CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND STAFF PERFORMANCE AT BENUE STATE UNIVERSITY, MAKURDI, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This study examined the relationship between conflict management strategies and staff performance at Benue State University, Makurdi. A survey research design was used on a sample of 331 respondents. Primary data through a structured questionnaire was used. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression statistical tools were employed to analyse the collected data. Findings from the study revealed that integrating, obliging, dominating and avoiding strategies jointly explained 68.8% of the variation in the performance of the staff. Particularly, the study also found that dominating strategy has a negative relationship with staff performance in the university, while integrating, obliging, and avoiding strategies have a positive influence on the performance of staff at the university. The study, therefore, e recommended that the Management of the University should emphasize the adoption of an integrating strategy, an obliging strategy and an avoiding strategy in the management of critical issues such as employees' welfare.

Keywords: Avoiding Strategy, Dominating Strategy, Integrating Strategy, Obliging Strategy, Organizational Performance

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INTRODUCTION

All human beings are different from each other with different needs, tastes, opinions, beliefs, preferences, and values that, if not properly managed, may result in conflict. While conflict can be constructive, most conflict situations are destructive. In a work environment, managers and their workers are bound together in an association that has an appearance of fragility and a conspicuous potential for frequent conflict situations due to differences that often occur in industrial relations. All over the world, organizations, whether public or private, small or large, exist essentially to achieve defined economic, social, or political objectives (Wang & AnqiLiu, 2019). These objectives may be in the form of profit-making, provision of services, and production of goods and services, among others. However, these objectives can only be achieved when human resources are employed to utilize other natural and physical resources, such as raw materials, machinery, land, and water resources. Organizations are made up of different people with different attitudes, beliefs, abilities, and personalities; therefore, conflict is inevitable (Olasupo, 2018). This means that conflict is a "necessary evil" that organizations cannot do without. It is a regular feature of formal organizations that results from divergences in the interests of individual workers and management (Ibrahim & Adeyemi, 2019).

The available literature shows that conflict in the workplace is a leading cause of stress and causes loss in productivity as employees try to avoid those with whom they disagree (Amusan, 2016; Stringfellow, 2012). Albelt (2001) affirmed that there are productive and destructive conflicts in the workplace. According to Albelt (2001), "conflict is said to be positive when it is constructively discussed by the parties and amicable terms for the settlement reached". The study emphasized that constructively managed conflict in the workplace induces positive employee performance, while poorly managed conflicts lower employees' productivity, increase employee absenteeism, increase the chances of losing skilled personnel and levels of loss of man and machines hours, and may lead to an increase in the number of defective products produced due to a lack of employees' commitment to work.

Oftentimes, the nature of conflicts that erupt at Benue State University, Makurdi ranges from interpersonal to inter-groups conflicts. But the most common is the intergroup conflicts that erupt between unions and management. These require collective agreements that when not properly managed lead to industrial disharmony that often culminates in the breakdown of activities in the institution. Employees' unresolved conflicts usually leave them with low morale, decreased productivity, loss of skilled personnel, loss of man and machine hours, absenteeism, increase in defective products due to lowered employee commitment to work, and health issues due to stress and depression (Fareo & Jajua, 2018). Therefore, it is pertinent to examine the effects of conflict management strategies and staff performance at Benue State University, Makurdi, bearing in mind the series of conflicts within the university.

The relationship between conflict management strategies and performance has attracted much empirical attention from scholars, professionals, and policymakers, among others. However, some scholars are unanimous that conflict cannot be completely ruled out in any organization, as frequent occurrences of conflict are inherent in almost all organizations. Arriving at an acceptable conclusion from the relationship has remained a far cry, laying a solid ground for yet another investigation as presented in this study. A good number of studies include those of Yusuf and Anuar (2014). Saranya (2016), Nwabueze and Bernard (2017), Taher, Gomes, and Chuwdhury (2018) have all submitted that the relationship between conflict management and performance is positive; other studies, including Ekong (2013), Gomes and Rahman (2018), Ibrahim and Adeyemi (2019), and Attah (2019), who all used an integrating strategy, have a different opinion, as their studies hold that conflict management strategies hurt performance. The diverging views from these and many other similar studies have invoked the need for this study to establish the true position of the effect of conflict management strategies on performance among Staff at Benue State University, Makurdi. A few studies, such as Agusioma (2019), Ibrahim and Adeyemi (2019), Fareo and Jajua (2018), Sammy (2016), Ndulue and Ekechukwu (2016), Mba (2013), Algert and

Watson, (2002), and Balay (2007), have studied the effect of conflict management on performance outside the study area. This development has created a gap that this paper has attempted to fill while incorporating the aspect of obliging strategy that has been ignored by previous studies. Consequently, the study is aimed at assessing the effect of all conflict management strategies (integrating strategy, obliging strategy, dominating strategy, and avoiding strategy) on the performance of staff at Benue State University, Makurdi.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

