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## Reflections on Organizational Conflicts

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### **Abstract:**

*Records at the University of Education, Winneba disclose that in 2017, the Vice Chancellor of the University, together with five other officers, was sacked. Following this situation was a massive transfer of staff members alleged to be sympathizers of the six dismissed staff members to other campuses of the institution and the suspension of some staff members. This led to several court hearings that made the University popular via the media with continuous controversies. This study is a case study conducted at the University of Education, Winneba that seeks to follow up on the implications of the primary court action that initiated the termination of appointments of staff members and examine the experiences of victims of the University's impasse between 2017 and 2022 when a High Court ruling directed the reinstatement of duty of the dismissed members. This study investigates the reintegration process of staff returning to the institution and seeks to examine the measures taken over the period to address the psychological implications of the impasse.*

**Keywords:** Organizational conflicts, conflict resolution strategies

### **1. Introduction**

Institutional conflicts are a common occurrence in many organizations, and they can arise due to various reasons. These conflicts can be detrimental to the productivity and success of an organization if not addressed properly. In this article, we will reflect on institutional conflicts, their causes, and how to manage them effectively.

Conflict is a clash of interests, values, actions, views or directions (De Bono, 1985). Institutional conflicts are a common occurrence in organizations, and they can have significant effects on the overall performance of the organization. These conflicts arise when different departments or individuals within an organization have conflicting goals, values, or interests. Psychologist Art Bell (2002) suggests six reasons for conflict in the workplace: conflicting needs, conflicting styles, conflicting perceptions, conflicting goals, conflicting pressures, and conflicting roles. Brett Hart (2009) identifies two additional causes of conflict: different personal values and unpredictable policies. This brings the potential reasons for conflict in Hart's estimation to eight.

Conflict situations are inevitable in one's personal life, in organizations or even between nations. Conflict is a process in which one party suggests that its interests are being opposed by another party (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014). The authors go on to cite that Conflict theory is significant to the role of the administrator, but it emanates primarily from fields such as business, sociology, psychology, etc.

Effects of institutional conflicts include a decrease in innovation. When different departments or individuals are in conflict, it can lead to a lack of creativity and innovation within the organization. This is because individuals may be more focused on their own goals and interests rather than working together to develop new ideas and solutions. Managing institutional conflicts requires a proactive approach that involves identifying potential conflicts before they escalate. According to Kirchoff and Adams (1982), there are four distinct conflict conditions, i.e., high-stress environments, ambiguous roles and responsibilities, multiple boss situations, and the prevalence of advanced technology. Effective communication is key to managing conflicts as it allows team members to express their opinions and concerns openly. It is also essential to establish clear goals and expectations for team members to avoid misunderstandings that can lead to conflicts. Another effective way of managing institutional conflicts is involving a neutral third party to mediate the conflict. This approach can help to de-escalate the situation and facilitate a peaceful resolution. It is also important to encourage team members to focus on finding solutions rather than dwelling on the problem.

Organizational conflicts usually involve three elements: power, organizational demands and worth, which have to be appropriately matched through necessary organizational arrangements to resolve the conflict (Turner & Weed, 1983). It is important for organizations to establish clear communication channels and protocols for conflict resolution. This can include regular meetings between departments or individuals to discuss any issues or concerns and a clear process for escalating conflicts if they cannot be resolved at the departmental level.

Coping efficiently and effectively with potential and bonafide conflicts is possibly one of the most important aspects of the manager's position (Nebgen, 1978). Brodtker et al. (2001) argue further that these three elements must be present for a conflict to take place.

Conflict is common in organizations because managers and line workers rarely concur on the rules governing the organization. Instead of seeing one another as partners working toward a shared goal, as it should be in the organization, they see one another as adversaries. Every choice the management must make carries the risk of escalating conflict. Conflicts can be complicated or straightforward. The possibility of a conflict being transformed or resolved creatively and constructively increases with the complexity of the issue. The sides will not be compelled to engage in the conflict if it is too straightforward, and they will instead likely ignore it. This may cause more serious issues within the company, which may then result in subpar performance. When there are additional components, managing the dispute is impossible.

