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Conflict Resolution Strategies and Employee Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises in Abuja Metropolis, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Although peace is a necessary condition for progress, the absence of it may not guarantee the attainment of common goals. While it is important for work teams to peacefully coexist, align their interests, and maintain a conducive environment to achieve corporate objectives, conflicts are inevitable. And when it does exist, it affects employees' performance and organizational outcomes. This paper examined the influence of conflict resolution strategy on employees' performance in small and medium enterprises in the Abuja metropolis. Specifically, the study examines the effect of avoiding, obliging, compromising, dominating, and integrating on employees' performance in small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. Five hypotheses were formulated and tested using data collected from 280 employees working with small and medium size companies in Abuja metropolis. Data collected were using existing scales and analysed using descriptive statistics; and multiple regression analysis via SPSS version 23 was used to test the hypotheses. The findings revealed a positive and significant effect for compromising strategy ($\beta = .30$, $t = 6.54$, $p = 0.00$), dominating ($\beta = .11$, $t = 2.69$, $p < 0.05$), integrating strategy significant ($\beta = .29$, $t = 4.96$, $p = 0.00$) employees' performance in small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. Based on the findings it was recommended that business managers should carry out programs to train and increase the employees' conflict management ability; managers should encourage employees to use integrating or compromising behaviour while dealing with conflict and management team understands the advantages, disadvantages & strength, and weakness of the different styles for managing conflict.

Keywords: conflict resolution, conflict management, employee performance, avoiding, compromising, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Peace is a fundamental prerequisite for progress. However, paradoxically, the mere absence of conflict does not necessarily ensure the achievement of shared goals. In business environments, particularly within Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), teams must coexist harmoniously, align their interests, and foster a conducive workplace atmosphere to achieve organizational objectives (Kinika & Ohahuru, 2022). Yet, conflict is an unavoidable reality in any setting, including the workplace. It arises from

diverse factors such as differences in beliefs, expectations, orientations, demands, perspectives, egos, and imaginations (Maiti & Choi, 2018). Left unmanaged, conflict can disrupt workplace harmony, but when effectively handled, it can drive innovation, strengthen teams, and enhance organizational performance.

Conflict is broadly defined as a struggle between individuals or groups with opposing needs, ideas, values, or goals (Watson et al., 2017). It manifests itself in the form of unrest, protest, down tools (strike), sabotage, absenteeism, lockout and others (Odieli & Okeke, 2025). Conflict management, on the other hand, refers to strategies aimed at minimizing the negative impact of conflict while leveraging its positive aspects to benefit the organization (Maiti & Choi, 2018). In essence, conflict functions as a double-edged sword—it can be constructive when it stimulates creativity, clarifies viewpoints, and strengthens interpersonal skills, but destructive when it fosters resistance to change, creates workplace tension, and causes psychological and emotional distress (Abomeh, 2022; Rwehumbiza & Mfugale, 2022).

Given these dynamics, suppressing conflict entirely is neither feasible nor desirable. Instead, organizations should focus on managing conflict effectively to mitigate its adverse consequences while harnessing its potential for growth and innovation (Rwehumbiza & Mfugale, 2022). Rahim (1983) identified five primary conflict resolution strategies: avoiding, obliging, compromising, integrating, and dominating. Avoiding entails sidestepping the conflict; obliging involves yielding to the other party's preferences; compromising seeks a middle ground; integrating encourages collaboration for a mutually beneficial solution; and dominating imposes one party's will over the other (Alnajjar & Hashish, 2022). Research indicates that these strategies have varying effects on employee performance (Aljawazneh, 2015; Abomeh, 2022).

Notably, conflict can enhance decision-making and, in turn, improve employee performance (Sun, Peng, & Liao, 2021). Employees function within interconnected teams comprising colleagues, supervisors, and managers, meaning that individual performance directly influences organizational success. Consequently, effective conflict resolution can either bolster or undermine overall performance. SMEs, as critical drivers of economic growth, must adopt suitable conflict management strategies to sustain a productive work environment and optimize employee performance. Given their limited resources, SMEs cannot afford the inefficiencies that stem from unresolved workplace conflicts.

Alarmingly, many SME employees expend considerable time and energy on conflict-related issues, diverting attention from productive work (Omene, 2021). Poorly managed conflict incurs significant financial and human costs, fostering an unhealthy work climate that hampers talent retention and recruitment (Watson & Yep, 2019). Therefore, for SMEs, implementing effective conflict resolution mechanisms is essential to maintaining productivity and preventing adverse effects on employee performance, which can ultimately hinder organizational growth and prosperity (Ayinde et al., 2021).