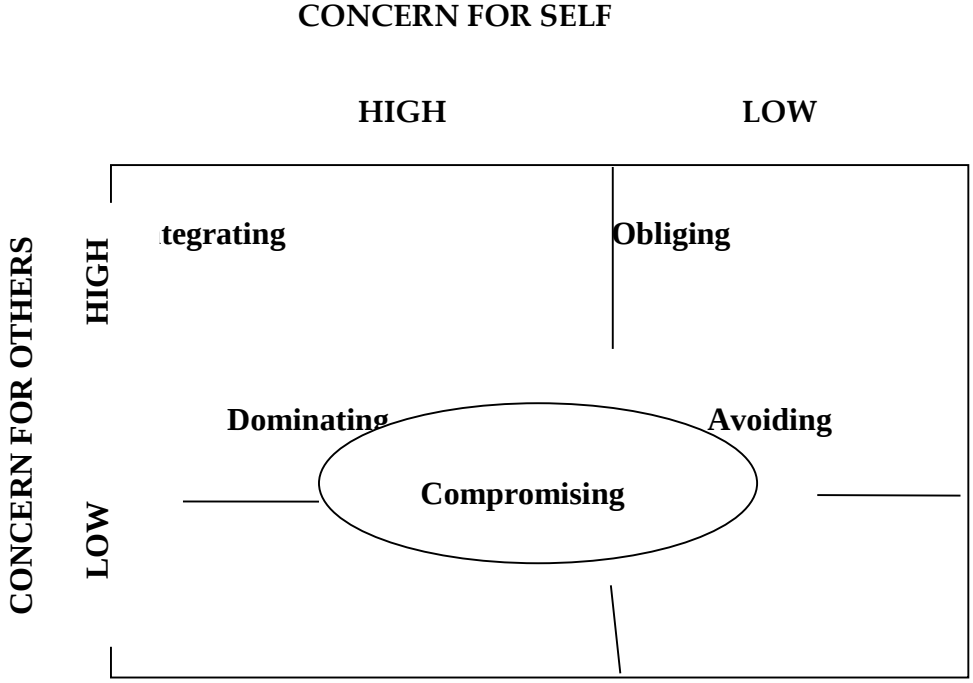
Different theories have been developed by different schools of thought to support research in conflict management strategies and organizational performance. Some of these theories are as follows:

Contingency Theory: This theory is a behavioural theory developed by Fred Fiedler in 1964 (MonizJr, 2010). The theory assumes that there is no universal or one best way to manage an organization and that an organizational/leadership style that is effective in some situations may not be successful in others. The theory argues that a manager's effectiveness is based upon the interplay of task, relation, motivation, and circumstance. In other words, certain circumstances require different management approaches with a focus either on motivating task completion or maintaining harmonious group relations. The appropriate management actions and strategies depend on the situation. Managers with a contingency view use a flexible strategy, draw on a variety of theories and experiences, and evaluate many options as they solve problems. From the contingency perspective, managers are faced with the task of determining which managerial approach or strategy is likely to be most effective in a given situation. Contingency theory is, however, made of six independent constructs (strategy, task, technology, organizational size, structure, and culture) and two dependent constructs (efficiency and organizational performance). The study looks at the aspect of conflict management strategy being the independent variable and organizational performance being the dependent variable. The applicability of this theory was informed by the fact that there is no one best strategy for

resolving organizational conflict. A strategy is considered appropriate for a conflict situation if its use leads to effective formulation and/or solution to a problem (Rahim, 2011). Thus, there is a need for managers to identify and understand the situation before choosing the appropriate style of conflict management.

Management conflict theory was propounded by Rahim and Bonoma (1979). The theory states that there are different styles of handling conflict and can be classified into two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. Concern for self is the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy his or her concern. The second dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which a person attempts to satisfy the concern of others. According to Rahim and Bonoma (1979), these dimensions depict the reason behind the orientation of an individual during a conflict. Rahim and Bonoma (1979) further stated that studies by Van de Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) supported these dimensions. The combination of the two dimensions results in five specific styles or strategies for handling interpersonal conflict, as shown in the Rahim and Bonoma matrix model in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Rahim and Bonoma's Conflict Management Model



Source: Rahim, and Bonoma. (1979).

From Figure 1, the interpretation of the five submatrices is simplified as follows: dominating style- high concern for self and low concern for others; obliging style- low concern for self and high concern for others; avoiding style- low concern for self and low concern for others; integrating style- high concern for self and high concern for others; and compromising style- moderate concern for self and moderate concern for others.

It follows that Rahim and Bonoma (1979) adopted Black and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid theory of conflict management. They, however, named their dimensions differently: concern for self and concern for others. Rubin, Pruitt and Kim (1994) posited that concern for self-dimensions depends on the degree to which an individual attempts to satisfy his concerns, while the second dimension determines

the degree to which an individual wants to satisfy the concerns of others. They named their CMSs compromising, integrating, obliging, dominating, and avoiding. Similarly, the second dimension that determines the degree to which an individual wants to satisfy the concern for others was named integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. This model later became known as the dual concern model (Rubin, Pruitt & Kim, 1994), and the avoiding and dominating styles are considered ineffective in conflict management (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979; Gross & Guerrero, 2000).

