due to resource scarcity, goal divergence, political dynamics, and disagreements, this is an inevitable part of nature. Another way to look at conflict is as a way for one side to think that the other is influencing or behaving contrary to their interests.

Conflict is described as "a situation in which interdependent individuals encounter mutual intervention to express and achieve disagreement (whether explicit or implicit) on how to meet their individual needs and desires (Rose, et al., 2006). What distinguishes them is their approach to conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is the use of techniques to reduce the negative effects of conflict while magnifying the positive aspects as much as or more than the magnitude of the conflict. The goal of conflict management is to improve learning and organizational outcomes (effectiveness or success within an organization) (Rahim, 2002). Conflict management should always aim to defuse emotional conflicts and achieve and maintain moderate and constructive conflicts (Rahim, 2002).

Conflict in its broadest sense is characterized as the challenges individuals or groups experience in choosing alternatives, leading to disruption of the decision-making process. Wherever the human element is present as social input, interpersonal disagreements and conflicts resulting from interpersonal differences are therefore inevitable, especially in today's world of extreme competition and globalization.

#### **Organizational Performance**

Every organization cares about organizational performance. Companies are in a turbulent environment looking for ways to improve their performance and competitiveness. Therefore, organizations need to find out what drives and hinders their good performance. Organizational performance can be achieved not only by implementing the right strategy and the right technology but also by improving the organizational culture. A supportive organizational environment is a factor that improves organizational performance. Maintaining a good organizational culture is one of the main responsibilities of top management.

One of the causes of a negative environment is conflict. Managing conflicts is critical to achieving better results. Managers should then identify the positive and negative sides of the conflict as unhealthy conflicts can hamper an organization's ability to achieve its goals, whereas functional or healthy conflicts support organizational goals (Tanner, 2014).

Dysfunctional conflicts lead to poor performance, whereas functional conflicts can improve organizational performance. People can be motivated to improve their performance through competition (a type of confrontation) when they believe that their way of doing things is better than that of others. Moreover, as long as conflicts are handled warmly and constructively, meaningful objectives are achieved within the organization and performance is enhanced. On the other hand, if work relationships have been destroyed and conflicts have reached a destructive scale, they are likely dysfunctional, leading to poor performance and need to be addressed. Conflict was often depicted as part of a conflict-cooperation dichotomy, where one is defined in terms of the absence of the other. Conflict situations were considered best eliminated so that cooperation that produces order could take place. These views were aligned with assumptions that organizations are rational, linear, and predictable systems, in which stability is to be achieved through planning and control (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019).

However, too much conflict can lead to undesirable performance-hindering outcomes, such as hostility and lack of cooperation. Managers need to find and maintain the optimal level of competition that drives performance. Of course, what constitutes an optimal conflict depends on both the situation and the parties involved.

### **Empirical Review**

Numerous empirical researches have been conducted on organizational performance in businesses, institutions, and dispute resolution. For example, Iravo (2011) investigated how conflict resolution affected public secondary school performance in Kenya's Machakos County. Methods of quantitative analysis and data collection were used. Data were gathered using a semi-structured questionnaire. One hundred and forty secondary school principals were the desired target group. Using non-random sampling and stratified probability selection based on several school types, an ideal proportion of 30% was chosen from each category of the target population of schools to satisfy these requirements of optimality and representativeness. One principal or CEO was selected from among the selected schools. The correlation coefficient  $r = 0.69$  showed a robust and generally positive association. This suggested that the association is strong and that the performance rate may be predicted and explained. The resulting regression model's beta coefficient,  $t=2.822$  on the ANOVA, showed that it is significantly more than 0,  $P = 0.07$ , which is smaller than  $P = 0.05$ , the test value. This indicated that success in an educational setting and conflict resolution are strongly correlated. The researcher suggested that rather than just connecting systems, conflict management systems should be integrated into the organization's system at a higher level.

