



The nexus between conflict management styles and employee job performance: Evidence from hospital employees in Pretoria

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Abstract

The study investigates the nexus between conflict management styles and hospital employees' job performance in Pretoria. Explanatory design was adopted to achieve the research objectives and to test the hypotheses. The study adopted the purposive and convenient sampling technique whilst the Yamane (1967) formula was used to calculate a sample size of 90. The study's findings showed a significant positive relationship between conflicts manage styles such as collaborative, accommodative and compromising and employee job performance. However, collaborative style was found to be the most significant with correlation value of .690 followed by accommodative style with a correlation value of .550 and compromising style a correlation value of .520 at 0.1 confidence level. Recommendations for managers and directions for future studies have been presented.

Keywords: Conflict management style, employee job performance, health sector, Pretoria

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable part of our lives. In organizations, specifically, different shared values and beliefs might lead to misunderstanding and create tension between employees. Conflict as an obstacle, is an inescapable component of social life which pervades various organizational process (Hinterleitner & Sager, 2022) ^[10]. Scholars and researchers have attempted to analyse how conflict management works in organisations since different organisations face different conflicts. Conflicts have different sources and can lead to positive or negative effects (Aditya & Setyawan, 2021) ^[1] and it has been mainly emphasized that the type of conflicts faced by the organisation can determine failure or success and conflict should be avoided at most (Etele & Akunne, 2023) ^[5].

Conflict management depends on the kind of styles that suit the organisation and have an added advantage to the organisation in the long run. Conflict management is also seen as a wider concept which involves conflict management styles, process and skills to mitigating conflicts in a workplace (Kayser & Kaplan, 2020) ^[13]. Therefore, in order to know which style suits the conflict best, management should be able to have the right kind of skills to manage the conflicts which come about in the organisation. The conflict management styles include dominating, compromising, integrating, avoidance and accommodation (Rahim, 2023) ^[24] who studied the five different styles of conflict management. In preference for one or another conflict management style, all depends on certain factors which include the kind of conflict, position of the parties and the kind of the relationship (Rahim, 2023) ^[24]. However, individuals may use a particular style for conflict management which suits them best. Conflict is now a very common factor in organizations that leads to deterioration in performance because of human interactions in today's work environment. According to Corn (2013), conflict is the result of dissension between stakeholders' interests, values and goals thus disagreeing. The interest to achieve the desired goals becomes the cause of conflict in some organizations. Many researchers have different views

about organizational conflict. According to Folger *et al.* (2023), conflict is a process in which a part believes that the other party has a negative perception towards his or her interests. The same notion was further propagated by Furlong (2020) ^[7] that conflict is seen to be the struggle for resources, power, status, beliefs, preferences and desires.

Employee job performance is affected when conflicts are many and this affects employee perform in the work environment. The conflicts usually affect the creativity and innovation, efficiency and effectiveness of the employees; there's also change in attitude and many others (Kayser & Kaplan, 2020) ^[13]. Various researchers have described two types of conflicts such as constructive and destructive. Constructive conflicts are conflicts which end up being good or have a positive impact whereas destructive conflicts end up being disastrous. Similarly, it was described that positive conflict can end up being innovative and creative too (Warmuth *et al.*, 2020) ^[35]. According to Keashly *et al.* (2020) ^[14], the causes of conflict are differences in knowledge, beliefs and values, lust for power, position and recognition, personal liking and disliking, and perception about organizational culture. The administrators and managers have to use different styles of managing conflict which have advantages to them (Liddle, 2023) ^[15].

Conflict is seen to be inevitable and presently continues to be an issue in almost all the health sectors in the world and Pretoria, South Africa is no exception. At the various health centers, employees demands for pay raise and better working conditions often leads to conflicts. In a bid to addressing the conflicts, management of the hospitals end up using different styles of conflict management which yield results to mitigate the conflicts. However, much as the styles are used, the hospitals continue to face conflict management challenges. Studies confirmed that different conflict management styles yield different results (Rahim, 2023) ^[24]. Studies on conflict management style is replete in literature among different industries, for instance in education Lin (2023) ^[17], manufacturing, John-Eke & Akintokunbo (2020) ^[12], in health Aseery *et al.* (2023) ^[3]. However, these studies are carried out in the developed

world where the geographical settings are different from that of Ghana. Clearly, there appears to be little or no studies carried out in the context of Pretoria hospitals, South Africa. Hence, the study intends to fill the gap in knowledge by investigating how management style impact hospital employee' job performance in Pretoria, South Africa. Results of the study should help hospital managers adopt the conflict management styles suitable for the conflict situation in order to achieve a positive impact on employee performance in the health sector. It is hoped that recommendations from the study should provide managers in the hospital with practical solutions which would reduce unnecessary resources of managing conflicts and thereby improve employee job performance. In this way, new approaches may be developed to solve conflicts and improve employee job performance.

