

Effects Of Conflict Situations On Staff Performance At University Of Cape Coast Library In Ghana

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Abstract: Conflict can produce both positive and negative results. The specific nature of these results depends largely on the way the conflict is managed. This study therefore set out to investigate the effects of conflict situations on staff performance in University of Cape Coast Library in Ghana. The study assessed the positive and negative effects of conflict on the performance of library staff. The study employed descriptive research design and used questionnaire to collect data from 64 respondents who were drawn from various sections and units of the library. Tables, frequencies, and percentages were used to analyse and present the data. The study revealed that conflict has both negative and positive effects on the library. Positively, conflict helps long standing problems among staff to be brought to the surface and resolved. Negatively, the study discovered that conflict reduces the productivity and performance of staff of university libraries in Ghana.

Keywords: Effects; Conflict; Staff performance; University of Cape Coast; Library.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Olorunsala (1997) conflict is an essential aspect of all organisations and almost every library staff has some personal experience with conflict situations either as a junior staff, senior staff, or senior member. This is because conflict could be experienced as people interact with other colleagues at meetings, programmes and discussions. Yet, it is commonly believed that very few managers accept the reality of conflict.

Although it is true that conflict brings about discomfort and can be a source of problems, it is additionally true that conflict has a positive dimension in every organisations. This means that conflicts can have beneficial effects on staff. Managing conflicts can enhance the staff's experience in the University libraries and can also help the staff to learn how to handle such issues when they come up. In this case, the library staff will get the knowledge and the skills needed to deal with and minimize staff conflicts.

It is an indisputable fact that directors of libraries feel uncomfortable with conflict. Many even see it as something to be suppressed and stifled in all situations. However, conflicts

handled well can provide priceless prospects for learning and adjustment. Some of these prospects are: boosting of relationships among staff, allowing for better decision making, and stimulating involvement in discussions and the building of group cohesion, empowering people to discover constructive solutions in problem solving (Robinson & Clifford, 1974). It is hoped that when conflicts among library staff are effectively managed and utilized positively, it would serve as a step towards achieving efficient service to patrons of the library. It is against this reason that a study on the effects of conflict situations on staff performance in University of Cape Coast Library in Ghana has become necessary.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the apparent silence of librarians on the issues of conflict, conflict is alive and well in libraries, as in other complex organisations. Badu (2001) notes that university libraries in Ghana have been plagued with petty squabbles, interpersonal and intersectional conflicts as well as coalitions of factions whose activities run counter-productive to their

goals and objectives. He further argues that internal politics in some university libraries in Ghana is so rife that this prevents or delays the implementation of some major policy decisions. In addition, it has been identified in an early study that some library staff of university of Cape Coast have no clear-cut job roles and this leads to frequent violation of one another's territory. Library conflicts occur when people or parties perceive that, as a consequence of disagreement, there is a threat to their needs, interests or concerns. The effects of conflict become negative if proper conflict management is not done. This paper therefore examines the positive and negative effects of conflict situations on the performance of the library staff of the university of Cape Coast.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study answers the following research questions:

- ✓ What are the positive effects of conflict situations on staff performance in University of Cape Coast Library?
- ✓ What are the negative effects of conflict situations on staff performance in University of Cape Coast Library?

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. EFFECTS OF CONFLICTS ON UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST LIBRARY

Conflict can produce both positive and negative results. The specific nature of these results depends largely on the way the conflict is managed. Many approaches can be applied in dealing with conflict and how effectively it is managed will have a major influence in determining its potential in producing a positive or negative result (Capozzoli, 1995; Garrison & Bly, 1996). According to Mensa-Bonsu and Effah (2003) conflict can be positive or negative with regard to the circumstances under which it occurs. Conflict is positive when it produces gains, innovations, new ideas as well as fostering unity and understanding among members. However, the negative aspect of conflict is seen when it leads to stress, hostility and fear, thereby resulting in physical illness such as headache and hypertension among staff.

a. POSITIVE EFFECTS OF CONFLICTS

Boulding (1993) points out that despite the adverse effect conflict can produce, disagreement between people has its good side. Robbins (2000) asserts that a certain amount of conflict in an organisation is healthy as it prevents the organisation from stagnating and from producing myopic decisions. Conflict is a pivot around which change takes place in workplaces and the society at large. When we disagree it sharpens our focus and defines what the important issues are.