This theory is also applicable and relevant to this study, as it explains the different strategies for managing conflict in an organization such as Benue State University, Makurdi, or other organizations where conflict is inevitable. The theory also argued that conflict can be healthy if it is managed effectively; therefore, conflict management requires a combination of analytical and human skills that are elucidated in the theory. Moreover, it is expedient to effectively analyse conflict situations in organizations to know the appropriate conflict management styles or strategies.

2.1 *Review of Related Empirical Studies*

In examining the relationship between conflict management strategies and administrative effectiveness in tertiary institutions in the Sokoto metropolis, Ibrahim and Adeyemi (2019) employed a correlational survey research design. Data were analysed using multiple regression analysis, and the findings showed a significant relationship between dialogue, competition, prevention, and communication on the one hand and administrative effectiveness on the other hand. Agusioma (2019) also investigated the effect of staff conflict resolution on employee performance at the Public Service Commission in Kenya. The study used a descriptive survey research design and a mixed-mode research approach. Path regression analysis was used, and the study found that conflict resolution positively and significantly affected employee performance. The study also found a partial mediating effect of staff participation on the relationship between employee performances.

In a related study, Attah (2019) examined conflict resolution strategies and how they affect organizational performance. The findings revealed that a good management-labour conflict strategy improves decision outcomes and group productivity and that an effective conflict resolution strategy ensures good communication, time management, cooperation and organizational performance. Nuel-Okoli, Mbah, and Okeke (2018) also investigated the effect of conflict management on organizational performance in private universities in Anambra state (Madonna University Okija, Tansian University Oba, and Paul University Awka) using descriptive statistics and the Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation. The study established a relationship between conflict management strategies and their implications for an organization's performance and found that there is a significant positive contribution of conflict management strategies to organizational performance. Ndulue and Ekechukwu (2016) also examined the impact of conflict management on employees' performance at Nigerian Breweries Plc Iganmu, Lagos state, using the ordinary least squares (OLS) method. The study found that there is a significant relationship between conflict management and employees' performance in Nigerian Breweries Plc. Agwu (2013) also examined conflict management and employee performance in Julius Berger Nigeria Plc, Bonny Island, using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that a significant relationship exists between conflict management strategies and employees' performance, and no differences exist between managerial and nonmanagerial employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of conflict management strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a survey research design that allows for an in-depth exploration of a particular research problem. The area of coverage for this study is Benue State University, Makurdi, with a focus on teaching and nonteaching staff.

The target population of this study comprises all teaching and nonteaching staff at Benue State University, Makurdi. Hence, the study has a total population of 1932 staff (Benue State University

Establishment Office, 2022). The sample size for this study is calculated using the formula propounded by Yamane (1967):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

where

n= sample size, N= population, α = level of significance. This study adopts the 5% (0.05) level of significance. Applying the formula, we have:

$$n = \frac{1932}{1 + 1932(0.05)^2} = \frac{1932}{5.83} = 331.389 \approx 331$$

The sample size for the study is 331 respondents, who are proportionately distributed across the categories of staff. The study employed simple random sampling and proportionate sampling techniques in distributing the questionnaire among the teaching and non-teaching staff. Simple random sampling was used to avoid bias and to ensure that each respondent had an equal chance of being selected from each category. The study used the first staff member who came to work as a point of random selection for the survey and the online platforms for teaching and nonteaching staff. On the other hand, proportionate random sampling through the use of Bowley's formula (1926) was used in selecting respondents proportionate to the size of the population of each category of staff. The study, therefore, used a sample size of 331 respondents. The data for this study were collected through the administration of a questionnaire to the respondents using Google forms and through the physical distribution of the questionnaires. The instrument was validated using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient through a pilot study.

3.1 *Model Specification*

In this study, staff performance is regarded as a function of conflict management strategies. In this vein, this study suggests that,

SP = f (CMS) - - - - - - - (1)
where SP = Staff Performance
CMS = Conflict Management Strategies
Given that conflict management strategies comprise four dimensions: the implicit form of the model is given as follows:
SP = f (IS, OS, DS, AS) - - - - - (2)

where: IS= Integrating Strategy; OS = Obliging Strategy; DS= Dominating Strategy; and AS= Avoiding Strategy.
Thus, the explicit form of the model for the study is as follows

$$SP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IS_i + \beta_2 OS_i + \beta_3 DS_i + \beta_4 AS_i + \varepsilon \text{ - - - (3)}$$

where: β_0 = Intercept of the model (constant), and $\beta_1 - \beta_4$ = coefficients of the independent variables. i = the number of cross sections (that is the staff), ε = error term.

Based on theoretical expectations, β_1, β_2, β_3, and β_4 are all expected to have positive signs implying a direct relationship with the dependent variable. This is because the positive changes in these variables (independent variables) enhance staff performance.