Literature review

Theoretical review

In this study, the Human Relations theory on conflict management styles were used to highlight factors influencing conflict management styles in the workplace and on employee performance.

Human relations theory

This theory was postulated by Elton Mayo in 1964 after conducting experiments to find out how individual employees behaved under certain work conditions. The study highlighted the importance of the relationship between various social factors and performance within an organisation. It was found that employee productivity and performance were considered as their functions and then compensated in the end. However, after the experiment, it was realized that in order for employee performance and production to increase, their needs had to be satisfied through motivation and with the right compensation packages (Reddy, 2020) ^[25]. The Human Relations School of Thought was of the view that the performance of an organisation depends on the types of relationship between employees and managers. The human relations theory was applicable to the study in that conflicts should be partially accepted since conflicts establish a positive energy for the performance of the organisation depending on how the conflict is handled (Sapar & Syafruddin, 2021) ^[28]. Management should be able to create better human relations among their employees. In cases of conflict, management should be able to know their employees well and know how to act, select the best style of conflict management which has to yield the best results in the end thus managing the conflicts.

Conceptual review

Employee job performance

Referencing to Loan (2020) ^[18], job performance is a behavior that an individual delivers in order to leverage the value of an organization over period of time. Any HR department aims to leverage and increase the job performance of its employees which leads to increase the productivity to the highest possible level. Hence, many books and articles mentioned various factors that can be used to indicate and measure job performance such as conflict management style, organizational commitment, and leadership style (Shitu, 2021; Staccort, 2020) ^[31]. The authors believes that conflict style can affect the

performance of employees as suitable conflict style will push and guide members toward the organization goals

Conflict management style and employee job performance

Conflict is an unavoidable and normal event in any organization. Organizations have been faced with structural, personnel, and resource distribution issues as a result of industrialization and globalization, resulting in different forms of conflict (To *et al.*, 2021) ^[32]. It is in the norm of various cultures worldwide that conflict must be avoided, however, if it is well-managed, conflicts too, can open new unexpected possibilities to the organizations. Studies have shown that conflict management style, when applied properly can impact employee job performance positive. For instance, Rahim (2023) ^[24] posits that the collaborating style is one of the positive conflict management styles which can impact employee job performance in that it depicts a major concern to satisfy both sides. Obulor & Onuoha (2024) ^[20] view this style to be highly assertive and highly cooperative whereas the goal is to find a "win-win" solution. In elaboration, choosing a cooperative problem-solving styles enable people to work, collaborate and perform their job together so that everyone can win. In a situation where conflict arises, choosing the collaborating style is a good attempt as people try to find a solution that will help everyone meeting their preferences and interest (Obulor & Onuoha, 2024) ^[20]. Besides, this type of conflict management style can help maintaining a good workplace relationship. This situation can lead to an excellent synergy at the workplace (Ronquillo *et al.*, 2023) ^[27]

Janghu & Bhau (2023) ^[11] underscores the relevance of the accommodating style in managing conflict at the workplace. The accommodating style is about foregoing self-main concerns in order to satisfy the concerns of others. This type of conflict management style is low assertiveness and high cooperativeness whereas the goal is to yield (Janghu & Bhau (2023) ^[11]. In the workplace environment, many people tend to choose this type of conflict management style as they believe that maintaining a good workplace relationship is more important than other things (Ilgan, 2020). Prior studies confirmed a positive relationship between accommodating conflict management style and employee job performance (Bogman & VALIma, 2021; Walz & Collins, 2020) ^[4, 34]

