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## Relational Skills and Conflict Management Techniques among Staff in Baptist Government Hospital Eku, Delta State

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### Abstract

The study seeks to investigate relational skills and conflict management techniques among the Baptist Government Hospital, Eku staff. This study is a correlational survey study which uses a questionnaire as an instrument of data collection. The population comprises all staff of the hospital. A sample of 120 staff was selected, the instrument titled "Relationship and Conflict Management Scale", which had a reliability coefficient of 0.82. Data was collected after administration with the help of a research assistant, and same was collected immediately. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The result of the study indicated that there is a significant relationship between relational skills and conflict management techniques among staff, and that there is a significant relationship between dialogue, communication, competition, prevention and conflict management. It was recommended that management should create the appropriate atmosphere for recreational activities that affords staff the opportunity to relate better, dialogue should be institutionalised, and there should be competition and prevention amongst others.

**Keywords:** Relational, Conflict, Management, Techniques.

### Introduction

Wherever there is more than one man, a relationship is formed, and conflict is also bound to arise. Conflict is a phenomenon that cannot be avoided completely; it can only be managed, especially when it is discovered on time. It therefore becomes very important to fast-track signals that may point to the existence of conflicts to be able to subdue any unlawful situation that might arise from it. People in organisations deal with conflict daily; conflicts cannot be avoided most time, but it is possible to manage them in a way that enhances reconciliation on time. It is necessary to continuously track the organisational signals which point to the existence of conflicts; once noticed, proper action must be taken to harness them, but if we do not react duly, this can lead to a situation whereby conflict itself begins to manage the organisation. Conflicts usually occur between employees on one hand, employees and the authorities or management staff on the other; sometimes, there are also interpersonal conflicts based on relational issues. Comprehension of conflict management among employees at the workplace is one of the essential, though neglected, areas within organisations. Lazarus (2021) is of the view that, despite thousands of years of work by scholars on the role of conflict management techniques among co-workers in organisations, the scientific study of conflict within academia and other organisations is a relatively recent phenomenon. Conflict is regarded as the presence of discord that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and frustrate each other attempting to achieve objectives (Eboh, 2022; Kazimoto, 2013). Thus, conflict is an unavoidable part of organisational life since the purpose of diverse stakeholders such as managers and staff, are often unharmonious. Undoubtedly, within every human relation where there is competition for jobs, resources, power, recognition and security, conflict is always present (Adomie & Anie, 2005). Higher levels of conflict, according to Yusuf and Ibrahim (2019), include National Union of Medical and Health Workers, the Federal Government of Nigeria, and the National Labour Congress and the Federal Government. This study is particularly relevant at a time when the health sector was planning on embarking on a nationwide strike, which

would have claimed lots of lives but for the prompt intervention of the president by signing into law the thirty thousand minimum wage.

### Statement of the Problem

It is no longer news that individuals have issues in their interpersonal relationships with others, especially in organisations of work. As a staff member of the Baptist Government Hospital, Eku, I had a particular scenario where staff members got into a heated argument that almost claimed a life. Some of such issues could have been avoided if properly managed. Even the nonchalant attitude of some health workers or staff members is tantamount to patients losing their lives. This study therefore wishes to investigate the relational skills and conflict management techniques suitable for managing relationships at the workplace, especially in the Baptist Government Hospital, Eku.

Work is fundamental to the human condition and it determines, to a great extent what we do for most of our lives. Also, it preoccupies much of what we think about (Abbott, 2006). Work allows us to engage with people and it helps us to define our sense of identity. It further provides us with access to the material necessities of life as well as to the advantages and achievements of civilization. Therefore, good relationship at work is very vital to the workplace whether at the time of recruitment, during an employee's tenure or at the time of separation (Leat, 2008). Good relationship at work is the ability to create a conducive environment that ensures good, pleasant rapport and encourage healthier acquaintances among members of organization. Employers and employees are all key players in relationship; obtaining and sustaining an ideal relationship does not always occur due to some misunderstanding that might arise. Thus, colleagues sometimes might not meet certain expectations. Blyton and Tumbul (2004) said that to build a healthy relationship at work therefore, becomes necessary to ensure that issues are managed rightly, duly and competently. Some of the skills needed in building a healthy relationship includes; listening actively, communicating effectively, self-advocating, developing mutually healthy and productive relationships, making and maintaining trust, respect for oneself and significant others as well as constituted authority, and seeking the good of the organization amongst others. The role of communication cannot be over emphasized in relating to others, misunderstanding can mislead people to think otherwise than expected and bring about conflict. Where there is respect for self and others, things are done in the proper way that helps to reduce tension and friction around the work environment.