The study used descriptive statistics and inferential statistics for data presentation and analysis. Descriptive statistics include percentages and tables while inferential statistics are the multiple regression techniques used to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the utilization of conflict management strategies by staff at Benue State University, Makurdi. All the copies of the questionnaire administered were duly completed and returned by the respondents. The reason for total compliance is based on the fact that all the respondents were knowledgeable enough and careful in the course of answering the questions. This may also be due to the value attached to research since the study area (Benue State University) is a research-

based institution. This indicates a good response from the sample, which makes the findings valid for generalization.

4.1 *Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents*

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents included sex, age of the respondents, marital status, level of education, and years of experience. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Attributes	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	278	84%
Female	53	16%
Total	**331**	**100%**
Age		
18-30 Years	52	15.7%
31-60 Years	265	80.1%
61-70 Years	14	4.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
Marital Status		
Single (Never married)	39	11.8%
Married	238	71.9%
Divorced/Separated	27	8.2%
Widowed	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
Educational Level		
SSCE/GCE	27	8.2%
OND/NCE	13	3.9%
HND/B.Sc., P/Graduate	52	15.7%
Postgraduate Degrees	239	72.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
Work Experience		
1-3 years	52	15.7%
4-6 years	14	4.2%

7-9 years	91	27.5%
10 and above years	174	52.6%
Total	**331**	**100%**
Category of Staff		
Teaching Staff	212	64.0%
Non-Teaching Staff	119	36.6%
Total	**331**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The results in Table 1 show that the majority (84%) of the respondents are male, while 53 of the respondents (16%) are female. The result further reveals that the majority (15.7%) of the respondents fell within the age bracket of 18 and 30, 265 (80.1%) ranged between 31 and 60, while other staff with age brackets of 61 and 70 years were 14 (4.2%). The result also shows that a total of 238 (71.9%) were married, while 39 (11.8%) of the respondents were never married. The result also shows that 27 respondents representing 8.2% were either divorced or separated, while the same percentage of the respondents were windows. Most of the respondents, representing 239 (72.2%), obtained postgraduate degrees, while 52 (15.7%) obtained either HND, B.Sc. or B.Ed. The few respondents who had SSCE or GCE certificates were 27 (8.2%), while 13 (3.9%) of the respondents had OND/NCE certificates. The result further shows that most of the respondents representing 174 (52.6%) had between 10 and above years of experience, 91 (27.5%) of the respondents had up to 7-9 years of work experience, 14 (4.2%) had 4-6 years of work experience and 52 (15.7%) of the respondents had less than 3 years of work experience. The sample was good for the study since most of the respondents were mature, educated and had much work experience at Benue State University, Makurdi. This category would be able to understand the strategies used over time by the staff at Benue State University, Makurdi, in resolving or managing conflicts at the University. The results from Table 1 also reveal that most (64%) of the respondents were teaching staff, while a few (936%) of the respondents were e nonteaching staff.

4.2 Main Causes of Conflict at Benue State University, Makurdi

The study assessed the main causes of conflict at Benue State University, Makurdi. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Main Causes of Conflict at Benue State University, Makurdi

Main Causes	Frequency	Percent
Lack of timely payment of salaries	27	8.2
Inadequate leave allowances	11	3.3
Poor of communication	93	28.1
Inadequate basic needs/staff welfare (medical needs, accommodation, among others)	40	12.1
All of the above	133	40.2
Others	27	8.2
Total	331	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The results show that most (40.2%) of the respondents agreed that all the highlighted causes of conflict are the main factors that cause conflict at Benue State University, Makurdi. This includes a lack of timely payment of salaries, inadequate leave allowances, inadequate communication, and inadequate basic needs/staff welfare (including issues such as medical needs and accommodation, among others). The respondents suggested that the timely payment of salaries, adequate communication and provision of staff welfare needs would curtail the level of conflict among the staff at Benue State University, Makurdi.

4.3 Conflict Management Strategies Utilized by Staff at Benue State University, Makurdi

This study presents the conflict management strategies that are utilized by staff at Benue State University, Makurdi. Generally, there are four (4) conflict management strategies identified in this study: integrating, obliging, dominating and avoiding strategies.

A. Integrating strategy for conflict management

Integrating strategy into conflict management represents a high concern for both self and others, as noted earlier. The results of the responses from the respondents on the level at which the integrating strategy for conflict management is utilized by the staff at Benue State University, Makurdi, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Responses on the integrating strategy

Items	Frequency	Percentage
The organization uses dialogue to resolve conflicts		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	172	52.0%
Disagree	119	36.0%
Strongly Disagree	40	12.1%
Total	**331**	**100%**
BSU employees are involved in decision making		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	94	28.4%
Disagree	210	63.4%
Strongly Disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
Aggrieved employees are reconciled		
Strongly Agree	27	8.2%
Agree	185	55.9%
Disagree	92	27.8%
Strongly Disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
The organization applies mutually optional solutions		
Strongly agree	-	-
Agree	173	52.3%
Disagree	158	47.7%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2022