In a related study, compromising conflict management style was found to have significant impact on employee job performance (Obeng & Agyemang, 2021) ^[19]. According to the authors, most managers tend to choose a compromising style because it is important for them to satisfy some of their interest, but not all of them is about finding a middle ground or forgoing some of our concerns and committing to other's concerns (Staccort, 2020) ^[31]. According to Weider & Harold (2021), this style is moderately assertive and moderately cooperative, whereas the goal is to find the middle ground. In this conflict management style, everyone is expected to give up something and compromise to the other person's needs and preferences. In the study of Okyere & Boadu (2022) ^[21], compromising conflict management style was found to positively related to employee job performance. Inferring from the literature, the study hypothesis as follows:

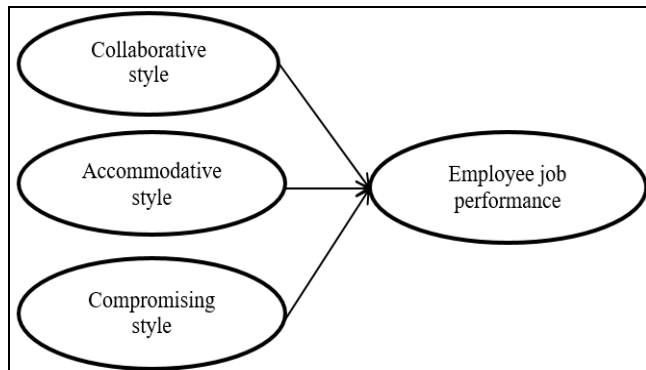
H1: collaborating style will positively influence employee job performance

H2: accommodating style will significantly influence employee job performance

H3: compromising style will significantly influence employee job performance

Conceptual framework

In testing the stated hypotheses, i.e. the relationship between the independent variables (Collaborating style, accommodating style and compromising style) and the dependent variable (employee job performance), a construct is formulated as shown in figure 1.



Authors Construct, 2024

Fig 1: Conceptual framework

Methodology

Research design

The study employed the explanatory design to achieve the research objectives and to test the hypotheses. The explanatory research is an objective way of measuring the effect or the influence of one variable on another. The explanatory design was adopted in this study because hypotheses are tested on the relationship between conflict management style and employee performance

Population

A population is any group of individuals that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to a researcher (Best & Kahn, 2007). The targeted population of the study included all employees in Pretoria hospitals, South Africa.

Sampling technique

The sampling design refers to the procedure for obtaining samples from the selected population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2009). The study adopted the purposive and convenient sampling technique. The purposive sampling was employed to administer questionnaire to only employees working in Pretoria hospitals while the convenient technique enabled the researcher to reach participant readily available to respond to the questionnaire

Sample size

Sample size can be defined as a subset of a population or a selected proportion of an entity. The essence of the sample size is for easy analysis of data collected about a problem; because the population of the study is very large, making a census or a complete enumeration of all the variables in the population is often impossible. For this study, the Yamane

(1967) formula for sample size calculation was adopted. The formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(r)}$$

Where n=required sample size,
N=study population, and 0.5 is the Confidence level

$$n = \frac{92}{1+92(0.5)^2}$$

An iteration of 20% was added to the sample size to allow for more respondents in view of possible inaccurate responses and unreturned questionnaires that are normally associated with survey studies. The new sample size after iteration stood at 90 to increase the sample's power

Source of data

Primary data is collected to aid the analysis of the study objectives. Primary data is the one that is obtained for the first time from the field. This type of data is required when no prior data exist that can help provide answers to solve the problem identified. According to Babbie (2019), primary data has high degree of validity since the data collected reflect the currency condition and context within which the study was conducted. Data is collected from the respondents by administering hard copy of the survey instrument to them at the banking premises

Data collection instrument

The study used structured questionnaires to obtain data from the respondents. Structured questionnaire was used because it lowers the cognitive load of information on the respondents. That is, the structured questionnaire reduces the amount of thinking a respondent is required to undertake the task of completing the questionnaire. This increases the response rate. The use of the structured questionnaire also enables the researcher to easily code and analyse the items captured on the questionnaire.

Data analysis

Data analysis refers to the process of summarizing and organizing the data (Kothari, 2004). Data from the completed questionnaires were then summarized, coded, edited and tabulated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. In ascertaining the relationship between the independent variables and the dependable variable, the regression analysis was carried out.

