Conflict management strategies and academic staff performance:
A conceptual review

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Abstract

Conflict is relevant for high performance of academic staff in the university system. Functional conflict enhances team camaraderie and fosters affective commitment amongst academic staff in the university. However, the dysfunctionality of conflict breeds chaos and uncertainty in the workplace thereby hindering service delivery to potential clients whose interest is to be satisfied by the organization. It is against these contentions that this paper elucidated and reviewed the theoretical basement that explains conflict in the workplace and then connect the dimensions of conflict management strategies that have been dissected and found reliable in resolving workplace conflicts. The paper concludes that conflict management strategies that are measured with avoidance, accommodation, compromise, collaboration, would positively increase the performance of university academic staff.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict management strategies, Academic staff performance.

Introduction

Conflict is essential for the survival and sustainability of every organisation (Samrah et al., 2022). The changing workplace dynamics due to increased diversity have resulted in a surge of conflicts among employees, employers, and other stakeholders, including suppliers and consumers (Amito et al., 2023; Ayoko, 2016). Although workers are united by a shared corporate mission and goals, differences in priorities, religion, culture, socioeconomic status, tastes, and backgrounds can result in personality clashes, harassment, misunderstanding, and mismanagement. Gxhaweni and Plaatjies (2023) admitted that conflicts can disrupt processes, increase absenteeism, result in terminations, and heighten employee turnover. Olukayode (2015) contends that constructive conflict management enhances performance, but destructive management causes workplace disarray, leading to unnecessary relocations and

worker polarisation. This leads to a decline in labour productivity and academic staff efficacy.

Longe (2015) asserted that conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon in any organisation, and its consequences for the firm may be either beneficial or harmful. Muriuki (2022) acknowledged the necessity for management to use appropriate strategies to efficiently resolve conflicts and enhance organisational performance based on these findings. This enables the unimpeded transmission of information from upper management to all tiers within the company. It cultivates interpersonal interactions among employees, hence improving morale and productivity.

Most scholars have investigated conflict management strategies with other variables, but it does appear that very few of them carry out an extensive review of the concept especially linking it to academic staff performance. Samrah et al. (2022) analysed the relationship between conflict management strategies and employee performance in at Pakistan banking Industry. They found that accommodating, between avoiding and collaborating has significant relationship with employee performance.

Sadat et al. (2022) examined the impact of conflict management strategies on organizational performance at Bangladesh's textile industry and found that conflict management strategies such as collective bargaining, confrontation, compromise, and accommodation had a positive significant impact on organizational performance. Chukwuemeka et al. (2022) investigated

the effect of conflict resolution strategies on workers' retention in Nigeria's public sector. They found that conflict resolution strategies have a significant positive effect on workers' retention in selected government agencies.

A study by Shehu-Usman et al. (2024) on conflict management strategies and organisational performance indicated that conflict management strategies have significant effect on the performance of government agencies in Nigeria. Beckoning on the above research, the point of departure for this review is to conceptualize conflict management strategies and its relevant to academic staff performance in the university system.

Literature Review

Theoretical Review
This study will be guided by the Conflict Resolution Theory by Kenneth Thomas propounded in (1976), and the Organizational Behavior Theory by Fred Luthans developed in (1980s).
Conflict Resolution Theory
Conflict resolution theory is a recognised concept that has proven crucial in comprehending and addressing disputes in diverse organisational environments, including universities.

Kenneth Thomas is a significant theorist who has greatly advanced conflict resolution theory. In 1976, Kenneth W. Thomas introduced an extensive model of conflict resolution tactics founded on two principal dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness (Thomas, 1974). The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) identifies five distinct conflict resolution styles: competing

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(high assertiveness, low cooperativeness), collaborating (high assertiveness, high cooperativeness), compromising (moderate assertiveness, moderate cooperativeness), avoiding (low assertiveness, low cooperativeness), and accommodating (low assertiveness, high cooperativeness). This theory analyses the dynamics of conflicts, their sources, and resolution strategies. It offers frameworks for examining various dispute resolution methods, including negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and partnership (Rahim, 2002). This theory facilitates the analysis of conflicts among academic staff and the efficacy of settlement options in improving staff performance and institutional cohesion. Conflict resolution theory provides a framework for understanding and addressing problems within organisations, including educational institutions. Each of these theories provides insights into the successful management of disputes to enhance academic staff performance and satisfaction (Brewer & Tierney, 2012).