The result from Table 3 shows the responses on whether the organization uses dialogue to resolve conflicts. The findings indicate that the majority (172), representing 52% of the total respondents, agree, 119 respondents and 40 respondents (36%) disagree and (12.1%) strongly disagree that staff at Benue State University used dialogue to resolve conflicts with others, respectively. The result also shows that approximately 27 (8.2%) of the respondents strongly disagree that employees are not involved in the decision making, while 210 respondents (63.4%) agree and 94 (28.4%) strongly agree that staff at Benue State University, Makurdi, are involved in the decision making. The result from Table 3 also reveals that 185 (55.9%) of respondents agree and 27 (8.2%) of respondents strongly agree that aggrieved employees are reconciled, while 92 respondents representing 27.8% disagree and 27 respondents representing 8.2% strongly disagree with the claim. Furthermore, considering respondents' views on whether the organization applies mutually optional solutions, the result demonstrates that the majority of 173 respondents, representing 52.3%, agree with the view, while 158 respondents, representing 47.7%, disagree with the claim that the organization applies mutually optional solutions. It can therefore be deduced from the responses in Table 3 that staff at Benue State University adapts an integrating strategy that involves high concern for both themselves and others in handling conflicts at the University.

B. **Obliging strategy for conflict management**

Obliging strategies for conflict management involve sacrificing one's concern for the satisfaction of other persons. The results of the respondents on whether the obliging strategy to conflict management is in use at Benue State University, Makurdi, or whether obliging or seeking a better solution in the middle ground has been the strategy to conflict management by staff at the University are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Responses on the obliging strategy

Items	Frequency	Percentage
BSU employees accept management decisions		
Strongly agree	13	3.9%
Agree	185	55.9%
Disagree	106	32.0%
Strongly Disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
BSU employees adjust to organizational opinions		
Strongly Agree	54	16.3%
Agree	186	56.2%
Disagree	91	27.5%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
BSU management cooperates with employees		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	92	27.8%
Disagree	239	72.2%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
BSU employees submit to organizational opinions and suggestions		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	197	59.5%
Disagree	107	32.3%
Strongly Disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2022

The result from Table 4 reveals the response as to whether or not employees accept management decisions at Benue State University, Makurdi. The outcome shows that the majority 185 (55.9%) of the respondents agree while 13 (3.9%) of the respondents strongly agree that employees accept decisions from management. Only 32% and 8.2% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the claim,

respectively. Considering respondents' views on whether employees adjust to organizational opinions, the result indicates that 186 respondents (56.2%) agree and 54 respondents (16.3%) strongly agree with the view that employees adjust to organizational opinions. However, 91 respondents, representing 27.5%, disagree with the claim of the employees adjusting organizational opinions. Additionally, the results reveal that the majority of respondents, representing 239 (72.2%), disagree, while few of the respondents, representing 92 (27.8%), agree with the view that management cooperates with employees (staff) at Benue State University, Makurdi. It was further discovered that most of the respondents (59.5%) agreed that employees submit to organizational opinions and suggestions. However, 32.3% and 8.2% of the respondents disagree and strongly disagree with the claim that the employees submit to organizational opinions and suggestions. It can be deduced from the results that the majority of employees accept management decisions and adjust and submit to organizational opinions and suggestions. However, they argued that management does not cooperate with employees in the study area.

C. Dominating strategy for conflict management

Dominating strategy to conflict management is a more confrontational approach that involves a person facing problems to fulfill his or her wants, as it involves the use of forceful tactics such as threats and put-downs. The result of the responses on whether dominating employees accepts one stand has always been the strategy for conflict management adopted by the staff at Benue State University, Makurdi, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Responses on the dominating strategy

Item	Frequency	Percentage
The organization place its benefits above that of employees		
Strongly Agree	66	19.9%
Agree	238	71.9%
Disagree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
The management manipulates employees		
Strongly Agree	66	19.9%
Agree	213	64.4%
Disagree	25	7.6%
Strongly Disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
The management subdues employees		
Strongly Agree	26	7.9%
Agree	160	48.3%
Disagree	118	35.6%
Strongly Disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
The management take decisions at the detriment of the staff		
Strongly Agree	65	19.6%
Agree	173	52.3%
Disagree	93	28.1%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2022

The results in Table 5 show that 27 (8.2%) of the respondents strongly disagree and 66 respondents (19.9%) agree that the organization places its benefits above that of employees, while the majority of respondents (238, 71.9%) agree with the view that the organization places its benefits above that of staff at Benue State University, Makurdi. From the results in Table 5, 213 (64.4%) of the respondents agree and 66 (19.9%) strongly

agree that management manipulates employees (staff), while 25 respondents (7.6%) disagree and 27 (8.2%) strongly disagree with the claim, implying that management does not manipulate employees (staff) of the university. This is because they have seen the dominating strategy to conflict as a quick approach to resolving conflict issues. In contrast, the result shows that the majority 160 (48.3%) of the respondents agree and 26 respondents representing (7.9%) strongly agree that the management subdues employees (staff), while 118 (35.6%) of the respondents disagree with the statement indicating that management does not subdue employees (staff) of Benue State University, Makurdi. However, 160 (48.3%) of the respondents agree, and 26 (7.9%) strongly agree that the management subdues staff. The result further reveals that 65 respondents (19.6%) strongly agree and 173 (52.3%) agree that management makes decisions at the detriment of staff, while 93 respondents (28.1%) disagree with the claim, implying that management does not make decisions at the detriment of staff. Goudge (2006) urged that this strategy should be implemented in an organization when the relationship among employees is not important. Hence, dominating strategy leaves hard feelings because people dislike having others' views imposed on them (Fiore, 2009). This can be buttressed further by the fact that the dominating strategy works best in emergencies, as argued by Pruitt and Rubin (1986).