Validity and reliability of data

Saunders *et al.* (2009) [29] defined validity as “the extent to which the data collection method accurately measures what it was intended to measure. The study’s validity was ascertained by pre-testing the questionnaires. This was done by administering questionnaires to 5 experts in conflict management. The comments and suggestions from these experts helped shaped the questionnaire to achieve the study’s purpose. Reliability on the other hand is an indicator of a measure of internal consistency, as well as, how the appropriate items on the test measure the same construct (Saunders *et al.* 2009) [29]. The Cronbach alpha was used to ascertain the reliability of the study. Respondents were

encouraged to participate at will. Confidentiality and anonymity was also ensured

Results and discussions

Analysis of background information

The study sought to find out information regarding the designations, gender and experience of the respondents. The general information was to guide the researcher to relate it to the subject under investigation. It begins with gender, age, designation and experience of respondents

Regarding the gender of respondents, the statistics shows that 55(61.1%) of the respondents were males and 35(38.9%) were female respondents. This was envisaged prior to the study. Also, similar findings have been in the study of Okyere & Boadu (2022) [21]. Findings from the dataset showed that 15(16.7%) of the respondents were in the age bracket of 24-28years, 30(33.3%) of the respondents were in the age bracket of 29-33years, 28(31.1%) of the respondents were in the age bracket of 34-37years, 12(13.4%) of the respondents were in the age bracket of 38-42years, 5(5.5%) of the respondents were 43 years and above.

The study sought to find out the designations or job titles of the respondent. This was to guide the researcher to determine how the various conflict management styles affect employee job performances. The statistics of the dataset obtained showed that 15(16.7%) of the respondents were medical doctors, 47(52.2%) of the respondents were nurses whilst 28(31.1%) of the respondents were clinical officers.

Slightly majority 35(38.9%) of the respondents have about 7-12years experience in the health sector, 26(29.8%) of the respondents have about 1-6years experience in the health sector, 17(18.9%) of the respondents have about 13-18years experience in the health sector whilst 12(13.3%) of the respondents have about 19-24years experience in the health sector. The varied years of experience showed that respondents have in-depth understanding of the subject matter

Reliability statistics

Hair *et al.* (2018) [8] propose that assessing the reliability and consistency of measurements is integral to evaluating the quality of a measurement tool. In this study, the reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, a coefficient that measures the internal consistency of items within a set. Cronbach's alpha values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2018) [8]. The achieved Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this study was .950, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70 suggested by Hair *et al.* (2018) [8]. This high coefficient indicates strong internal consistency among the survey items, suggesting that they are closely interconnected and reliably measure the intended construct. Therefore, the survey instrument demonstrated excellent reliability, providing confidence in the consistency of measurements and the robustness of the data collected. Table 1 presents the results obtained.

Table 1: Reliability of variables

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.950	4

Source: Researcher's field work, 2024

Correlation analysis

The multiple regression analysis explore the relationship between the study's variables, collaborating style, accommodating style and compromising style (independent variables) and employee job performance (dependent variable). Collaborative style was found to be the most significant with correlation value of .690 whilst accommodating style recorded a correlation value of .550 and compromising style recorded a correlation value of .520 at 0.1 confidence level. The results are presented in table 2

Table 2: Showing Correlation between the Independent and Dependent Variables

		EJP	COS	AS	COMS
Employee job performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.690**	.550**	.520**
	Sig. (2 tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	90	90	90	90
Collaborating style	Pearson Correlation	.690**	1		
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000			
	N	90	90		
Accommodating style	Pearson Correlation	.550**		1	
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000			
	N	90		90	
Compromising style	Pearson Correlation	.520**			1
	Sig. (2 tailed)	.000			
	N	90			90

Source: Researcher's Field Work, 2024

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

***EJP, COS AS and COMS denote Employee job performance, collaborating style, accommodating style and compromising style respectively

Discussions

H1: Collaborative style will positively influence employee job performance

The statistics from the regression analysis in Table 2 shows correlation of collaborative style .0690 of employee job performance. The .0690 correlations explains that collaborative style influences employee job performance by 69% while about 31% remaining is attributed to other variables which are not explained by the study. Hence, *H1: collaborative style will positively influence employee job performance was accepted*. Findings of the study are in line with previous studies (Parks, 2021). According to Parks (2021) collaborative conflict management style positively impacted employee satisfaction which in turn enhances employee job performance. Collaboratively style has been widely stimulated as the best approach in improving employee job performance in the health sector (UK DoH, 2020). Ineffective collaborative style can be as a result of lack of understanding, poorly defined roles and responsibilities, poor communication challenges among health care professionals, which evidently has a negative impact on employee job performance. Collaborative style can foster effective communication to help achieve single aim, decrease work load, share ideas on how to deliver highest quality of healthcare Collaborative style is assertive and cooperative. It has been identified with confronting disagreements and problem solving to find solutions (Li & Xe, 2022) [22]