Although existing literature has identified various conflict resolution strategies, the extent to which these strategies influence employee performance remains unclear. The avoiding, obliging, compromising, integrating, and dominating strategies have been widely utilized, yet their effectiveness varies based on organizational type and size. For example, Saridi et al. (2019) found that healthcare professionals frequently employ the avoiding strategy, while Kinika and Ohahuru (2022) reported no significant correlation between compromising and commercial bank performance. Similarly, Al-ajmi (2007) suggested that integrating and obliging strategies enhance team performance, whereas dominating and avoiding strategies have detrimental effects on project managers.

Given these variations, this study seeks to examine the impact of conflict resolution strategies—avoiding, obliging, compromising, integrating, and dominating—on employee performance within SMEs in the Abuja metropolis. By addressing this gap, the research aims to provide insights into effective conflict management practices that can enhance SME performance and contribute to their long-term sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict and Organizational conflict

Conflict is an inherent part of any project or organization, making its management a critical aspect of workplace dynamics (Sudhakar, 2015). Lundy, Collette, and Downs (2022) define conflict as competition between groups or individuals over incompatible goals, scarce resources, or power. This competition is shaped by individuals' perceptions of goals, resources, and power, which can vary significantly among different stakeholders. Conflict also manifests as negative emotional reactions among conflicting parties, interfering with goal attainment and resulting in perceived disagreements (Zhao, Thatcher, & Jehn, 2015). In essence, conflict emerges from disagreements over opinions, perspectives, and ideas, with symptoms such as jealousy, hostility, resistance to norms, and frustration (Sudhakar, 2015). The seeds of conflict are sown when individuals perceive disharmony within projects.

In the workplace, conflicts occur due to disagreements between and among various stakeholders. Organizational conflict, as described by Fajana (2000), is the inability of parties—whether between employers and employees or within internal groups—to reach a consensus on employment-related matters. This disagreement may or may not result in strikes, lockouts, or other forms of protest. A widely accepted sociological definition of organizational conflict, proposed by Kornhauser, Dubin, and Ross (2004) and cited in Adilo (2019), describes it as the full spectrum of behaviors and attitudes expressing opposition and divergence between business owners, managers, and employees.

Scholars agree that conflict is inevitable and not inherently detrimental; rather, its impact depends on how it is managed. When handled effectively, conflict can foster innovation, improve relationships, and enhance performance. Conversely, unresolved or mismanaged conflict can lead to workplace dysfunction, negatively affecting both individuals and organizations. The perception of conflict's role within an organization depends on one's broader conceptualization of employment relationships, their functions, and underlying structures. While some view conflict as harmful to projects, others argue that moderate levels of conflict can drive better collaboration and performance (Al-ajmi, 2007). However, excessive conflict can hinder team cohesion and reduce overall effectiveness. Additionally, conflict often arises from individuals' deep-seated loyalties or attachments to certain ideas or entities (Sudhakar, 2015).

Organizational conflict stems from structural and personal factors that disrupt workplace dynamics and productivity. Structural conflicts arise from limited resources, divergent goals, task interdependence, unclear roles, jurisdictional ambiguities, inconsistent policies, and work specialization. For example, competition for scarce resources like office space or budget allocations can create dissatisfaction, while conflicting departmental goals, such as sales versus production targets, lead to misalignment. Task interdependence increases the risk of conflict when delays in one area disrupt others, and unclear roles or overlapping responsibilities cause power struggles. Inconsistent policies and work specialization further exacerbate misunderstandings and disputes.

Personal factors, such as divergent work styles and authority dynamics, also contribute to conflict. Differences in work preferences, like structured versus flexible approaches, can lead to interpersonal friction. Hierarchical tensions may arise when employees perceive unfair treatment or resist managerial authority, sometimes engaging in disputes to gain influence. While conflict can disrupt workflows, it also highlights areas needing improvement, potentially benefiting the organization. Addressing these issues through procedural adjustments, clear communication, and role definition can mitigate conflicts and enhance workplace harmony.