D. Avoiding strategy for conflict management

Avoiding strategies for conflict management entails retraining or moving back, back-passing, or sidestepping situations since both employees and management avoid confronting each other. The results of the responses from the respondents concerning whether keeping off from conflicts has been the strategy for conflict management utilized by staff at Benue State University, Makurdi, are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Responses on the avoiding strategy

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Both management and employees avoid conflicts		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	105	31.7%
Disagree	186	56.2%
Strongly Disagree	40	12.1%
Total	**331**	**100%**
The management and employee adhere to agreements		
Strongly agree	-	-
Agree	78	23.6%
Disagree	227	68.6%
Strongly Disagree	26	7.9%
Total	**331**	**100%**
There are often times peace between the management and the employees		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	239	72.2%
Disagree	92	27.8%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
The management and the employees confide in each other on matters of industrial relations		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	120	36.3%
Disagree	172	52.0%
Strongly Disagree	39	11.8%
Total	**331**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2022

The result from Table 6 shows that the majority (186 respondents representing 56.2%) of the respondents disagree, while 40 respondents representing 12.1% disagree with the statement indicating that both

management and employees do not avoid conflicts. However, 105 (31.7%) of the respondents agree that both management and employees avoid conflicts that keeping off has been the strategy to conflict management by the staff of BSU, Makurdi. However, Bahrassa, Syed, Su and Lee (2011) argue that conflict is destructive and its impact is always negative, as it usually leads to a gradual loss of performance. Similarly, Khun and Poole (2000) also argue that the approach reduces expenses and saves time in going through the process of solving conflict, thereby ensuring employee performance. Approximately 26 respondents (7.9%) strongly disagree, and 227 respondents (68.6%) disagree with the claim that management and employees adhere to agreements. This means that management and employees do not adhere to agreements. However, 78 respondents (23.6%) agreed that management and employees adhere to agreements. Additionally, the result from Table 6 reveals that the majority 239 (72.2%) agree that there is often peace between the management and the employees, while 92 respondents, representing 27.8%, disagree with the claim. The implication is that there is often time peace between the management and the employees (staff) at Benue State University, Makurdi. The results reveal that the majority of respondents, representing 172 (52%), disagree and 39 respondents (11.8%) strongly disagree that management and employees do not confide in each other on matters of industrial relations, while 120 (36.3%) respondents agree that management and employees confide in each other on matters of industrial relations. With the assertion of keeping off from conflicts as a conflict management strategy is often adopted by the staff of Benue State University, Makurdi. There are instances where some agitations have been ignored or delayed with the hope that the problem can be resolved by itself. However, it can generally be deduced from the above results that due to the organizational will of maintaining its relationship, which is important to performance, differences are often ignored at the university while resolving or seeking solutions may be detrimental to organizational performance. Hence, keeping off from conflicts has been the strategy for conflict management adopted by the staff of BSU, Makurdi. It can be deduced that the majority of the

respondents hold that both management and employees do not avoid conflicts and hardly confide in each other on matters of industrial relations and barely adhere to agreements. However, the study found that often times peace between the management and the employees.

E. Staff performance

This explains how a member of staff fulfills his duties or role, completes required tasks and behaves in the workplace. This is with the aim of meeting the needs of its stakeholders and organization for its survival. The staff performance measures how well or how poorly an employee conducts their required job duties and how promptly they meet their deadlines or requirements. The results of the responses from the respondents concerning the staff performance at Benue State University, Makurdi, are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Responses on the staff performance

Item	Frequency	Percentage
The employees serve effectively during the required number of hours per day because of high morale		
Strongly Agree	13	3.9%
Agree	147	44.4%
Disagree	171	51.7%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
The employees work diligently for the number of hours required per day		
Strongly Agree	13	3.9%
Agree	160	48.3%
Disagree	131	39.2%
strongly disagree	27	8.2%
Total	**331**	**100%**
The employees put in maximum effort to ensure high-quality outcomes		
Strongly Agree	-	-

Agree	251	75.8%
Disagree	80	24.2%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
The employees at BSU ensure speedy and efficient outcomes regardless of any work conditions.		
Strongly Agree	13	3.9%
Agree	240	72.5%
Disagree	78	23.6%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
BSU employees take actions to improve themselves and their environment in terms of learning		
Strongly Agree	-	-
Agree	265	80.1%
Disagree	66	19.9%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
BSU employees work independently when the task requires it		
Strongly Agree	53	16.0%
Agree	199	60.1%
Disagree	79	23.9%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**
There are less work hours lost due to fewer complaints received		
strongly Agree	27	8.2%
Agree	146	44.1%
Disagree	158	47.7%
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**331**	**100%**