Institutional conflicts can arise due to various reasons, including differences in opinions, goals, values, and beliefs. Over the years at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), there have been episodes of power struggles, competition for resources, and poor communication among staff members. Conflicts that have existed in the university mostly resulted from personal issues between team members. Regardless of the cause, it is essential to identify the root cause of the conflict to address it effectively. Institutional conflicts can have several negative effects on an organization, some of which the University of Education, Winneba, has experienced. One of the most significant effects is a decrease in productivity. When different departments or individuals are in conflict, it leads to a breakdown in communication and collaboration, which ultimately affects the organization's ability to achieve its goals. Additionally, conflicts in the institution have led to a decrease in employee morale and job satisfaction, which resulted in the institution experiencing some turnovers.

### *1.1. Objectives*

The following are the objectives of this study:

- To examine the experiences of the staff of the University of Education, Winneba, on organizational conflicts between 2017 and 2022.
- To examine the effects of conflicts and conflict management practices at the University of Education, Winneba.

### *1.2. Research Questions*

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the experiences of staff members of the University of Education, Winneba, on organizational conflicts between 2017 and 2022?
- What have been the effects of conflict management practices at the University of Education, Winneba?

### *1.3. Purpose of the Study*

This study is an interpretive study conducted at the University of Education, Winneba. It aims to examine the experiences of victims of the university's impasse over a period and to follow up on the implications of the initial court action that led to the termination of staff members' appointments. In addition to examining the steps undertaken over time to alleviate the psychological effects of the impasse, this study looks into how staff members are reintegrated into the institution.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

The theory that underpins this study is the Kirchoff and Adams traditional and contemporary conflict management theory. Kirchoff and Adams, 1982 cite that conflict is defined as a disagreement between individuals. It can vary from a mild disagreement to a win-or-lose, emotion-packed confrontation. The authors continue to state the following as the two theories of conflict management:

- Traditional theory is based on the assumption that conflicts are bad, are caused by troublemakers, and should be subdued.
- Contemporary theory recognizes that conflicts between human beings are unavoidable. They emerge as a natural result of change and can be beneficial to the organization if managed efficiently.

Current theory (Kirchoff & Adams, 1982) considers innovation as a mechanism for bringing together various ideas and viewpoints into a new and different fusion.

There is an atmosphere of tension, and hence conflict, is thus essential in any organization committed to developing or working with new ideas.

## **3. Materials and Methods**

### *3.1. Research Design*

This study used a qualitative method since it focused on institutional conflicts and looked into the reflections and overall experiences of staff in an organization. To address the research topic, the case study design was used. The study was conducted at University of Education, Winneba. The adoption of this design was acceptable since it made it simple to gather information from members of the institution. The case study approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the approaches for managing conflicts and the perceptions of the staff of the institution on the subject.

### 3.2. Research Instruments

To gather information for the study, questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis were employed. According to Hancock (2002), these tools are suitable for such a design since they give a researcher a chance to acquire information about the cases engaged in the study.

### 3.3. Data Analysis Plan

Data collected were gathered over a period of three (3) weeks and analyzed thematically from the responses of respondents to the two research questions that guided the study. Frequency distribution tables, percentages tables and themes were employed to analyze data for this study.

### 3.4. Population, Sample and Technique

In this study, senior members and junior members of the University of Education, Winneba, made up the accessible population. The variables in this inquiry necessitated the use of stratified probability sampling to offer both junior and senior staff members of the university community an equal probability of being chosen for the study. The study successfully sampled and gathered data from thirty respondents from a population of 1262 and is presented in the table below. Data from twenty-six of the accessible respondents were collected through a questionnaire, while interviews were granted to four respondents.

Entry Number	Description	Number of Respondents
1	Junior Staff Members	15
2	Senior Staff Members	15
Total		30

Table 1: Statistics of Respondents

## 4. Discussion and Findings

A brief overview of the circumstances leading to conflicts at the University of Education, Winneba and their repercussions are provided in the discussions and findings. The findings from the data collected and analyzed have been divided into sub-sections that represent the important factors from the research questions that form the basis of the study.