Agana (2020) examined the effect of organizational conflict on employee performance at the Tamale Technical University in the Northern Region of Ghana. The research gathered information from primary and secondary sources using the case study methodology. The discussion guidelines for focus groups and interviews served as the primary data collection instruments. A total of 120 participants - 40 senior members, 40 senior staff members, and 40 junior staff members were purposefully chosen to take part in this study. The study found that several factors, including an inefficient organizational structure, erratic policies, tribalism etc. contributed to conflict at Tamale Technical University. The study also showed that disagreement has led to a decrease in some employees' desire to work, mistrust, discord, intimidation, separation, and a rise in some employees' absenteeism. It was advised that Tamale Technical University's management create a structure that makes it simple to handle grievances when issues arise and that senior staff members in charge should pay attention to and meet the demands of their younger employees.

Maresi (2021) examined organizational performance and conflict management techniques (a survey of microfinance institutions in Nairobi). The study focused on ninety managers of MFIs operating in

Nairobi. The questionnaire was used as the study instrument. The regression model revealed a significant inverse relationship between accommodating strategy and MFI performance in Nairobi, and a substantial positive association between the dominating approach and MFI performance in Nairobi. According to the study's findings, managers should always use dominating and collaborating strategies rather than utilizing accommodating and compromise approaches unless they are necessary.

Zgambo (2018) conducted a study at the University of Zambia (UNZA) to evaluate conflict management techniques and their efficacy in public universities. The study used a descriptive design with a qualitative method. The study employed purposive sampling techniques to generate a sample of 21 respondents, comprising three principal officers, ten shop stewards, and eight union representatives. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data once it was gathered using an interview guide. According to the study's findings, attitudes against one another, political affiliations, incompetent bargaining abilities for worker compensation, and unfavourable working circumstances were some of the factors that led to confrontations. Ultimately, it was determined that ineffective dispute resolution incurred time and expense for UNZA, resulting in subpar operations for the organization. Since the majority of participants mentioned that conflict had to be handled skillfully, harmonious relationships were recommended.

Mwaniki (2021) investigated employee performance and organisational conflict management strategies at several public universities in Nairobi County, Kenya. The research design was descriptive. 1,600 employees in low, middle, and senior management roles participated in the poll. These individuals were chosen from Nairobi City County's public colleges in Kenya. Stratified sampling approaches along with basic random sampling methods were used to pick a sample of 160 individuals. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used to evaluate the questionnaire's reliability, which was the main research instrument for the study. The reliability criterion at the 5% significance level was found to be at least 0.70. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to analyse the collected data using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Three strong, positive, and statistically significant relationships were found between employees' performance and mediation ( $a=0.621$ ,  $p=.001$ ), employees' performance and negotiation ( $a=0.707$ ,  $p=.000$ ), and employees' performance and collaboration ( $a=0.736$ ,  $p=.000$ ). In total, these relationships were found to exist. Employee performance at the chosen public universities in Nairobi City County, Kenya, was found to be significantly impacted negatively by avoidance as a conflict management strategy ( $a=-0.469$ ,  $p=.027$ ). The study suggested that managers and administrators of Kenya's public universities conduct routine assessments of how workplace disagreements affect workers' productivity in the nation's educational establishments.

### **Theoretical Framework: Modern Conflict Management Theory**

The analysis of this paper is anchored on Modern conflict management theory attributed to Wright Mills (Knapp, 1994). The Modern conflict management theory suggests that conflict between people with divergent interests and resources shapes social structures. Dominant perspectives on the drivers of conflict management across the world have been situated within the modern conflict management framework. This theory, among others, suggests that conflict is important for society to develop. Therefore, adequate organizational conflict resolution by managers will result in good communication, better time management, and increased organizational performance.

The conventional perspective, which was prevalent from the late nineteenth century until the middle of the 1940s, emphasizes that conflict must always be avoided since it is harmful, always has a negative effect, and causes performance to drop as its level rises. Mary Parker Follet asserts in her contribution to the growth of administrative theory that conflicts within organizations are unavoidable. Differences in appearance, viewpoint, and interest are what cause conflict. Conflict therefore offers chances for either good or negative outcomes rather than being good or evil. If handled optimally it can lead to increased organizational efficiency (Nwaizu, 2010).

Although Follet proposed three strategies for resolving organizational conflicts - domination, compromise, and integration. It is believed that integration is the most effective approach since it

addresses the underlying source of the issue and ends the dispute once and for all. This method justifies and encourages the existence of conflict. Thus, it may be argued that to improve organizational effectiveness, conflict is required. This theory is pertinent to this research since it addresses the subtleties of conflict and how to manage it, particularly in relation to how it impacts organizational performance. However, to achieve good service delivery, this strategy urges the management of businesses to handle conflicts constructively.

