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**Workplace Conflicts and Employee Performance in Institutions in  
Kamuli District.**



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## Workplace Conflicts and Employee Performance in Institutions in Kamuli District.

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** To study Workplace conflicts and processes.

**Methodology:** Qualitative-methods study was used where secondary data review and analysis was undertaken. Three variables were examined: (a) the types of conflict, (b) the processes for resolving those conflicts, and (c) the consequences of those conflicts.

**Findings:** findings revealed that the prevalent work-family conflict, poor policies, financial difficulties, bad communication, competition and jealousy between groups have caused conflicts in work places in Kamuli District.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice:** The study recommended that there is need to minimize the time it takes to be able to discuss a dispute. Secondly, a policy of resolving disputes should be drafted in every institution and effectively implemented at all times in the organization. Employees who feel empowered to resolve a conflict are less likely to let conflict spiral out of control. There is need to reward employees who are able to prevent a conflict from escalating and make suggestions for future conflict prevention.

Nevertheless, Workplace Conflicts are inevitable in Work places when employees of different backgrounds and different work styles are brought together but with a deliberate effort, there are multiple processes to resolve those conflicts.

**Keywords:** *Conflict, Conflict Resolution, ADR, Managers, Work place*



## **Introduction and Background**

Conflict has long existed in the workplace (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2022). It has been consistently reflected in writings over the last 6,000 years. Analyzing how workplace conflict begins and ends throughout history helps understand how ADR practitioners develop better practices (Ayub, & Jehn, 2021). The first escalated, multi-person, workplace conflict is documented in the Bible occurring approximately 6,000 years ago. The Book of Genesis reports that Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel (NIV Bible, Genesis 4). Cain, the older brother, was a farmer. Abel was a shepherd. When the time came for both brothers to show their sacrifices to God/their boss, the boss favored Abel's sacrifice and this caused a conflict between Cain and Abel which later resulted into Cain murdering Abel (Argyris, & Schon, 2018). While workplace disputes and resolution processes might have changed over the last few 1,000 years, conflict paths and patterns have not.

The 20th century went through dramatic structural shifts in the workplace, which reflected a shift in societal values. The researcher identified conflicts as being at a destructive or peaceful stage based upon how the participant described the conflict. Despite this progress, conflicts still exist. Around the year 2000, researchers began to seriously explore why conflicts were still present. Employers began to realize that they needed to develop an effective way to deal with these inevitable conflicts (Barritt, 2022). Conflict seemed to appear more often, as there was more solicitation for employee feedback. Although companies began asking employees what was wrong, few were developing means to address that feedback. This, in turn, was leading to a new type of conflict.

The turn of the century was marked by four substantial management theories: (a) Scientific Management (led by Taylor), (b) Idealized Bureaucracy (led by Weber), (c) Administrative Science (led by Fayol), and the (d) Human Relations Movement (led by Mayo). At the beginning of the century, workplaces were based around processes known as Scientific Management (Taylor, 1911). Taylor (1911) developed the core principles of Scientific Management in the 1880s through the early 1900s (Taylor, 2010). One of the values of Scientific Management is that businesses should be run like a tight ship. Many employees of the time worked in factories, or held similar jobs that did not allow for creativity or individual expression (Frank, 2017). Employees behaved in a certain, specified manner. The best employee was believed to be the most robotic, meaning he or she behaved exactly as expected and was not given the opportunity to express emotions. Any conflict that arose then was attributed to a poorly designed business structure. If the structure were tighter and more streamlined, it was believed that this would eliminate the need for employees to act out (Fox, & Stallworth, 2016).