The theory of conflict resolution is particularly pertinent to this study as it elucidates how properly handled disputes may enhance performance among academic personnel. Rahim (2002) asserts that effective conflict management entails addressing the fundamental interests and requirements of the concerned parties, resulting in more durable and favourable solutions. In private chartered institutions, using conflict resolution tactics derived from these ideas can alleviate stress, increase work satisfaction, and foster collaboration among academic personnel. The interest-based relational (IBR) strategy, which prioritises comprehending and resolving the interests of all parties in a dispute, can result in more amicable and effective outcomes (Fisher et al., 2011). This method is especially advantageous in academic environments where collaboration and mutual respect are crucial for effective instruction and research. The theory of conflict resolution underscores the significance of a constructive organisational atmosphere in alleviating and resolving disputes.

An encouraging and transparent atmosphere encourages academic personnel to express their concerns and engage in dispute-resolution procedures (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). This corresponds with Basheka's (2015) results, which indicated that private colleges with well-organised dispute resolution systems often exhibit elevated staff morale and performance. Transformative mediation, a fundamental idea in conflict resolution theory, emphasises altering how persons engage and communicate during disputes (Bush & Folger, 2005). This strategy is pertinent to private chartered colleges, as cultivating a culture of open communication and mutual understanding may markedly diminish the frequency and consequences of disagreements. The theory of conflict resolution offers pragmatic ways for addressing disagreements, relevant to the academic environment (Dialoke & Edeh, 2017). Applying mediation and negotiating strategies can facilitate the resolution of conflicts between academic personnel and administration on resource distribution, workload, and several other matters. Fisher et al. (2011) asserts that negotiating skills are essential for achieving mutually acceptable

agreements and improving worker happiness and performance. Furthermore, organisational conflict theory, which analyses the origins and categories of disputes within organisations, might assist in pinpointing certain areas where conflicts are prone to occur at private colleges (Rahim, 2002). Comprehending these causes allows university administration to pre-emptively tackle prospective problems, averting the escalation of conflicts that might impact staff performance.

Implementing conflict resolution theory in private chartered institutions can substantially enhance the performance of academic staff. Efficient conflict resolution strategies grounded in these beliefs help foster a more peaceful and productive workplace. Nakabugo et al. (2011) discovered that colleges that actively participate in dispute resolution have reduced staff turnover and elevated job satisfaction levels. Furthermore, Rahim (2017) asserted that constructively addressing disagreements may cultivate a culture of constant development and innovation, which is vital for academic performance. Mugimu et al. (2009) observed that academic personnel who see their issues as acknowledged and handled exhibit increased motivation and commitment to their responsibilities, resulting in improved educational results. Organizational Behavior Theory

This study will be informed by Organisational Behaviour Theory, a recognised discipline pertinent to analysing the correlation between conflict resolution tactics and academic staff performance at private chartered institutions. Fred Luthans is a prominent thinker in the field of Organisational

Behaviour. In the 1990s, Fred Luthans, a distinguished scholar in organisational behaviour, provided an extensive framework for Organisational Behaviour Theory (Luthans, 1998). This theory highlights the significance of comprehending human behaviour in the organisational setting, concentrating on elements such as individual traits, group dynamics, and organisational processes. The significance of Organisational Behaviour Theory to the proposed research on conflict resolution tactics and academic staff performance at private chartered institutions in Kampala, Uganda, is evident in the following aspects: Organisational Behaviour Theory acknowledges the importance of human traits, including attitudes, personality, and motivation, in influencing employee behaviour and performance (Luthans, 1998). This idea aids in examining how the personal characteristics of academic staff, particularly their conflict management techniques, impact their overall performance. The idea emphasises the significance of group dynamics, encompassing communication patterns, leadership, and conflict resolution, in influencing organisational results (Luthans, 2011). This is especially pertinent to the study, as conflict management within the university context frequently entails negotiating intricate group dynamics involving academic personnel, administrators, and other stakeholders.