Source: Field survey, 2022

The results from Table 7 reveal that the majority 171 (51.7%) of the respondents disagree with the statement implying that employees do not serve effectively during the required number of hours per day,

while 147 respondents (44.4%) agree and 13 (3.9%) strongly agree that employees serve effectively during the required number of hours per day. Furthermore, the results reveal that the majority of respondents, representing 160 (48.3%), agree and 13 (3.9%) strongly agree that employees work diligently for the number of hours required per day, while 19 (6%) strongly disagree with the claim that employees work diligently for the number of hours required per day. This means that most of the respondents argue that the employees do not work diligently for the number of hours required per day. However, some (131 respondents representing 39.2% disagree and 27 respondents representing 8.2%) strongly disagree with the view. Moreover, the results in Table 7 also reveal that 251 (75.8%) respondents agreed that the employees put in maximum effort to ensure high-quality outcomes, while 80 (24.2%) of the respondents disagreed with this view. Furthermore, the results reveal that the majority of respondents, representing 13 (3.9%), strongly agree and 240 (72.5%) agree that employees at BSU ensure speedy and efficient outcomes regardless of any work conditions. However, only a few 78 (23.6%) of the respondents held a contrary view.

It can be inferred that the employees hardly serve effectively during the required number of hours per day due to morale and barely work diligently for the number of hours required per day. However, they still try to best maximize their efforts to ensure high-quality outcomes and speedy and efficient outcomes regardless of the work conditions. The results also reveal that most (80.1%) of the BSU employees take action to improve themselves and their environment in terms of learning. Only a very few (19.9%) of the respondents do otherwise. The result also shows that the majority (60.1%) of BSU employees work independently when the task requires it. The respondents (44.1%) also argued that there are fewer work hours lost due to fewer complaints received while others (47.7% of the respondents) disagree.

4.4 *Test of Hypotheses*

A standard multiple regression was performed utilizing staff performance as the criterion and four dimensions of conflict management strategies, integrating strategy (IS), obliging strategy (OS), dominating strategy (DS) and avoiding strategy (AS), as predictors to determine if the organizational performance scores could be predicted as a function of conflict management strategies scores. The results are presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-statistic	Sig.
1	.832[a]	.692	.688	144.249	0.000[b]

a. Predictors: (Constant), Integrating Strategy, Obliging Strategy, Dominating Strategy and Avoiding Strategy

b. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

***Source**: Researcher's Computation 2022*

The estimated model presented in Table 8 reveals how much of the variation in the dependent variable (Staff Performance) is explained by the model predictors (IS, OS, DS and AS). The study showed that variations in conflict management strategies explain approximately 69.2% of the variations in the organizational performance of Benue State University, Makurdi. The adjusted R-square (0.688) also explains the total variations in the dependent variable accounted for by the explanatory variables, taking into account the number of parameters through degrees of freedom. It shows that approximately 68.8% of the changes in organizational performance are accounted for by the variations in the conflict management strategies at Benue State University, Makurdi. The F-statistic is 144.249 with a probability of 0.000, which is less than 0.05 at the 5% level of significance. This means that the joint effect of all the variables is statistically significant. This implies that the overall significance of the linear regression model presents a good fit. The impact of conflict management strategies on the

staff performance of Benue State University, Makurdi, is presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Impact of Conflict Management Strategies on Staff Performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.013	.405		7.442	.000
	Integrating Strategy	.388	.041	.440	9.476	.000
	Obliging Strategy	.493	.064	.402	7.704	.000
	Dominating Strategy	-.329	.038	-.419	-8.574	.000
	Avoiding Strategy	.055	.052	.064	1.059	.290

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Avoiding Strategy, Integrating Strategy, Obliging Strategy, Dominating Strategy

***Source**: Extractions from IBM SPSS 23 Output, 2022*

From the regression analysis in Table 8, integrating strategy has a significant effect on the Staff performance of the University (P=0.000<0.05). Since the probability value (0.000) is less than the critical value (0.05) at the 5% level of significance, the study rejects the null hypothesis that the integrating strategy has no significant effect on the performance of Benue State University, Makurdi. This indicates that a change (increase) in the integrating strategy leads to 0.44 changes

(increase) in the organizational performance of Benue State University, Makurdi and vice versa ceteris paribus. This implies that there is a significant effect of integrating strategy on organizational performance; that is, as the staff of the university utilizes an integrating strategy to resolve conflicts, the performance of the organization improves. This implies that both management and employees' efforts to find mutually acceptable solutions to problems or try as much as possible to discuss all concerns openly, especially during meetings, improve the performance of the university. Thus, the higher the use of the integrating strategy is, the higher the performance of staff at the University. This is consistent with the findings of Akintola, Adeleke, Onoduga, Akintimehin and Ike (2019), and Olasupo (2018) found that integration strategy has a positive influence on the performance of university staff.