The chronology of a workplace examines its maturity, its lifespan, and its experience. Examining workplaces chronologically is important because workplace systems and conflicts vary based on its age (Flagg, 2019). Workplaces that were founded over 20 years ago are typically less nimble and may be less receptive to organizational change (Fisher, & Ury, 2021). Specifically, workplaces

in Kamuli District experience corporate sclerosis, meaning that the bigger and older institutions have a harder time quickly dealing with conflict henceforth affecting employee performance (Byansi, 2020). In order to understand what element in the workplace is causing the conflict, the entire systems and processes need to be examined (Kasumba, 2021).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The majority of workers in Kamuli District are currently employed by small businesses (Kamuli CDO Report, 2022). The result is that small businesses may be more negatively affected by conflict than necessary. However, there exists conflicts in both small and big institutions in the District that could be creating employee performance gaps in terms of quality of output, timeliness and tasks accomplished in a given time. The types of conflicts that are draining time and money were studied to yield information that might be useful for designing a system for resolving these conflicts. This aspect of the study is designed to gain a broad snapshot of the type and scope of conflicts currently affecting work places and institutions in Kamuli District. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to examine the relationship between work place conflicts and employee performance in Kamuli District.

### **Research Objectives**

This study hinges on three Research objectives

1. To examine the common types of conflict that are experienced at work places in Kamuli District
2. To assess the common processes that employers are adopting to resolve conflicts in Kamuli District.
3. To find out the consequences of conflicts in work places in Kamuli District as reported by employers?

### **Theoretical Framework**

There are multiple theoretical frameworks that are relevant to understanding workplace conflict. The first is the Realistic Conflict Theory, proposed by Campbell (1965). Campbell suggests that conflict is based upon a tangible or intangible resource that two groups want, and the wants of both groups might not be able to be met. This unfulfilled desire leads groups into conflict (Einarsen, 2021). This theory focuses on the perception of groups, the importance of belonging to a group, and the impact of friction between groups. This study is also founded on the Social Identity Theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979), which states that merely having two groups in proximity to each other typically creates competition and jealousy between the groups (Edwards, & Rothbard, 2022). Tajfel and Turner indicate that one group bonds by identifying and defining itself, and the other group becomes the out-group. This happens due to a need to identify one's self in relation to others, making a quick decision if someone is a friend or foe.

### **Literature Review**

Workplace literature indicates that the size of a business affects its culture and operations (Dijkstra, Beersma, & Evers, 2023). A small business must be treated drastically differently than a large or a micro-business (Barritt, 2022). A large business, for instance, may be likened to a community with different interests and diverse groups. A micro-business is akin to a two- or three-person business. Micro-businesses may be likened to a marriage where the roles overlap and the people are completely dependent on each other for their success.

Bartunek, Kolb, and Lewicki (2022) agree that conflict can be caused by a variety of factors, including internal and external. Their study examined the relationship between work-family conflict and smoking at four extended care facilities. They found a substantial relationship between the amount of conflict experienced and the proclivity to smoke. They found that conflict was stressful (which tended towards increased smoking) both because of internal and external factors. They cited internal factors as co-worker disagreements. They cited external factors as stress from home life which workers carried into the workplace. While a specific study on the general types of conflicts reported by small business owners is not known, there have been additional studies examining conflicts type, processes, and consequences in other settings. Examining these studies is helpful in developing this study. One such longitudinal study, performed by Berger (2020), analyzed how the type of conflict affected workgroup productivity. For their study, they developed and tested a dynamic group conflict model. Their model assumed, and proved, that conflicts could fall into three categories: (a) relationship, (b) task, and (c) process. They studied 51 three-student teams doing a similar organizational task over the course of a semester. The teams were taking the same general management course, and most were full-time employees concurrently taking courses. The researchers measured group value consensus in each time, and compared this against the types of conflict they were experiencing at that point in the semester. They found that the frequency with which they met or the duration of the meetings did not affect the cooperativeness of the groups. The result of their study was that 97% of the intra-group conflicts experienced by work groups were Process Conflicts. They also reported that 90% of the general office emotional conflicts occurred when employees simply got angry at each other. Jehn and Mannix(2020) also pointed out that the groups that were the best performing had low levels of process and relationship conflict, and moderate levels of task conflict. This is consistent with the literature by Ayub, & Jehn (2021) that examined task, process, and relationship conflicts.