### 4.1. Background of Conflicts in the University of Education, Winneba

Serial Number	Background Factors	Frequency Percentage	
		YES (%)	NO (%)
1	Conflicts existed in the University before the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor.	72	28
2	Conflict management practices were poor before the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor in 2017.	65	35
3	Unresolved conflicts/agitations led to the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor in 2017.	62	38
4	The dismissal of the Vice Chancellor and the five officers in 2017 did not significantly increase conflicts in the University.	0	100
5	Tensions brewed in the University following the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor and five other officers in the University from 2017.	100	0
6	The dismissal of the Vice Chancellor and five Staff members stemmed political divisiveness among Staff members in the University.	100	0
7	Factions were created following the onset of conflicts in 2017.	81	19

Table 2: Background of Conflicts in the University of Education, Winneba

Source: Field Study, 2022

From table 2 above, it was gathered that the majority of respondents, representing 72% of respondents, agree that Conflicts existed in the University before the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor, while 28% of respondents disagreed with the above assertion. 65% of respondents agreed that conflict management practices were poor before the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor in 2017, as against 35% who disagreed. On the notion that unresolved conflicts/agitations led to the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor in 2017, a total of 62% and 38% of respondents agreed and disagreed, respectively. 81% of respondents agreed that factions were created following the onset of conflicts in 2017, while 19% of respondents disagreed. All respondents, representing 100% of respondents, disagreed that the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor and the five officers in 2017 did not significantly increase conflicts in the University. 100% of respondents agreed that tensions brewed in the University following the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor and five other officers of the University in 2017 and that the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor and five Staff members stemmed from political divisiveness among Staff members in the University.

### 4.2. Experiences of Staff of UEW from Organizational Conflicts

Themes from data gathered from the study indicated that staff members of the University community encountered experiences that were a result of the conflicts in the institution that followed the court case brought against

the management of the University, which saw the dismissal of the Vice Chancellor in 2017 and manifested in a variety of forms stated as follows. The study gathered that during conflicts in the University, Staff members suspected to be associates of an opposition group in the University are often victimized. Respondents disclosed that staff members had their promotions unduly delayed/withheld, were scolded during meetings and mostly felt left out of discussions during meetings because they were thought to be associates of an opposition group involved in conflicts in the University. Additionally, respondents indicated that staff members who were categorized as advocates to affected staff members whose appointments were terminated following the onset of the court case in 2017 are not allowed to exercise their democratic rights during meetings. Respondents further cited that they encountered challenges with their appointments and promotions, whereas some staff members were transferred from the University without just courses with unjust dismissals in some cases. Respondents stated as part of their experiences that members who even possess good qualities and have experience in specified areas are not allowed to serve on committees in the University because they were identified as associates to the dismissed members that were at the center of the conflicts the brewed in the University.

Respondents indicated that conflicts in the institution led to revolt. Data gathered suggested that some experiences of members included being misled on opinions as staff members took sides which led to agitations and, furthermore, regretted their revolt-linked actions thereafter. From the experiences of staff members, the study concluded that there was a likelihood of the reoccurrence of conflicts if the underlining causes are not promptly identified and mitigated.

#### 4.3. Conflict Resolution Strategies Employed by Management at UEW

Darling and Fogliasso (1999) conclude that it is impossible to eliminate conflict totally. Managers who try to eliminate conflict will not last, while those who manage it well typically experience both institutional benefit and personal satisfaction. In this light, it is imperative for leaders to prudently adopt strategies in mitigating conflicts to ensure peace and a harmonious working environment. The table below presents conflict management strategies adopted by UEW.