Conflict Management

Conflict in the workplace arises from differences and is inevitable in any setting where people interact. Effectively managing conflict is a crucial skill for leaders. Conflict management is based on the understanding that not all conflicts can be resolved but learning to manage them can prevent unproductive escalation. It involves addressing disputes constructively, exploring alternative solutions, and fostering commitment to decision-making processes (Maiti & Choi, 2018).

Effective conflict management requires skills such as conflict resolution, self-awareness about personal conflict styles, and strong communication abilities. It also involves creating structures to handle conflicts

within an organization. Esbati and Korunka (2021) emphasize that poorly managed conflict can damage relationships, while constructive handling of conflict can strengthen bonds and promote growth. Ihejirika (2001) notes that individuals with negative perceptions of conflict often handle it destructively, leading to adverse outcomes. Conversely, approaching conflict with a positive mindset can foster constructive dialogue and beneficial results. Conflict can either escalate into unproductive outcomes or be resolved in ways that enhance teamwork and produce high-quality results. Thus, mastering conflict management is essential for building high-performing teams. Conflict often stems from miscommunication regarding needs, ideas, beliefs, goals, or values. Conflict management involves the attitudes, reactions, and behaviors adopted to address and resolve disputes (Fakhry & El Hassan, 2011). Rahim (1983) developed a widely recognized framework for conflict management styles, identifying five key approaches that guide how individuals and organizations navigate conflicts effectively.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Conflict in the workplace is inevitable, and how it is managed significantly impacts organizational outcomes. The present study is anchored on the bi-directional model of conflict management.

The bi-dimensional model of conflict management styles

The bi-dimensional model of conflict management styles, introduced by Rahim (1983), is a widely recognized framework that revolves around two key dimensions: *concern for self* and *concern for others*. The first dimension assesses how much an individual prioritizes their own interests, while the second evaluates their consideration for others' needs (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). Based on these dimensions, the model identifies five distinct conflict management styles: integrating, avoiding, dominating, obliging, and compromising (Phillips, 2019) each with distinct characteristics and implications for employee performance.

Avoiding Style

Avoiding style is characterized by low concern for both self and others. Those who avoid conflict tend to withdraw from the situation, sidestepping the issue or ignoring it altogether resulting in a lose/lose situation where neither party's concerns are addressed. This approach is often described as a "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" strategy, where individuals hide disagreements or disengage entirely (Rahim & Magner, 1995; Aritzeta et al., 2005; Rahim, 1983). It is characterized by low assertiveness, low cooperativeness, and low concern for self and others (Kilian, 2022; Thomas et al., 2005). Avoiding is used when issues are minor, parties need time to cool down, or when addressing the conflict could be damaging. However, it often leaves conflicts unresolved. Studies show that managers with strong informal power are less likely to avoid conflict, and low-intensity conflicts are more likely to be avoided (Sun et al., 2021; Todorova et al., 2022).

H1: Avoiding will positively and significantly affect employee performance in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Abuja.

Accommodating Style

The *obliging style* is marked by low concern for self and high concern for others. Individuals using this approach downplay differences and emphasize commonalities, striving to satisfy the other party's concerns even if it means sacrificing their own (Rahim & Magner, 1995). It emphasizes harmony and self-sacrifice, with high cooperativeness and low assertiveness. It is a lose/win strategy where one party yields to the other's desires, often to maintain relationships or demonstrate fairness (Al-Hamdan et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2005). Accommodation is effective when issues are more important to the other party or when preserving relationships is critical. Research links this style to organizational commitment and democratic leadership styles (Fattah et al., 2017; Alnajjar & Hashish, 2022).

H2: Accommodating will positively and significantly affect employee performance in SMEs in Abuja.

Compromising Style

Compromising seeks a middle ground, where both parties gain and lose equally. It is a win/lose-win/lose approach that fosters negotiation and flexibility (Kilian, 2022). This style is useful when parties have

equal power, time is limited, or temporary solutions are needed. While it promotes democratic solutions, its impact on organizational performance is mixed (Dialoke & Ogbu, 2017; Abomeh, 2022).

H3: Compromising will positively and significantly affect employee performance in SMEs in Abuja.

Integrating (Collaborating) Style

The *integrating style* reflects a high concern for both self and others. Individuals using this approach actively seek to reconcile their own interests with those of the other party. They demonstrate empathy, exchange information, and carefully consider both perspectives to find mutually beneficial solutions (Aquino et al., 2006; Aritzeta et al., 2005; Rahim & Magner, 1995). This win/win strategy focuses on problem-solving and mutual satisfaction. It is most effective for resolving long-standing issues, preserving relationships, and fostering commitment. Studies show it is highly effective under democratic or autocratic leadership and significantly improves organizational performance (Alnajjar & Hashish, 2022; Abomeh, 2022).