Finlay (2022) conducted a study on conflict types by examining organizational conflict in three Pakistani banks. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were conducted. They discovered that masquerading was the most common type of conflict. This study supported Situational Leadership Theory, in that the researchers found that different types of conflict required different management approaches. Khalid and Amjad produced an analysis of different working environments, the conflicts in those environments, and the different management styles that were most effective at resolving them. Barritt (2022) conducted three studies on workplace conflict, which revealed that task conflict was the most common. In one study, 131 Pakistani professionals were asked questions

concerning perceived nationalism, which they ranked on a 7-point Likert scale. Another study also revealed that increased respect among group members increased task conflict, but decreased relational and process conflicts. Another study revealed that national diversity is positively related to process conflicts. These studies showed that conflict could be studied not just by the type (task, process, and relational) but also by what caused the conflict. Determining the type of conflict helped to determine the most effective way to resolve the conflict.

Bolman, and Deal (2023) conducted an additional study that is useful in understanding conflict type. Their study examined over 12,000 Dutch workers and developed a list of the most common causes of conflict for men and women. Some of the causes they discovered for men were work-related demands, work schedule, fear of losing a job, conflicts with coworkers or managers, having full responsibility for housekeeping, and the responsibility of a chronically ill dependent at home (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2022). For women, common causes of conflict were physical demands, overtime work or a difficult work schedule, the time it took to commute to work, and having dependent children. This study, however, was conducted in another country and so it is unclear how large of an impact this had. Also the size of the businesses that these researchers examined was not clear.

### **Methodology**

The methodological approach is purely qualitative revolving around use of secondary data. The qualitative aspect focused on “where”, “what”, and “when”, how and “why” of the process of decision making. This study was founded on the ontological and epistemological assumptions. The selection of research design was founded largely by the methodology (qualitative), and philosophical assumptions direct the research process. A descriptive design was embraced for this study as it was anticipated to allow in-depth study of basic themes. Data was sorted and analysed using content thematic analysis.

### **Findings**

Findings reveal that conflicts begin at work when people are unable to deal with a difficult situation at home. Whenever there is a stressful situation in someone’s life, such as children moving out of the home, people are often unable to fully resolve the conflict at home. With the children moving out, Bartunek, Kolb, & Lewicki (2022) points out parents might be secretly upset with the kids for leaving because they anticipate missing them. Since the parents want to appear supportive, however, they may not discuss their feelings at home with their children. Instead, they might become irritable at work and begin blaming others irrationally. Further, Bartunek, Kolb, & Lewicki (2022) states that when someone is emotional they are convinced that what they are saying is more important and more truthful. In other words, when in conflict a passing thought becomes a life value that must be strongly defended. Based on this, Shaub believes that workplaces should provide a safe place where people can talk about what is going on in their life. By discussing the outside stressors, the conflicts at work are believed to lessen.

People sometimes generate conflict in work as a way to address other stressors in their life (Barritt, 2022). For example, if a husband is feeling disrespected at home, he might become overly bold and bossy in the workplace to compensate.

Findings reveal that some people are drawn to the position of power because of their own feelings of jealousy or inadequacy. These personal issues, if not dealt with, will likely result in conflicts in the workplace hence affecting employee performance. Baltimore (2006) also discusses that when personal conflicts are acted out at work they become difficult to resolve without a neutral intervention. The reason for this, Baltimore states, is that when an employee acts out he attributes it to an external cause. He might attribute it to a difficult environment, a bad coworker, or a justifiable or righteous cause. He becomes entrenched and convinced of his right to act out. When someone else acts out, he attributes it to that person's poor temperament. This makes the conflict continually self-enforcing because the people involved tend to be tougher on the other party than they are on themselves. It can be helpful, then, to have a neutral third party assist parties to gain some perspective.