The first positive effect of conflict on university libraries is that it helps long standing problems among staff to be brought to the surface and resolved. Schmidt (1982) asserted that conflict can produce better ideas, force people to search for new approaches; create the opportunity for long-standing problems to be brought to the surface and resolved; bring

about the clarification of individual views; stimulation of interest and creativity; and also create a chance for people to test their capacities.

Secondly, conflict among staff helps to diffuse more serious conflicts within the library organisation. Filley (1975) suggests that games can be used to moderate the attitudes of people by providing a competitive situation which can liberate tension in the conflicting parties, as well as having some entertainment value. In an organisation such as the university library where members participate in decision making, disputes are usually minor and the likelihood of major fights are minimised.

Another benefit of conflict among university libraries is that it helps to increase group's cohesion and performance. According to Filley (1975), when two or more parties are in conflict, the performance and cohesion of each party is likely to improve. This is because in a conflict situation, an opponent's position is evaluated negatively, and group allegiance is strongly reinforced, leading to increased group effort and cohesion. Eccles and Gabbaro (1995) note that conflict makes groups become more cohesive and operate more effectively as teams, increasing group and individual motivation which goes a long way to boost standards of performance as a result of commitment and concern to make better decisions. When a group is threatened, its members pull together in solidarity.

Conflict enables library staff to achieve their goals and objectives. Through conflict, people in an organisation are able to *achieve* their goals and objectives (Filley, 1975). Jennings and Wattam (2005) agree to this assertion by saying that conflict is a necessary agent to stimulate change and innovation and those problems and inefficiencies in working will be highlighted by conflict whereas attempts to eliminate conflict can lead to such matters being "swept under the carpet". This means a healthy competition and rivalry can lead to better decisions being made as attention is more clearly focused on the issue.

Finally, conflict stimulates a search for new facts, ideas or resolutions in the library. When two staff who respects each other faces a conflict situation, the conflict resolution process may help in clarifying the facts and stimulating a search for mutually acceptable solutions. Conflict therefore brings harmony in the library.

b. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CONFLICTS

Just as conflict has its good side, it has a negative side as well in university libraries in Ghana. According to Aldag and Stearns (1994), anyone who has ever worked in an organisation knows that conflict exists and that it can have destructive effects on the organisation and the members' activities.

Firstly, conflict reduces the productivity and performance of university libraries. As libraries devote their precious time to dealing with conflict situations, productivity and quality of work will also suffer. This is because staffs rather divert their time towards winning the conflict rather than towards achieving the libraries' goals. Nelson (1995) explains that not only can conflict in the workplace cause great stress and

unhappiness but it can also lower output and in extreme cases, bring strikes.

Secondly, conflict situations in university libraries in Ghana hamper their decision making processes. Barker and Gum (1994) state that in the midst of conflict, opposing individuals or groups will put their own interests and goals above those of the organisation resulting in the lessening in the organisation's effectiveness. Kirchoff and Adams (1982) assert that conflict in an organisation impedes the smooth running of the organisation since the decision making processes may be obstructed.

Furthermore, conflict causes fragmentation or division among the staff of university libraries in Ghana. Schmidt (1982) records that one of the negative effects of conflicts is that it causes an increase in the distance between people. Kirchoff and Adams (1982) assert that the destructive effect of conflict is the formation of competing affiliations within the organisation. The overall result of such negative effects is to reduce employees' commitment to organisational goals and organisational efficiency.

Conflict among staff of university libraries in Ghana makes some people feel defeated and demeaned. Schmidt (1982) buttresses this by indicating that people who lost in conflict situations feel defeated and demeaned by their colleagues.

Another negative effect of conflict among libraries in Ghana is the development of the climate of mistrust, suspicion and tension or stress among staff. Since university libraries are divided into departments and units, there is the need for rapid exchange of information from one department to the other. In conflict situations, the pathway for messages among staff may be littered with obstacles and the true sharing of information may be hindered. Some workers in the library may always be suspicious of what management says and may therefore look at every word of management in different ways. According to Schmidt (1982) conflicts in organisations bring about the development of a climate of mistrust and suspicion among workers.

Conflict in university libraries may lead to the development of resistance rather than team work among staff. Kirchoff and Adams (1982) assert that conflict among workers leads to the formation of competing affiliations within the organisation. They added that sometimes workers emotions become so strong that some people want to strike at the other person. Schmidt (1982) buttresses it by saying that since in conflict individuals and groups concentrate on their own interests, development of resistance rather than teamwork becomes the result.

V. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study includes research design, population, sample size, sampling techniques, instrumentation, and how the data collected is analysed and interpreted. The details of these have been discussed.