### **Methodology**

A descriptive survey research design was used in the study. The study's population consisted of all 100 employees of EBPRL in Gombe State, Nigeria. The Taro Yamens sample size method was used to establish the study's sample size, which was 50 respondents.

For this investigation, simple random sampling was used to get more precise data from the sample. This is so that each participant in the sample has an equal opportunity to be included. A tool known as the Questionnaire for Assessment of Conflict Management (COM) and Organizational Performance (OGP) was used to gather data. There were three divisions in the instrument: A through C. Section A contained bio-data of the respondents and this included gender, age, and academic qualification, marital status, while section B contained ten (10) items on Conflict Management system (COM) and section C contained ten (10) items on Organizational Performance (OGP). The instrument was scored on a Likert scale of Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Undecided = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5.

The validity of these instruments was ensured by giving the instruments to experts in the fields of human resources management, measurement and evaluation and all suggestions and corrections were attended to. The reliability of these instruments was determined through the administration on 50 employees from different organizations that were not part of the population of the study. Data collected from the pilot test were subjected to analysis with Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) statistics technique and the results revealed a reliability co-efficient of 0.68 for the instrument. This shows that the instrument was reliable enough to be used for this study. Descriptive statistics in the form of mean was used to answer the research questions.

### **Operational Policy of EB Poly Resources Limited (EBPRL)**

EB Poly Resources Limited (EBPRL) is a privately owned production company situated in the Gombe State local government area of Akko. A diverse array of synthetic and semi-synthetic organic compounds are utilized by the organization during the manufacturing process of plastic materials. The operations of the organization are regulated by a well-defined organizational policy in writing, which additionally establishes the obligations and duties of both management and staff members. Significant determinations about work operations within organizations are executed by management after thorough consultation with representatives of the employees. The Health, Safety, and Environment Department (HSE) conducts regular job hazard analyses (pep talks) before the start of daily production activities to inform employees about the risks associated with their specific job responsibilities, preventive measures against incidents and accidents, and practical approaches to minimizing these risks to the greatest extent feasible. Conflicts between employees are the responsibility of EBPRM management to resolve via the human resources department.

The management of the organization provides specialized compulsory periodic (monthly) training for employees on conflict management and hazard prevention mechanisms. During the meeting, past and prospective occurrences of organizational conflicts are reviewed to identify lessons learned regarding the immediate or remote causes of these conflicts. Employees are granted the opportunity to inquire about matters that pique their interest, to mitigate or avert conflicts. This exercise is therefore a proactive conflict prevention mechanism in EBPRM.

Nevertheless, the organization relies strictly on arbitration, mediation and reconciliation whenever a conflict is reported. It is essential to mention that the company places an annual bonus for the highest

reporter of conflict incidents in the organization. Therefore, the organization possesses a reporting system that is operational and effective. 'Incident reporting cards' (IRC) are extensively distributed to employees and safe incident boxes are placed at strategic locations in the organization. Thus, it appears that no conflict incident is being underreported at EBPR. Hence there is a significant measure of leadership commitment towards conflict resolution in the organization. There is therefore no contradiction to state that conflict management in EBRL is central and critical to its sustenance and sustainability as an organization.

### Data Presentation

This section presents the results of the analysis on research questions formulated for this study

**Research Question 1:** Is there conflict management system in EBPR?

**Table 1: Analysis of Mean Scores of Conflict Management System**

| S/No. | Items  | Mean |
|-------|--|------|
| 1.    | Job operations in EBPR are guided by organizational policies   | 3.03 |
| 2.    | Management provides induction training for newly recruited employees   | 3.10 |
| 3.    | Management of EBPR are always ready to settle any form of disagreement among the employees   | 3.13 |
| 4.    | Every employee receives the necessary workplace health and safety training when starting a job, changing jobs and using new techniques       | 3.30 |
| 5.    | Systems are in place in EBPR for employees to report every workplace incident or conflict  | 3.25 |
| 6.    | Communication about employee role, duties and responsibilities in EBPR is done in a way that can be understood                               | 3.21 |
| 7.    | Job specifications for employees in EBPR are done in such a way that workers are not exposed to conflicts or confrontations among themselves | 3.06 |
| 8.    | Employees are not disengaged from EBPR as a result of an involvement in conflicts  | 3.16 |
| 9.    | There are adequate welfare packages for employees in EBPR  | 3.15 |
| 10.   | There is low level of absenteeism in EBPR  | 3.37 |