Moreover, Organisational Behaviour Theory underscores the importance of organisational processes, including decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution, in influencing the overall performance and efficacy of an

organisation (Luthans, 2011). This theoretical framework can elucidate how the conflict resolution tactics utilised by university administration affect the performance of academic personnel. This theory examines individual and collective behaviour inside organisations, encompassing elements that affect performance, motivation, and interpersonal relationships. Organisational behaviour theory elucidates the effects of disputes on work satisfaction, commitment, and collaboration among university academic staff (Robbins & Judge, 2019). It also offers insights into leadership styles, organisational culture, and communication patterns that influence conflict management and employee performance.

The theory of Organisational Behaviour (OB) centres on comprehending, forecasting, and regulating human conduct inside organisations. This study focuses on conflict resolution tactics and the performance of academic staff in private chartered institutions in the Kampala Central Region of Uganda. Organisational Behaviour (OB) theory elucidates the impact of individual, group, and organisational dynamics on behaviour and performance, presenting a thorough framework for examining the elements that influence conflict and its resolution in academic environments.

Organisational Behaviour theory underscores the need to comprehend human behaviour to enhance organisational efficacy. Robbins and Judge (2019) assert that human behaviour inside organisations is shaped by several elements, such as personality, motivation, and perception. In the realm of private institutions, acknowledging these individual distinctions might facilitate the customisation of conflict resolution procedures to meet the distinct demands and preferences of academic personnel. For example, recognising that certain staff members may possess a greater tolerance for ambiguity, whilst others favour clarity and order.

A critique of Organisational Behaviour (OB) theory is its tendency to oversimplify human behaviour by classifying it into generalised models and theories. Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) assert that organisational behaviour theory may occasionally neglect the intricate and subtle aspects of individual conduct within organisational contexts.

This simplification may neglect the distinct and varied motives, personalities, and experiences of academic staff in private chartered universities, potentially resulting in a uniform approach to conflict resolution that may not be beneficial for everyone. Organisational Behaviour theories are often formulated within Western organisational contexts and may inadequately consider the cultural and contextual variables inherent in other areas. Hofstede (2001) observes that cultural disparities can profoundly influence organisational behaviour and dispute resolution. Cultural norms and values in private colleges within the Kampala Central Region of Uganda may affect conflict dynamics in ways that classic organisational behaviour theories do not sufficiently address. The communal and hierarchical dimensions of Ugandan culture may influence the perception and resolution of disputes, which may not be adequately accounted for by organisational behaviour theories rooted in Western contexts

(Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict management methods are essential for addressing and resolving disagreements within organisations, seeking to alleviate the adverse effects of conflicts and promote constructive settlements. The primary methods are avoidance, accommodation, compromise, competitiveness, and collaboration, each with distinct advantages and drawbacks (Ebeguki et al., 2023; Chukwuemeka et al., 2023).

1) Avoidance: This involves dodging or bypassing the conflict, either temporarily or permanently. This method may be beneficial in instances of minor conflict or when a period of reflection is necessary (Erwin et al., 2024). Extended avoidance can lead to unresolved issues and increased stress, as it does not confront the fundamental causes of the conflict (Adetunji et al., 2022).

2) Accommodation: This approach entails one party yielding to the requests of the other, generally to maintain cohesion. This method fosters relationships and encourages collaboration (Mitha et al., 2024), although excessive accommodation might engender resentment and compromise the goals of the accommodating party (Utile et al., 2020).

3) Compromise: This involves both parties conceding to attain a mutually acceptable outcome. This method can promptly resolve disputes when parties have conflicting goals but are willing to compromise on specific elements

(Sadat et al.,2020). However, compromise may lead to unsatisfying results if neither party's needs are fully met (Chukwuemeka et al., 2022).