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design refers to the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately its conclusions (Yin, 2003). Nachimias and Nachimias (1992) consider research design as 'a plan that guides the investigator in the process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting observations. The research design that was used for this study is a descriptive survey type. Descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. According to Anderson (1990), a descriptive survey is conducted where, the researcher attempts to reach a sample of the desired group and collect detailed data from respondents.

B. POPULATION

The population in this library is composed of senior members, senior staff and Junior Staff. Currently, the entire strength of staff in this library is about 225. Out of this, ten are Senior Members, 55 are Senior Staff, and about 160 are Junior Staff. The senior members are staff who have acquired a second degree or higher in Information Studies. Senior staff are also made up of staff with a first degree/ diploma in Library studies and Junior staff is made up of Junior Library Assistants, Typists, Messengers, Photocopying Operators, Janitors and Cleaners.

C. SAMPLE SIZE

A Sample refers to any group on which information is obtained in a research (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2000). According to Fraenkel and Warren (2000), for any scientific study, if the population is large, five percent of the population could be selected as the sample. However, for this study, the researcher chose twenty five percent (25%) of the Senior and Junior staff respectively. In addition, since the senior members were only ten in number, they were purposively included in this study. The sample size therefore constitutes twenty eight point four percent (28.4%) of the target population. The sample was made up of the ten senior members, 14 senior staff and 40 junior staff. These categories of staff from the various sections of the library, including the departmental and faculty libraries were randomly and purposively invited to participate in the study.

D. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The researcher used the purposive and simple random sampling techniques to select the respondents. The purposive sampling technique was used to select respondents in the senior member's category whereas the simple random technique was also used to select respondents in the Senior and Junior staff categories. These techniques were used to ensure that the sample adequately represents the target population and to obtain the most relevant information, and to allow informational adequacy and appropriateness of data. In order to conduct this sampling strategy, the researcher used the lottery method. Under this strategy, the researcher first

defined the population, listed down all members of the population by assigning numbers against their names, placed them into a container, and mixed well and removed one slip or paper at a time from the container without looking into it. The researcher therefore recorded the number or name on the slip. When a slip was picked or selected already, it was however thrown back into the container, mixed properly before the next one was picked. This process was continued until the required number of respondents was recorded. If an already drawn number is selected for a second or third time it is ignored, that is, it is thrown back into the container. In addition, the ten senior members were selected purposively because certain vital information could only be obtained from such level of staff or management. The selected members made up the sample of this study. For this purpose, a self-administered survey questionnaire was given to the staff to express their views and opinions on the topic under study.

E. INSTRUMENTATION

To accomplish the purpose of this study, both primary and secondary data were collected. The instrument used to elicit relevant data for this study was a set of questionnaire. Data collection was done personally with three Research Assistants who were also trained. Orientation was conducted for the Assistants so that they could be able to explain the nature of the study and the part they play in it. The questionnaire was personally administered with all additional instructions personally given to ensure effective data collection on the research problem.

F. METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULT

Since the study was purely descriptive, the data was processed and analysed according to the format required by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.0. Percentages and frequencies were calculated, and tables were also constructed to illustrate the analysis and findings of the study. The analysis of data allows the researcher to manipulate information collected during the study in order to assess and evaluate the findings and arrive at some valid, meaningful and relevant conclusions.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

EFFECTS OF CONFLICT ON PERFORMANCE OF LIBRARY STAFF

Table 6.1 presents the respondents' views on the negative effects of conflict situations on the performance of the library staff.

A. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF CONFLICT ON STAFF PERFORMANCE

Negative Effects of Conflict	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	U Freq. (%)	Total Freq. (%)
Reduces the	31	26	2	2	3	64

productivity and performance of staff	(48.4)	(40.6)	(3.1)	(3.1)	(4.7)	(100)
Hampers the decision making process among staff	21 (32.8)	33 (51.6)	3 (4.7)	3 (4.7)	4 (6.3)	64 (100)
Causes fragmentation (division) among staff	36 (56.3)	20 (31.3)	1 (1.6)	4 (6.3)	3 (4.7)	64 (100)
Some people (workers) may feel defeated and demeaned	19 (29.7)	36 (56.3)	1 (1.6)	1 (1.6)	7 (10.9)	64 (100)
Development of a climate of mistrust, suspicion and tension (stress) among staff	25 (39.1)	30 (46.9)	2 (3.1)	2 (3.1)	5 (7.8)	64 (100)
Development of resistance rather than teamwork	29 (45.3)	26 (40.6)	1 (1.6)	3 (6.3)	4 (6.3)	64 (100)

Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 1

Table 6.1 provides the respondents views on the negative impact of conflict on staff performance in the library investigated. Out of the total respondents of 64, 31 representing 48.4 percent strongly agreed that conflict among staff could reduce the productivity and performance of staff. About 26 (40.6) respondents also agreed to this statement, a total of 6.2 percent of the respondents disagreed and 4.7 percent were undecided on the issue. Thus, a total of 89 percent of the respondents agreed that conflict in libraries reduces performance and productivity of university libraries. This confirms Nelson's (1995) assertion that not only can conflict in the workplace cause great stress and unhappiness but it can also lower output and in extreme cases, bring strikes. This means that as managers of libraries devote their precious time to dealing with conflict situations, productivity and quality of work will also suffer. This is because staffs rather divert their time towards winning the conflict rather than towards achieving the libraries' goals.

Another negative effect of conflict in libraries is that it frustrates or hampers the decision making processes of staff. The result reveals that 32.8 percent strongly agreed and about 51.6 percent also agreed that conflict can disturb the decision making process of libraries. About 3(4.7%) strongly disagreed and 3(24.7%) disagreed while 4(6.3%) of the respondents remained undecided. About 84.4 percent agreed that conflict hampers decision making processes as confirmed by Kirchoff and Adams's (1982) assertion that conflict in an organisation impedes the smooth running of organisations since the decision making processes may be obstructed.

On the issue of conflict causing fragmentation or divisions among staff, 56.3 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, 20 respondents representing 31.3 percent agreed, 1.6 percent strongly disagreed, and 1.6 percent agreed while 3 (4.7%) were undecided on the statement. Schmidt records that one of the negative effects of conflict is that it causes an increase in the distance between people. Kirchoff and Adams (1982) also support this by indicating that the destructive effect of conflict is the formation of competing affiliations within the organisation. The overall result of such negative

effects is to reduce employees' commitment to organisational goals and organisational efficiency.

With respect to the views of staff on the assertion that conflict makes some people feel defeated and demeaned, a total of 55 respondents representing 86 percent agreed to this, 2 respondents representing 3.2 percent disagreed and 7 (10.9%) were undecided on the issue. Schmidt (1985) buttresses this by indicating that people who lost in conflict situations feel defeated and demeaned by their colleagues.

Conflict leads to the development of climate of mistrust, suspicion and tension or stress among staff. About 55 (86%) agreed, 4 (6.2%) disagreed and 5 (7.8%) were undecided. The data revealed that majority of the respondents accepted that conflict creates a platform for the development of a climate of mistrust and suspicion among workers, which is in agreement with Schmidt's (1985) statement that conflicts in organisations bring about the development of a climate of mistrust and suspicion among workers. Thus, since university libraries are divided into sections and units, there is the need for rapid exchange of information from one department to the other. In conflict situations, the pathway for messages among staff may be littered with obstacles and the true sharing of information may be hindered. Some workers in the library may always be suspicious of what management says and may therefore look at every word of management in different ways.

Finally, with the issue on conflict leading to the development of resistance rather than teamwork among staff, 29 (45.3%) strongly agreed, 26 (40.6%) agreed, 1 (1.6%) strongly disagreed, 4 (6.3%) disagreed and 4 (6.3%) were undecided on this statement. Schmidt (1985) buttresses it by saying that since in conflict, individuals and groups concentrate on their own interests, development of resistance rather than teamwork becomes the result.

B. POSITIVE EFFECTS OF CONFLICT ON STAFF PERFORMANCE

Table 6.2 below presents a summary of the respondents' views on the positive effects of conflict on the library under investigation.

Positive Effects of Conflict	SA Freq. (%)	A Freq. (%)	SD Freq. (%)	D Freq. (%)	U Freq. (%)	Total Freq. (%)
Increases staff's cohesion and performance	29 (45.3)	26 (40.6)	1 (1.6)	4 (6.3)	4 (6.3)	64 (100)
Helps to diffuse more serious conflicts among staff	12 (18.8)	30 (46.9)	3 (4.7)	8 (12.5)	11 (17.2)	64 (100)
Improves quality decisions among staff	21 (32.8)	28 (43.8)	4 (6.3)	8 (12.5)	3 (4.7)	64 (100)
Enables staff of the library to achieve their goals and objectives	15 (23.4)	19 (29.7)	10 (15.6)	14 (21.9)	6 (9.4)	64 (100)