**Source:** Field Survey (2023)

Table 1 shows the analysis of the extent to which conflict management is operational in EBPR. The result reveals that all the items have Mean scores above 2.5 which is the cut-off mean. This indicates that conflict management is operational to a great extent in EBPR.

**Research Question 2:** Is there any relationship between conflict management and organizational performance in EBPRL?

**Table 2: Analysis of Mean Scores of Organizational Performances**

| S/No. | Items   | Mean |
|-------|---|------|
| 1.    | Employees have pep talk regularly before the commencement of their daily task                             | 3.12 |
| 2.    | Employees do not work under pressure and there is no heavy workloads                                      | 3.18 |
| 3.    | There is up to date incident record/conflict record in EBPRL  | 3.23 |
| 4.    | Work control measures and protective equipment including PPE equipment are provided for the work activity | 3.33 |
| 5.    | Employees receive their salaries and benefits regularly when due in EBPRL                                 | 3.33 |
| 6.    | There are no disagreements between employers and employees in EBPRL                                       | 3.80 |
| 7.    | Employees do not find it difficult to perform their roles in EBPRL  | 3.12 |
| 8.    | Workers do not complain of work-related ill health and sickness   | 3.49 |
| 9.    | There is effective supervision of work in EBPRL   | 3.57 |
| 10.   | Workers are not coerced to perform their duties in EBPRL  | 3.29 |

**Source:** Field Survey (2023)

Table 2 shows the analysis of relationship between conflict management and organizational performance in EBPRL? The result shows that there is a nexus between conflict management and organizational performance to a great extent in EBPRL. Hence, all the question items have mean scores above 2.5 which is the cut-off mean score.

### Summary of Major Findings

The study revealed that the conflict management system is very central and critical to the organizational performance in EBPRL. Hence, it is an indispensable aspect of management functions in organizations. It is observed that although work procedures in organizations are guided by written organizational policies and specialized training on conflict management is periodically provided to employees by the management, there is still the occurrence of disagreements or conflicts among the employees. Hence, workplace conflicts remain inevitable in organizations. However, this study confirmed the availability of functioning incident reporting systems to manage conflicts as they arise in the organization. This has contributed tremendously to the smooth functioning and sustainability of the organizational performance. This result is consistent with the research by Agana (2020), which showed that inadequate conflict resolution leads to a decrease in some employees' motivation to work, mistrust, discord, intimidation, anxiety, and a rise in absenteeism.

The research showed that there is a strong correlation between organizational success and conflict management in EBPRL. Employees' confidence in the organization is enhanced when management expedites action towards settling employees' differences without disengaging them from their official job functions as a result of their involvement in workplace conflicts.

Hence, there is a visible low level of absenteeism and labour turnover in EBPRL and job functions are performed with ease. This finding is in agreement with Iravo (2011) and Nwaniki (2021),



who confirm that essentially there is a strong relationship between conflict resolution and performance in public educational institutions in Kenya and a strong positive and significant relationship between mediation and employees' performance ( $\alpha=0.621$ ,  $p=.001$ ) in selected public universities in Nairobi, respectively.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The study concluded that an effective conflict management system precedes efficient organizational performance in EBPRIL. In addition, proper and timely handling of conflicts in the organization goes a long way to demonstrating leadership commitment as it restores confidence to employees in the discharge of their job functions. Finally, this study also concluded that to a great extent, there is a nexus between conflict management and organizational performance in EBPRIL.

In light of the above results, it is recommended that organizations should be encouraged to institutionalize conflict management systems with a functional reporting mechanism in their workplaces and always provide effective supervision to employees. Employees should not be dismissed from work on account of their involvement in workplace conflicts so that workplace conflicts may not be underreported.

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