Age and inexperience at handling people may generate conflict at work that may end up impacting on employee performance. Berger (2020) state that a common cause of conflict is generational. Argyris, and Schon (2018) state that when young people enter the workplace, they have not yet acquired the skills to resolve conflict. Myers and Larson state that when faced with a conflict, young workers seek third-party counsel (often friends and family), but only from those who affirm their point of view. It takes a level of maturity, objectiveness, and experience to be open to other points of view, be teachable, accept blame, and confront conflict in a healthy way. These are all characteristics that are helpful for resolving conflict.

Findings revealed that conflicts that affect employee performance may not be generational at all. Once generational conflict they may be two-sided. They are not just caused by the inexperience of young workers, but also the jealousy of the more experienced workers. These types of errors are attributed to a lack of competence and commitment. In reality the cause can be traced back to omission of essential information and lack of guidance from their preceptor, often despite repeated requests for assistance," (Baltimore, 2006, p. 23). Baltimore states that while it is commonly difficult to incorporate new and young employees, the senior staff can exacerbate the situation. The senior staff might expect more humility and a desire to learn from the new staff members, and instead be surprised at their confidence. Baltimore suggests that more experienced staff needs to realize it is their responsibility to ensure the new staff succeeds. A recent survey conducted by the staff Uganda Equal Opportunities Commission (2022) reveals that 75% of almost 2,000 respondents interviewed agreed that bosses do not adequately support their subordinates which may also be another source of conflict at the work place irrespective of gender.

Findings revealed that work time conflict are becoming common in Kamuli. Work–family conflict can be time based, behavior based, or strain based (Ayub, & Jehn, 2021). A time-based conflict may exist if an employee is asked at the last minute to work late, and it conflicts with picking up

a child at day care. Behavior based conflict may be encountered when an individual who is hired for a particular job that requires an assertive and unemotional personality, then takes this behavior into the home life, creating family problems. Strain-based conflict occurs when the strain that is experienced in one role is carried into another role. If an employee experiences substantial strain at home or at work, then that strain can be carried into the other role and make the employee unable to efficiently perform her tasks, resulting in a work or family conflict.

Financial and economic difficulties are also another source of work place conflict as findings revealed. Two external causes of conflict in the workplace include reporting policies and economic difficulties. Changes in reporting for businesses, specifically the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX), have added an extra layer of accountability on businesses. For some businesses, this requires them to work harder and spend more time on their paperwork and accounting to comply with the federal act. SOX was passed in 2002 to compel companies to be more transparent. For some companies it required “full disclosure, internal controls, and an independent board of director oversight by public accounting firms” (Finlay, 2022). Recent economic difficulties are also testing many businesses. The downturn in the economy has caused many companies to work harder with less, and this is resulting in increased pressure on companies. This increased pressure unfortunately often results in increased conflicts (Flagg, 2019). Fisher, & Ury (2021) state that if a company continues to have the same problems internally or externally, it is an indication of the existence of a systemic conflict. Berger (2020) say that systemic conflicts are the most unidentified but the most common types of conflict in the workplace. Systemic conflicts, whether formally or informally, may have unintended negative consequences.

Systems that are not well defined have been found to stress employees in work places in Kamuli District. For example in efficient information/communication system (due to ill-designed system, misuse of system, or unwillingness to use system. In some organization in the District, there are organizational deficiencies where employees blame each other for the organizational system’s deficiencies.

Bolman, & Deal (2023) write that the main cause of conflict in the workplace is the organizational systems. Flagg (p. 94) list five causes of systemic workplace conflict: 1. “A lack of clear and courageous leadership. 2. An absence of agreement over values, visions, mission, and goals. 2. Unclear roles and responsibilities. 3. A lack of support for collaboration and participation in decision-making over important issues. 4. Inequality and unfairness in the distribution of resources and pay.