Similarly, the obliging strategy has a significant effect on the performance of the university (P=0.000<0.005). Since the probability value (0.000) is less than the critical value (0.05) at the 5% level of significance, the study rejects the null hypothesis that the obliging strategy has no significant effect on the performance of Benue State University, Makurdi. This indicates that a change (increase) in the obliging strategy leads to 0.402 changes (increase) in the organizational performance of Benue State University, Makurdi and vice versa ceteris paribus. This implies that there is a significant effect of obliging strategy on organizational performance; that is, as the staff of the university utilizes an obliging strategy to resolve conflicts, the performance of the organization improves. This finding is also consistent with the finding of Sammy (2016), who found that an obliging strategy improves performance. According to Follet (2014), the strategy is best used in an organization when the management or employer needs to create an obligation for a trade-off at a later time. To Thomas (2014), implementing an obliging strategy in an organization ensures improved performance as personnel feel valued and cared for, thus performing better. The implication is that there is a significant degree of cooperation since it requires sacrificing one's needs or desires to end the

conflict. Instances of this strategy can be seen in times of strikes and protests at the University.

In contrast, the dominating strategy has a significant effect on the organizational performance of the university (P=0.000<0.05). Since the probability value (0.000) is less than the critical value (0.05) at the 5% level of significance, the study rejects the null hypothesis that the dominating strategy has no significant effect on the performance of Benue State University, Makurdi. This indicates that a change (increase) in the dominating strategy leads to -0.419 changes (decrease) in the organizational performance of the staff at Benue State University, Makurdi and vice versa ceteris paribus. This implies that there is a significant effect of the dominating strategy on organizational performance; that is, as the staff of the university utilizes the dominating strategy to resolve conflicts, the performance of the organization declines. This is because the adoption of a dominating strategy in managing conflict leads to a decrease in the performance of the organization, as many are seen as being forced to comply with derivatives and decisions. Thus, the greater the staff and management at Benue State University, Makurdi adopts the dominating strategy, the less the performance of the staff of the institution. This could be a result of the long-run effect. The more employees give up their demands, the less motivated they become. As such, their efforts towards their job begin to reduce, leading to a decrease in their performance. This is consistent with the findings of Sammy (2016).

The estimated coefficient of the avoiding strategy has a significant effect on the staff performance of the university (P=0.29>0.000). Since the probability value (0.29) is greater than the critical value (0.05) at the 5% level of significance, the study fails to reject (that is, accepts) the null hypothesis that the avoiding strategy has no significant effect on the performance of the staff at Benue State University, Makurdi. This shows that there is no significant effect of the avoiding strategy on organizational performance; that is, as the staff of the university adopts an avoiding strategy towards resolving conflicts, the performance of the organization does not change significantly at the 5% level of significance. This implies that both management and

employees attempt to keep the working environment pleasant rather than creating tension, and their ability to refrain from critical issues that will cause division during meetings will improve the performance of the staff of the institution. This finding is consistent with the findings of Longe (2015), who states that the avoiding strategy has no significant impact on organizational performance. However, there is no one best strategy for managing conflict, as the management of conflict depends on the behavioural intentions of the parties to the conflict, the time frame and the situation the organization may find itself in.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concluded that conflict management strategies positively impacted the staff performance of Benue State University, Makurdi, except for the dominating strategy, which exerted a negative influence on performance. The study made the following recommendations for improved performance of staff and the University at large:

i. In a bid to improve the performance of the staff at Benue State University, management should emphasize the adoption of an integrating strategy, an obliging strategy and an avoiding strategy in the management of critical issues such as employees' welfare. Moreover, they are aware of the handling of conflict issues among employees through either an integrating strategy or an obliging strategy. However, if compromise fails, the study recommends the avoiding strategy by the employees.

ii. Additionally, given the negative significant level of dominating strategy on the performance of staff, management and staff of the University and other universities should try as much as possible to avoid any critical issues that will cause division in the organization through dominating issues or use of power in settling conflicts. Such issues should be left alone to be discussed in the open during meetings

iii. In line with the findings, the study recommends that the Management of Benue State University create an enabling environment where employees can openly communicate and discuss issues affecting them. In doing so, management should

try as much as possible to find mutually acceptable solutions to problems and implement any joint decision taken by putting the organizational goals as well as the staff's interests into consideration.

iv. The management of Benue State University should address the lingering issues bordering the staff on time. Some of these issues include the timely payment of salaries, adequate communication and provision of staff welfare need to curtail the level of conflict among the staff at universities.

v. The BSU management must be flexible in the adoption of strategies of conflict management based on the situation at stake. The circumstances of the organization and the relationship subsisting between the parties must be allowed to determine the choice of management strategy. A mindset that accommodates conflicting viewpoints is necessary for the effective management of conflicts and must be flexible in the adoption of strategies of conflict management based on the situation at stake. The circumstances of the organization and the relationship subsisting between the parties must be allowed to determine the choice of management strategy. A mindset that accommodates conflicting viewpoints is necessary for the effective management of conflicts.

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