4) Competition: In this strategy, one party attempt to dominate the dispute at the expense of others, sometimes through aggression (Samrah et al., 2022). This method may prove advantageous in situations requiring decisive action or a firm position on important issues; yet, it can also intensify conflicts and damage relationships (Nwankwo et al., 2022).

5) Collaboration: This emphasises the necessity of joint efforts to create a solution that addresses the interests of all parties concerned. This method promotes open communication, cooperative problem-solving, and joint decision-making (Gxhaweni & Plaatjies, 2023). Collaboration, recognised as the most effective strategy for complex problems requiring sustainable solutions, demands significant time and effort from all parties and relies on their willingness to engage (Yi, 2024).

Academic Staff Performance

The performance of academic staff is a crucial determinant of the quality and efficacy of educational institutions. It involves assessing the efficacy of faculty members in teaching, research, and institutional service (Kansiime, 2024). This paper examines the fundamental principles associated with academic staff performance, encompassing performance

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standards, evaluation methodologies, and the influence of performance on institutional results. Injikuru et al. (2024) assert that academic staff performance is generally evaluated according to many factors, such as teaching efficacy, research output, and service contributions. Teaching efficacy is assessed using student evaluations, peer assessments, and instructional resources (Centra, 2003). Research productivity is evaluated based on the quantity and quality of publications, research funding, and contributions to the discipline (Birungi et al, 2022). Service contributions encompass participation in departmental events, committee assignments, and community involvement (Alemiga & Kibukamusoke, 2019). Diverse methodologies are employed to assess the performance of academic personnel. Student evaluations serve as a prevalent instrument for evaluating teaching efficacy and offer insights into faculty members' pedagogical approaches and involvement (Baharudin et al., 2023). Peer evaluations entail colleagues evaluating one another's teaching and research contributions, providing a more holistic perspective on performance (Abdrabou, 2024). Self-assessment enables faculty members to evaluate their accomplishments and identify areas for enhancement, offering insights into their performance (Anyango, 2023).

The competence of academic staff significantly influences institutional outcomes, such as student happiness, graduation rates, and institutional reputation. High-performing teachers enhance student learning experiences and academic performance, hence improving the institution's overall quality

(Kansiime, 2024). The efficacy of faculty performance significantly impacts the institution's research productivity and its reputation within the academic community (Birungi et al., 2021). Furthermore, robust performance in service jobs bolsters institutional governance and community participation, hence augmenting the institution's reputation (Kenny & Berlach, 2016). A practical benefit is that assessing and enhancing the effectiveness of academic staff in teaching results in superior instruction and improved student learning outcomes. Institutions may utilise performance data to pinpoint areas for professional development and assist faculty in improving their pedagogical methods (Alemiga & Kibukamusoke, 2019). Moreover, frequent performance reviews might enhance research efficiency by establishing clear goals and offering feedback. Faculty members are motivated to pursue high-quality research and secure funding, which contributes to the institution's academic and research standing (Baharudin et al., 2023). Abdrabou (2024) pointed out that high academic staff performance positively affects the institution's reputation, attracting students, faculty, and funding. Anyango (2023) argued that an institution that is known for its excellent faculty is likely to have higher enrolment rates and better rankings. Performance evaluations can be influenced by bias and subjectivity, particularly in peer and student assessments. Evaluators may have personal preferences or conflicts of interest that affect the accuracy of the assessments (Injikuru et al., 2024). Measuring academic staff performance can be challenging due to the diverse nature of faculty roles and

responsibilities. Standardized metrics may not fully capture the complexity of teaching, research, and service contributions (Centra, 2003). Frequent or poorly executed evaluations can negatively impact faculty morale and job satisfaction. Faculty members may feel stressed or undervalued if the evaluation process is perceived as unfair or overly critical (Kenny & Berlach, 2016).

Conclusion

This paper review aims to conceptualize conflict management strategies and how they influence academic staff performance in the university system. Underlining theories of conflict and academic staff performance were examined in the review while documenting existing studies that were carried out by other researchers which created the vacuum for which this review was necessary. The essentiality of academic staff in the university system was elucidated and it was concluded that conflict management strategies when implemented can quell existential disagreement amongst academic staff and management of universities.

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