Enables long standing problems to be brought to the surface and resolved	13 (20.3)	36 (56.3)	3 (4.7)	3 (4.7)	9 (14.1)	64 (100)
Stimulates a search for new ideas and approaches among staff	18 (28.1)	30 (46.9)	3 (4.7)	3 (4.7)	10 (15.6)	64 (100)

Source: Field Data, 2016

Table 2

From the table 6.2 above, out of the 64 respondents, 28.1 percent strongly agreed that conflict that occurs serves as a means of increasing staff's cohesion and performance of staff. About 28.1 percent of the respondents agreed and 14.1 percent strongly disagreed while 21.9 percent disagreed. However, 7.8 percent were undecided on the issue. It has been realised that majority (56.2) percent of the total respondents agreed to the assertion that conflict increases staff's cohesion and performance. This is in support of Filley's (1975) view that when two or more parties are in conflict, the performance and cohesion of each party is likely to improve. This is because in a conflict situation, an opponent's position is evaluated negatively, and group allegiance is strongly reinforced, leading to increased group effort and cohesion. Eccles and Gabbaro (1995) buttressed this by indicating that the impact of conflict is that, groups become more cohesive and operate more effectively as teams, which boost standards of performance as a result of commitment and concern to make better decisions.

Another positive effect of conflict in the library is that it helps to diffuse more serious conflicts among staff because it facilitates the clarification of individual views. The views of the respondents revealed that 12 (18.8%) strongly agreed, 30 (46.9%) agreed, 4.7 percent strongly disagreed, 8 (12.5%) disagreed and 11 (17.2) were undecided on this issue. The analysis indicates that about 65.7 percent were in agreement to Filley's (1975) assertion that "conflict situations help to diffuse more serious conflicts in an organisation. "And to diffuse conflict, games can be used to moderate the attitudes of people by providing a competitive situation which can liberate tension in the conflicting parties, as well as having some entertainment value".

Respondents also observed that conflict helps in improving quality decisions among staff in the library. About 32.8 percent of the respondents strongly accepted this assertion. About 43.8 percent agreed and 6.3 percent strongly disagreed, 12.5 percent disagreed while 4.7 percent were undecided. The finding indicates that the majority of the respondents agreed that conflict brings about innovations which improve quality decision making in resolving conflict. Owens (2001) confirms this by noting that conflict can lead to better decisions being made as attention is more clearly focused on the issue. Filley (1975) buttressed it that in an organisation where members participate in decision making, disputes are usually minor and not acute as the closeness of members' moderate aggressive and assertive behaviour.

Conflict is also noted to enable staff achieve their goals and objectives. With reference to the assertion, 23.4 percent strongly agreed, 29.7 percent agreed whereas 9.4 percent

remained undecided. About 15.6 percent strongly disagreed while 21.9 percent disagreed. The result indicates that, greater numbers of respondents were in an agreement with the assertion; conflict encourages innovativeness and improves quality decisions which enable staff to achieve their goals and objectives. Filley (1975) buttresses these by saying through conflict people in an organisation are able to achieve their objectives.

With respect to conflict enabling long standing problems among staff to be brought to the surface and resolved, out of the total respondents of 64, about 76.6 percent agreed, 9.4 percent disagreed and 9 (14.1%) were undecided on the issue. The analysis revealed that majority of the respondents agreed to the statement. Schmidt (1982) also confirms that conflict can produce better ideas, force people to search for new approaches; create the opportunity for long-standing problems to be brought to the surface and resolved; bring about the clarification of individual views; stimulation of interest and creativity; and also create a chance for people to test their capacities.

Finally, conflict is responsible for producing better ideas, and forcing staff to search for new approaches of handling issues in the library. With respect to this, 18 (28.1%) strongly agreed, 30 (46.9%) agreed, 6 (9.4%) disagreed and 10 (15.6%) could not decide on this statement. However, majority making 75.0 percent of the respondents agreed to this assertion thereby confirming Schmidt's (1985) statement that conflict can produce better ideas, force people to search for new approaches; bring about the clarification of individual views and stimulation of interest and creativity in an organisation.

VII. CONCLUSION

Though conflict is often viewed as negative, it is capable of improving quality decisions, as long standing problems among staff are brought to the surface and resolved, thereby increasing innovativeness and productivity, which could improve staff performance. Conflicts when properly managed among staff could lead to the attainment and achievement of staff goals and objectives, and build the spirit of teamwork and co-operation.

It is therefore recommended that management should constantly organise seminars and workshops on conflict management for staff. This would enable the staff learn about conflicts and how they could be effectively managed for staff to derive positive outcomes of conflicts.

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