H2: accommodative style will significantly influence employee job performance

Findings of the study's statistics obtained from the regression analysis in Table 2 shows a correlation of accommodative style .0550 of employee job performance. The .0550 correlations explains that accommodative style influences employee job performance by 55.0% while about 45% remaining is attributed to other variables which are not explained by the study. Findings of the study are in tandem with extant literature (Ilgan, 2020; Janghu & Bhau, 2023) [11]. Also, earlier studies found a positive relationship between accommodative conflict management style and employee job performance (Bogman & ValkIma, 2021) [4]. According to Ilgan (2020) employees gravitate towards the accommodative conflict management style as they believe that maintaining a good workplace relationship is more important than other things. Also, the study's findings are in consonance with the human relations theory. According to the theory, performance of an organisation depends on the types of relationship between employees and managers. The theory further postulates that conflicts should be partially accepted since conflicts establish a positive energy for the performance of the organisation depending on how the conflict is handled. Accommodating style has been found to be unassertive and cooperative; it is seen as an attempt to soothe the other person and seek harmony (Rahim, 2023) [24]

H3: compromising style will significantly influence employee job performance

From the study's findings as obtained from the regression analysis in Table 2, compromising conflict management style correlates at .0520. The .0520 implies 52.0% influence of compromising conflict management style on employee job performance whilst about 48% remaining are attributed to other variables which are not explained by the study. Result of the study is largely supported by other works (Akanbi *et al.*, 2024) [2]. Akanbi *et al.* (2024) [2] found a significant relationship between compromising conflict management style and employee job performance in tertiary institutions in Kwara State. The study's finding is also supported by some literature (Maxwell, 2020). The compromising style is about finding a middle ground or forgoing some of our concerns and committing to other's concerns which help in resolving conflict among employees. However, Ronquillo *et al.* (2023) [27] held a different view. According to the authors, neither party will be fully satisfied. The result will harbor resentment between those involved. In the resolution, each party sacrifices a portion of his or her solution and a significant part of the resolution can be left out, and the best outcome may not prevail. When two sides are evenly matched and equally committed to opposing viewpoints, the compromising tactic is used. However, according to Maxwell (2020) the technique is often used where a person needs temporary findings, hence it yields no positive effect in the long run

Conclusions

The study investigates the relationship between conflict management styles and employee job performance in Pretoria hospitals, South Africa. The study employed the explanatory design to achieve the research objectives and to test the hypotheses. The study adopted the purposive and convenient sampling technique whilst the Yamane (1967)

formula was used to calculate a sample size of 90. Findings of the study confirmed male dominance in Pretoria hospitals. Also, it was concluded that slightly majority of hospital employee in Pretoria were in the age bracket of 29-33years.

Findings of the study further revealed varied years of experience of hospital employees in Pretoria with slightly majority of the respondents falling within 7-12years experience

The study's findings showed a significant positive relationship between collaborative conflict management style and employee job performance was accepted. Hence, the collaborative style of resolution should be adopted by hospital managers in Pretoria, South Africa. Management of the hospitals should create platforms for collaboration among employees and support for one another as such will help enhance employee job performance. By encouraging active collaboration from all parties in the conflict, this style will enhance commitment towards the organization

Further, the study revealed a significant influence of accommodative style on employee job performance. Adopting the accommodative style by management is appropriate considering its influence on employee job performance. Hospital managers should embrace the human relations theory to foster a good relationship with employees to enhance job performance

More so, the study revealed a significant influence of compromising style on employee job performance. Managers of the hospitals are recommended to adopt the compromising style particularly when the motive is to resolve the conflict among employees in the short term

Directions for future studies

The study investigates the relationship between conflict management styles and employee job performance in Pretoria hospitals, South Africa. Only three of the conflict management styles were delineated and examined. Future studies can focus on the other styles and also increase the sample size to enrich the study.

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