Serial Number	Conflict Resolution Strategies	Frequency Percentage	
		YES (%)	NO (%)
1	The successor of the dismissed Vice Chancellor attempted to mitigate conflicts that brewed in the University.	20	80
2	The successor of the dismissed Vice Chancellor adopted strategies that adequately addressed conflicts.	19	81
3	The image of the University was not adversely affected following the onset of conflicts in the University.	0	100
4	Staff members who identified themselves as family/friends/close acquaintances/loyalist of dismissed Staff voluntarily left/resigned their roles in the University for fear of being victimized.	100	0
5	Reconciliation strategies by the successor of the dismissed Vice Chancellor were well-managed.	15	85
6	The University has witnessed a smooth reintegration process of reinstating the Vice Chancellor and the five dismissed officers in 2022, spearheaded by a Peace and Reconciliation Council.	84	26
7	The image of the University was not negatively affected following the onset of court cases in 2017.	29	71
8	Staff members are generally satisfied with the present conflict management strategies adopted by the reinstated Vice Chancellor.	100	0
9	Conflicts in the University psychologically affected the Staff of the University.	100	0
10	Conflicts in the University did not negatively affect the performance of Staff of the University.	50	50
11	Tensions among Staff are likely to reoccur if there is poor conflict management.	100	0
12	Presently, there is evidence of activities that are likely to brew conflicts in the University.	32	68
13	Tribalism contributes to conflicts in the University.	62	38
14	There is evidence of tribalism in the University.	81	19
15	There are signs of witch-hunting in the University.	69	31
16	The reinstatement of the Vice Chancellor and the five dismissed officers in 2022 initiated calm in the University.	100	0
17	The strategies employed by the reinstated Vice Chancellor have been effective in mitigating conflicts at the University.	100	0

*Table 3: Conflict Resolution Strategies at UEW*

*Source: Field Study, 2022*

From table 3, it is evident that the management of UEW adopted strategies in an attempt to resolve conflicts. The table indicates the extent to which the strategies yielded the expected results. All respondents representing 100% agreed

on the subjects that staff members who identified themselves as family/friends/close acquaintances/loyalist of dismissed Staff voluntarily left/resigned from their roles in the University for fear of being victimized, tensions among Staff are likely to reoccur if there is poor conflict management. The entire respondents again agree that the reinstatement of the Vice Chancellor and the five dismissed officers in 2022 initiated calm in the University and that the strategies employed by the reinstated Vice Chancellor have been effective in mitigating conflicts in the University. Respondents were divided on their opinion, with a 50% distribution for those who agreed and disagreed that conflicts in the University did not negatively affect the performance of Staff of the University. The majority of respondents representing 69%, 81% and 62%, respectively agree that there are signs of witch-hunting in the University, there is evidence of tribalism in the University and that tribalism contributes to conflicts in the University against 31%, 19% and 38% of respondents who disagree respectively.

In responding to conflict resolution strategies adopted by the management between 2017 and 2021, respondents alluded to the following practices in the institution; divide and rule tactics where a staff member is either for or against the present leader in an attempt to maintain control of staff members and prevent staff members from uniting in opposition. The practice quickly gained fame with the phrase 'if you are not for me, you are against me' in the institution. Respondents also cited that there was the use of intimidation as an approach by management in mitigating conflicts in the institution and the use of win-lose approach. This approach, as described by respondents, only further divided staff members and strengthened the creation of factions rather than uniting them since only one party gained results at the loss of other factions instead of having a win-win situation.

However, in 2022, the institution witnessed a change in managements' strategies employed in an attempt to mitigate conflicts in the institution and are stated as follows:

- Open forum for staff members to update management on the current state of affairs.
- The UEW management further went on to constitute a Peace and Reconciliation committee to receive petitions and address the concerns of aggrieved staff members.
- One of the strategies employed to mitigate conflicts was to bring back staff who were unjustly transferred from the University of Education, Winneba, back to their respective campuses and also reinstate staff members who were dismissed. Management also further identified staff members who were unduly demoted and had affected staff members reinstated to their deserved positions and fairly compensated the affected members.
- Additionally, respondents cited that UEW management from 2022 harnessed the practice of democratic means in managing the affairs of the institution and ensured that staff were allowed to participate fairly in decision-making.
- Overall, respondents disclosed that the present strategies are non-punitive. Nonetheless, they expect management to strongly consider being more strategic in dealing with conflict resolutions to avoid further reoccurrences.