H4: Integrating will positively and significantly affect employee performance in SMEs in Abuja.

Dominating Style

The *dominating style* involves high concern for self and low concern for others. Individuals adopting this style view conflict as a win-lose battle and prioritize their own interests, often imposing their opinions on others. This aggressive approach is characterized by high assertiveness and low cooperativeness. It involves imposing one’s will on others, often through power or aggression (Al-Hamdan et al., 2019; Labrague et al., 2018). This style is suitable for emergencies or when decisive action is needed but can harm relationships and commitment. It aligns with autocratic leadership but has no significant effect on individual commitment (Fattah et al., 2017).

H5: Dominating will positively and significantly affect employee performance in SMEs in Abuja.

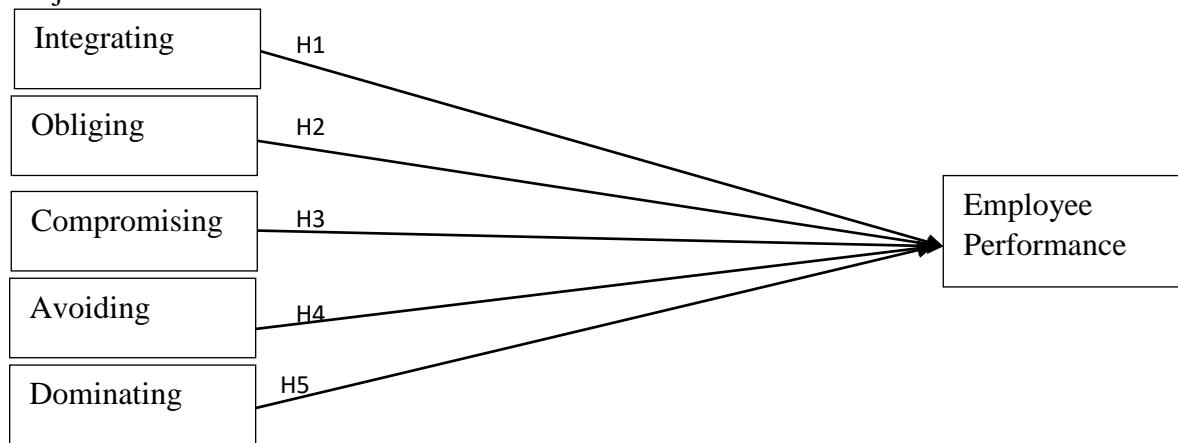


Fig 1. Conceptual Framework

Source: Authors’ own

Employee performance

Employee performance refers to how effectively employees carry out their job-related responsibilities, fulfilling the demands of their roles in a well-managed manner within the given resources (Saleem, Malik, & Qureshi, 2021). It aligns with the organization’s authority and responsibility to achieve its vision, mission, and goals. This includes demonstrating persistence, independence, problem-solving abilities, and adherence to ethical standards within legally defined timeframes (Diana, Supriyanto, Ekowati, & Ertanto, 2021). According to Haryanto et al. (2022), employee performance is a multi-dimensional concept that includes task performance, adaptive performance, and contextual performance.

Task performance focuses on completing core job responsibilities, which requires cognitive abilities, task knowledge, and technical skills to execute duties effectively, often without direct supervision (Haryanto

et al., 2022). It also depends on the alignment between supervisors and subordinates in achieving assigned tasks. Adaptive performance, on the other hand, reflects an employee's ability to adjust to dynamic work environments, such as organizational restructuring, role changes, or technological advancements (Haryanto et al., 2022). This adaptability is essential for maintaining productivity in unstable or evolving conditions. Contextual performance involves pro-social behaviors, such as helping colleagues or contributing to organizational progress, even when such actions are not explicitly required (Haryanto et al., 2022). These behaviors, often considered extra-role, aim to support individuals, teams, or the organization, fostering a collaborative and motivated work environment. Additionally, Asbari, Hidayat, and Purwanto (2021) highlight that performance is influenced by work-related factors such as role stress and work/non-work conflicts. Key elements of performance include quantity, quality, accuracy, attendance, cooperation, and loyalty.

Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMEs)

Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMEs) play a vital role in the economic development of nations, particularly in third-world countries. In Nigeria, the growing number of SMEs has significantly contributed to the expansion of the industrial sector (Kajo et al., n.d.). SMEs are defined differently by various institutions. For instance, the Federal Government Small Scale Business Development Programme (SBDP) describes SMEs as manufacturing, processing, or service firms with capital investments not exceeding N150,000 in machinery and equipment, and employing no more than 50 workers (Osuala, 2004). Similarly, Mawoli and Aliyu (2010) characterize SMEs as profit-making ventures that are small in size, with limited employees, capital, customer base, and sales turnover.

The Small and Medium Scale Industries and Equity Investment Scheme (SMIEIS) defines SMEs as businesses with a maximum asset base of N120 million (excluding land and working capital) and a workforce of between 10 and 300 employees. SMEDAN and NBS (2013) further distinguishes small businesses from medium businesses. Small businesses are those with total assets (excluding land and buildings) ranging from N5 million to N50 million and employing between 10 and 49 workers. Medium enterprises, on the other hand, have total assets (excluding land and buildings) between N50 million and N500 million, with a workforce of 50 to 199 employees. These definitions highlight the diversity and scale of SMEs, underscoring their importance in driving economic growth and employment.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a survey research design, which involves asking questions, collecting data, and analyzing responses from a representative sample of a population at a specific point in time. The aim was to assess the current status of the population regarding one or more variables under investigation. Judgmental sampling was used to select small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for the study. Given the focus on conflict resolution strategies, SMEs with a higher likelihood of employee conflicts were deliberately chosen. These included SMEs where employees frequently engage in interpersonal interactions and coordination to achieve organizational goals, such as those in construction, hospitality, services, health, and social services, among others. Following this, a random sample of 280 employees was selected from the chosen SMEs within the Abuja metropolis.

Measurement

The Rahim's Organisational Conflict Inventory-II (ROCI-II) The ROCI-II was used to measure conflict resolution strategies. The ROCI-II is a well-known and favoured measuring instrument used to measure conflict in an organisational environment. The measurement items for the independent variables were adapted from Rahim (2011) and it measured integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising conflict resolution strategies. The ROCI-II includes 20 questions. The dependent variable employee performance consists of 4 – items adapted from Wajiha and Tuba, (2022). All items were anchored on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree. The questionnaire was self-administered by the researcher and some assistants. In some cases, the questionnaire was dropped-off.

Profile of Respondents

The target population of the study is small and medium scale employees in Abuja metropolis. Table 1 showed that most of the respondents are male 63% with 35% female. A good number of them are between the age of 26 – 30 years old and single (55%). While those between 18-25 and 31 – 35 years are respectively more than 20% of the workforce. The respondents are well educated with most of them having a bachelors’ degree (66%) or a Postgraduate degree (19%). Most of the SMEs has 16 – 20 employees (32%) and 11 – 15 employees (28%).

Table 1. Respondents Profile

RESULTS

Variable	Responses	Frequency	Valid Percent
Sex	Male	157	63.2
	Female	86	34.8
	Prefer not to say	5	2.2
Age	18-25 years	54	21.7
	26- 30 years	102	41.3
	31-35 years	54	21.7
	36-50 years	38	15.2
	Above 50 yrs	0	0
	Years of Experience	< 5 years	20
	5 – 10 yrs	93	37.3
	11 – 20 yrs.	109	43.8
	>20 yrs	27	10.7
No. of Employees	< 5	18	7.4
	5 -10	62	25.0
	11 – 15	69	27.8
	16 – 20	80	32.2
	>20	19	7.6
Educational Background	O'level	22	9
	OND/NCE	16	6.6
	BSc/HND	162	65.4
	Postgraduate	47	19
Marital Status	Single	137	55.4
	Married	111	44.6
	Total	248	100

Data was collected from a total of 280 respondents – small medium business employees - in Abuja metropolis. Of the 280 respondents, 248 were returned filled and valid, representing 89 percent of the sampled respondents, and subsequently used for analysis.