### **Discussion of Results**

When difficulties erupt, people often make radical changes to remove what they think is causing the problem (Bartunek, Kolb, & Lewicki, 2022). This action diminishes the stability of the company. A better option may exist in a variety of gradual options, such as employee training, an on-call mediator, board of advisors, or a consultant. Having a variety of options can help the



company to be creative and resolve the problem in a healthy way. Edwards, and Rothbard (2022) states that companies should have a variety of checkpoints to prevent conflicts. They should implement multiple types of safeguards with different resolution options to catch conflicts before they get out of control. This is in agreement with the findings. If they do not have these checkpoints in place, Clifford states, the urgent trumps the important. The result is that immediate daily needs are dealt with while latent, festering conflicts go unnoticed.

Bolman, and Deal (2023) also states that one of the keys to effectively preventing conflict is to have a variety of options available to employees. Lewin points out that when these options are undertaken separately, they are not as effective. But when employers use a variety of options in combination then they see conflicts diminish quickly. Some of these practices include (a) employee evaluations, (b) employee training, (c) variable pay, (d) skill training, (e) employee interchangeability, and (f) work groups. Lewin states that workers know that their workplace culture is supportive when managers are willing to do what it takes to resolve conflict by providing a lot of resources and options. This is inline with the findings as Baltimore (2006) notes that many conflicts can be prevented simply through good communication. Whether it is believed that prevention is the responsibility of the employee or the employer, both sides would benefit from better communication skills. If good communication is going to begin with the managers, then managers need to communicate in a way that minimizes conflict but also sets an example of how to speak amongst each other in a way that prevents conflict. One way managers can do this is by having their communication and their instructions be precise, respectful, and easy for the employees to carry out without stepping on each other's toes. Managers who communicate well lay the groundwork to help their employees communicate well.

Researchers such as Dijkstra, Beersma, & Evers(2023) feel that the history of trying out different ways to resolve dispute has given companies a wide array of options. A company can pick which tool is the most appropriate for the current conflict. Frank (2017) states that employers can benefit from their predecessors by choosing the best process available. Having a clearly defined process also limits subjectivity and can help conflicts to be resolved quickly. Fox, & Spector (2019) support Smith's opinion that a conflict must be resolved quickly. However, they disagree with his method of having only one ADR process available as having only one complicated process can be detrimental to employees. Rather, say Fox, and Spector, it is preferable for a company to have access to a wide array of ADR options and choose what fits their company and current conflict.

Findings revealed that employees should be involved in work place decisions in order to minimize conflicts. These findings are consistent with the findings of the aforementioned researchers (Flagg, 2019) that began to advance management theories in the workplace. They found that for employees to be more effective, they wanted to be invested and involved in the workplace and workplace decisions.

## **Conclusion**

Findings revealed that managers are responsible for creating an environment that prevents conflicts. Once the employer has created this environment, employees begin acting in a way that prevents conflict. An employee that continues to cause conflicts needs to use the training and the resources available to learn how to prevent conflicts, or needs to find different employment. It is the responsibility of the employees to use the training and the resources available to them. It is the responsibility of the management to provide the options and conflict management training.

The author believes that conflict prevention is the responsibility of both the employer and the employee. Employers must be able to address and change the employee's attitude and tendencies to work through training and participatory decision making. Employees must take the initiative to treat each other with respect and maturity. Both employee and employer must share the responsibility of creating a successful organization. White states that the owner can support employees in this by giving them responsibility and treating them like adults. When treated like adults, employees must take responsibility to behave as they are treated.

### **Recommendations**

The author recommends that in order to prevent or resolve work place conflicts, there is need for the employer to create an environment where people can brainstorm solutions. There is also need for the employers to increase the perception of fairness and also not only enhance but increase the importance of resolving disputes. There is need to minimize the time it takes to be able to discuss a dispute. A policy of resolving disputes should be drafted in each institution and effectively implemented at all times in the organization. Employees who feel empowered to resolve a conflict are less likely to let that conflict spiral out of control. There is need to reward employees who are able to prevent a conflict from escalating and make suggestions for future conflict prevention.

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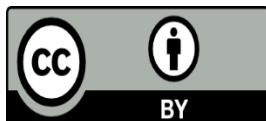
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