#### *4.4. Effects of Conflict and Conflict Management Strategies at UEW*

Conflict may have either a positive or negative effect on organizational performance, depending on the nature of the conflict and how it is managed (Armstrong, 2009). The study gathered data on the effects of conflicts and conflict management strategies at the University of Education, Winneba. The effects were categorized into institutional effects and psychological implications of conflict and conflict management strategies at UEW.

##### 4.4.1. Institutional Effects of Conflict and Conflict Management Strategies at UEW

The following were documented as the toll that conflict and conflict management strategies at UEW took on the institution:

- There was negative reportage in the media regarding conflict situations in the University.
- The reputation of staff members has been brought into question.
- Respondents alluded that students' certificate was losing credibility due to conflicts in the institution because the university was always in the news for one issue or the other pertaining to the court hearings and matters surrounding conflicts in the university.
- Respondents stated that conflicts in the university led to a reduction in confidence by potential applicants who wanted to pursue courses at the university.
- The general public, who were friends, family and acquaintances of staff members of the university, often asked the staff what was happening in the institution and this created a dent in the image of the institution as a result of controversies surrounding the play of leadership powers.
- The University's ranking was affected in the area of research and quality of training since it quickly lost staff members who had good credentials amid staff members who were not offered an opportunity to contribute knowledge due to some conflict resolution strategies that were practiced.
- Respondents cited that the existence of conflicts in the university has created tensions, led to low productivity and stunted the development of the University. This was identified in the number of projects that were brought to a halt following conflicts and a court injunction. This significantly stalled the growth and development of the University and further affected the morale and quality of tuition.

##### 4.4.2. Psychological Implications of Conflict and Conflict Management Strategies at UEW

Data gathered suggested that staff members suffered the psychological effects of conflicts. These were identified in the schedules of staff members as they embarked on their daily routines and work activities at the University.



Respondents indicated that Staff have become timid following their experiences in conflicts and its management which eventually affected productivity. The effects of timid staff members were manifested in member's poor attitude towards work, tensions in offices and lack of involvement because members were often not in the right frame of mind at the workplace. They appeared nervous and always looked over their shoulders for fear of getting into trouble or being betrayed.

## 5. Recommendations

In order to manage institutional conflicts, organizations must first identify the root cause of the conflict. This can be done through open communication and active listening. Once the root cause has been identified, organizations can work towards finding a solution that benefits all parties involved. This may involve compromise or finding a common ground that meets the needs of everyone. The study recommends that Psychological and physiological counselors must be engaged to provide counseling sections for the university staff. There should be a deliberate effort to reunite members of staff of the University through activities such as inter-departmental games and get-together events. The study recommends inclusion in decision-making and consensus-building at the University of Education, Winneba. There should be the practice of organizing regular reconciliation sessions to address all conflict situations that are likely to inflame factions. The University must consider using arbitration procedures enshrined in the UEW statutes.

## 6. Conclusion

Resolving institutional conflicts can have numerous benefits for an organization:

- Firstly, it can improve team morale and productivity as team members can work together more effectively.
- Secondly, resolving conflicts can lead to better decision-making as team members can consider different perspectives and ideas.
- Finally, resolving conflicts can help to build trust and respect among team members, which is essential for a healthy work environment.

In conclusion, institutional conflicts are a common occurrence in many organizations, but they can be managed effectively with the right approach.

Organizations can resolve conflicts and reap the benefits of a harmonious work environment by identifying the root cause of the conflict, establishing clear goals and expectations, and involving a neutral third party if necessary. In conclusion, institutional conflicts can have significant negative effects on an organization's productivity, innovation, and employee morale. Strong conflict-resolution skills are essential to be an effective leader in the workplace. They can help you resolve tense situations and assist your colleagues in getting along with one another. By implementing ways to manage workplace conflict, you can be a part of fostering a more positive company culture (Herrity, 2023). By actively managing conflicts and establishing clear communication channels and protocols for conflict resolution, organizations can mitigate these effects and create a more positive work environment. Conflict resolution is an essential skill that all employees should have, and organizations should invest in training programs to help employees develop these skills. By doing so, organizations can foster a culture of collaboration and innovation that benefits everyone involved.

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