Factor Analysis

A Principal component Analysis was computed to reduce the data using varimax rotation, eigenvalue set at greater than 1 and factor loading greater than 0.5. In all, the items converge to five factors. The first factor consists of four items relating to *compromising* and labelled accordingly. The second factor consists of 4 items relating to obliging and labelled '*obliging*'. The third factor consists of four items measuring '*Dominating*'. The fourth factor contains four items relating to avoiding and therefore labelled '*Avoiding*'. Finally, one of the four items measuring security risk was dropped. The factor was labelled

‘Integrating’. Overall, the factors account for about 68% of the explained variance and the reliability measures were all above 0.70 Benchmark (Nunnally & Bainsstein, 1994). Summary of the factor analysis and reliability measurement is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Factor analysis and reliability measurement

Items	Component					Cronbach alpha α	Explained variance (%)
	1	2	3	4	5		
Compromising						.83	31.22
[...] try to find a middle-of-the-road solution.	.90						
[...] emphasize that we have to find a compromise solution.	.69						
[...] insist we all give in a little.	.67						
[...] strive whenever possible toward a 50-50 compromise	.65						
Obliging						.73	14.31
[...] give in to other team members’ wishes.		.88					
[...] concur with the other team members.		.67					
[...] try to accommodate each other.		.61					
[...] adapt to other team members’ goals and interests.		.61					
Dominating						.72	9.60
[...] push my own points of view.			.79				
[...] search for (personal) gains.			.77				
[...] fight for a good outcome for myself			.77				
[...] do everything to win.			.67				
Avoiding						.75	7.21
[...] avoid a confrontation about our differences.				.93			
[...] avoid differences of opinion as much as possible.				.68			
[...] try to make differences loom less severe.				.59			
[...] try to avoid confrontations with one another				-			
				.52			
Integrating						.75	6.38
[...] examine issues until I find a solution that really all parties					.84		
[...] stand for all common goals and concerns.					.80		
[...] examine ideas from different sides to find a mutually optimal solution.					.71		

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Table 3: Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.585 ^a	.343	.323	.50262	1.632

a. Dependent Variable: EP

Table 4: ANOVA^b

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22.111	5	4.422	17.505	.000 ^a
	Residual	42.441	168	.253		
	Total	64.552	173			

b. Dependent Variable: EP

Table 5: Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	1.322	.321		4.126	.000		
	Compromising	.304	.047	.447	6.540	.000	.839	1.192
	Obliging	.062	.039	.102	1.578	.117	.935	1.070
	Dominating	.108	.040	.173	2.685	.008	.943	1.061
	Avoiding	.085	.048	.119	1.747	.082	.843	1.186
	Integrating	.290	.058	.322	4.964	.000	.930	1.075

a. Dependent Variable: EP

Test of Hypotheses

To test the five hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was performed through SPSS version 22. The result show that the overall regression model for purchase intention produced is a good fit ($F_{5, 168} = 17.51$, $p = .00$) and explained 34% of the change in the dependent variable. In addition, the Variance Inflation factor (VIF) for the variables were all above 1, showing that the data set is free from multi-collinearity problem. The result for the hypotheses test shows as follows:

Hypothesis 1 posit that there is a positive and significant relationship between compromising strategy and employees' performance in small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. The result showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between compromising strategy ($\beta = .30$, $t = 6.54$, $p = 0.00$) and employee performance. Thus, H1 was supported. In the second hypothesis, it was argued that there is a positive and significant relationship between obliging strategy and employees' performance and small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis

The result showed a positive but insignificant relationship between obliging ($\beta = .06$, $t = 1.58$, $p = .12$) and employees' performance and small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. Therefore, H2 was not supported. In Hypothesis 3, it was postulated that there is a positive and significant relationship between dominating strategy and employees' performance and small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis.

The result showed that dominating ($\beta = .11$, $t = 2.69$, $p < 0.05$) relate positively and significantly with employees' performance in small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. Thus, H3 was supported. In the fourth Hypothesis, it was stated that a positive and significant relationship exist between avoiding strategy and employees' performance and small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. The result showed that avoiding strategy ($\beta = .09$, $t = 1.75$, $p = .08$) had an insignificant relationship with employees' performance in small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. Therefore, H4 was not supported. Finally, Hypothesis 5 posited a positive and significant relationship between integrating strategy and employees' performance and small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. The result showed a positive and significant relationship between integrating ($\beta = .29$, $t = 4.96$, $p = 0.00$) employees' performance in small and medium enterprises in Abuja metropolis. Thus, H5 was supported. Furthermore, the finding showed that compromising ($\beta = .45$) had the strongest influence on purchase intention followed by the integrating strategy ($\beta = .32$).

DISCUSSION

Conflicts in organizations are unavoidable, but their impact on employee performance and organizational goals depends on how effectively they are managed. This study explored the effects of five conflict-handling styles—compromising, integrating, dominating, avoiding, and obliging—on employee performance. The findings reveal that the choice of conflict management style significantly influences performance outcomes.

The *compromising strategy* emerged as the most effective, showing a positive and significant impact on employee performance. When conflicts are resolved through a 50-50 compromise, where both parties find middle ground, employees tend to be more productive. This aligns with previous research by Maiti and Choi (2018), who found that compromising enhances organizational performance, and Ceyda (2020), who reported similar positive effects on teamwork attitudes.

Similarly, the *dominating strategy* also boosted productivity among SMEs employees. This finding is consistent with Aljawazneh (2015), who linked dominating styles to increased worker commitment, and Chen, Zhao, and Liu (2012), who found it improved innovation performance. In essence, employees who assert their viewpoints or strive for personally beneficial outcomes during conflicts tend to perform better. On the other hand, the *obliging strategy* was rarely used by SMEs employees and had no significant effect on performance. This supports earlier findings by Kassim and Ibrahim (2014), who also found no significant impact, and studies by Chen et al. (2012) and Ceyda (2020), which even reported negative effects. This suggests that conflict resolution strategies requiring employees to prioritize others' wishes or interests over their own do not enhance performance.

The *avoiding strategy* showed a positive but non-significant effect on performance. While avoiding conflicts might seem like an easy way out, it often stifles open discussions and innovation. This aligns with Maiti and Choi (2018), who found a negative impact on organizational performance, and Chen et al. (2012), who reported no significant effect on job satisfaction. Avoiding conflicts tends to hinder creativity and collaboration, making it an ineffective long-term strategy. Finally, the *integrating strategy* significantly improved employee performance. Employees who adopt this approach prioritize common goals, maintain open-mindedness, and foster strong interpersonal relationships. This leads to frequent open discussions and enhanced productivity, supporting findings by Dialoke and Ogbu (2017), Kasim and Ibrahim (2014), and Chen et al. (2012), who linked integrating styles to higher commitment, job satisfaction, and innovation.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study sought to understand the different conflict resolution styles and how it affects employee performance using SMEs in Abuja metropolis. The result showed while compromising and integrating strategies are highly effective, dominating can yield short-term gains. Obliging and avoiding, however, are less impactful and may even hinder performance. Organizations should encourage collaborative and

balanced conflict resolution approaches to maximize employee productivity and foster a positive work environment.

Based on the findings from this study, the following implication is inferred. First, conflict management is an important job skill for employees, and business managers should carry out programs to train and increase the employees' conflict management ability. Training programs can teach interpersonal-communication skills, group dynamics, cultural and religious tolerance and so on. These programs will help employees learn how to deal with interpersonal relationships and how to self-manage. Second, managers and workers need to pay attention to how conflicts occur in the workplace. They should have the necessary trainings and skills needed to cooperatively resolve a conflict. This process may be further enhanced by installing team-based benefits that reward cooperative sense-making and problem-solving and that sanction the postponement of conflicts.

Third, since avoiding strategy does not improve performance, it would be unwise for managers to use them. Based on the findings, managers should encourage employees to use integrating or compromising behavior while dealing with conflict. It is also essential for enterprises to take religious and ethnic differences into consideration while handling conflict, and they should try their best to maintain a good working atmosphere and working environment. Finally, for management, it is important that the management team understands the advantages, disadvantages & strength and weakness of the different styles for managing conflict and how they affect employee's outcomes and then work towards using the strategy that is appropriate for each situation. Using the proper style for managing conflict will enhance the employee performance and help organizations achieve their objectives.

Suggestion for further studies

The study focused on SMEs employees in Abuja metropolis. Future studies can examine other employees for large scale and multinational firms where cultural differences exist to validate the findings from this study. Also, other types of conflict management strategies and the potential cause of conflict can be examined in future studies. Future studies can compare conflict management style and causes of conflict among different personality type using more advanced statistical technique such as a multiple group analysis via structural equation modelling. It may also be worthwhile to examine how the use of digital technology in the workplace contribute to conflict management. Finally, while the present study is cross-sectional, future studies can conduct a longitudinal study to see how the effectiveness of conflict handling strategies changes over time following changes in group dynamics and corporate culture.

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