### Conflict Management Techniques

Conflict is defined as interpersonal disagreement, or a discord between two or more individuals, owing to differences in opinion, competition, negative perceptions, poorly defined role expectations or lack of communication (Ellis & Abbott, 2011; Marquis & Huston, 2017). Conflict is seen as a "disagreement between two or more organizational members or groups arising from the fact that they must share resources of work activities and/or from the fact that they have different status, goals, values or perceptions." In short, conflict refers to any kind of opposition or antagonistic intersection between two or more parties. Conflict has been defined in different ways. The commonest among these definitions holds that conflict is a perceived difference in interest. It is a belief that the current aspirations of the parties in a conflicting situation are incompatible (Pruit & Kim, 2004). In a similar vein, Wallenstein (2007) defined conflict as "a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an available set of scarce resources". Conflict could be described as all forms of opposition, disagreement, friction between two or more parties and it manifests in the form of arguments, protest, demonstration, aggression and other destructive behaviours. All these are common occurrences in organizational setting these days. Differences in opinions and interest of the individual groups in institutions may constitute conflict between staff and management, as well as among staff, hence management and personnel in institutions or organizations sometimes engage themselves in conflict situations which result into strikes, thereby affecting the masses and consequently reducing productivity (Adeyemi & Ademilua, 2012).

Conflict brings about reduction of work performance, deficiency, reduced communication among employees, motivation fall and ultimate employees' dissatisfaction are only some of the numerous negative consequences of conflict. But the conflict itself does not have to be negative; the majority of conflicts can in fact be an excellent ground for accomplishment of better business results, and an impulse for changes and growth of the organization itself. In the healthcare setting, Johansen (2012) he cited that conflict is borne from disparity in an individual perception in relation to patient care. He said prerequisites such as autocracy, hostility, disrespect, inequalities, hierarchy, low morale and absence of shared goals have been suggested as precipitating factors (Barr & Dowding, 2012). In presenting several definitions a wider perspective is provided upon how we define the larger, abstract concept of conflict in addressing these root causes, for example, mending relationships, improving communication, accepting change, all of which may be facilitated via effective leadership or managerial skill.

Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in an organizational setting. Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes; a positively handled conflict can result in the formation of new ideas, innovative approaches, and creativity which may contribute to higher morale and commitment in employees, strengthened organizational relationships, and enhance organizational performance (Kinicki & Kreithner, 2008; McKibben, 2017; Rahim, 2011). Conversely, failures with managing conflicts may result in disruptions in work performance, low staff performance, absenteeism, reduced work efficiency, wasting of resources, increased stress and burnout, and an overall negative effect related to the productivity of an organization (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014; Rahim, 2011; Turkalj et al., 2008). In nursing, constructively managed conflict is highly linked with improved patient safety and quality of nursing care, while poorly managed conflict can adversely affect nurses, the organization, and poor patient outcomes (Brinkert, 2010; Johansen, 2012; McKibben, 2017).

The cost of conflict includes direct cost, continuity cost and emotional cost (Nwofia, 2015). Where it will be difficult for health providers to care properly for their patients and achieve a healing process, even the patient on their part may not be comfortable receiving care from the person he or she is in disagreement with. Unfortunately, most administrators in the educational and health institutions are not knowledgeable enough in conflict management coupled with the absence of clear procedures for conflict management. Some of the conflicts centered on their personality and administrative styles of administrators; it is with this understanding that this study undertook to examine the relationship between forms of relationship and conflict management strategies in Baptist Government Hospital Eku, Delta State with a view to generating some recommendations towards attainment of the organizational goals of the institution.

Demer (2002) and Adebayo (2007) identified dialogue, mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, suppression and the use of force as conflict management strategies in organizations. Dialogue is “the art of thinking together” and is “sustained collective inquiry” into everyday experience and what we take for granted. Dialogue constructs a space for conversation that welcomes participants to invite a multiplicity of voices. It is intimately connected with the co-creation of new realities. Dialogue is meant to develop joint approaches to conflict resolution as well as improve relationships, understanding and trust between individuals or groups in conflict with one another. It is like a prevention strategy which is the object of a wide range of policies and initiatives. Its aim is to avoid violent escalation of a dispute. Dialogue is a method of resolving conflict among individuals whereby the management ensures that both staff are carried along the activities of the institutions (Umoren, 2001; Nwofia, 2015). Negotiation is essentially the process that takes place within conflict resolution and guides the agreement resulting in the target goal, whether it is peace or better understanding. Within this context; negotiation skills implies ability to dialogue successfully. While mediation could be regarded as the process of providing intervention between conflicting parties to promote reconciliation, settlement or compromise (Adomie & Anie, 2005; Okotoni & Okotoni, 2003).

Reconciliation is the long-term process by which the parties involved in a violent situation or dispute build trust, learn to live cooperatively and create a stable and peaceful relationship. Kelman (2010) Reconciliation is a multifaceted and ongoing process of building the relationship alliances and social understandings that are necessary to support systemic changes. It is however more complex than just repairing relationships (Freeman, 2014; Shed, 2015). In a simple way; according to Edson (2023) reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between people. Although, there is a need for the awareness of the past, there should be acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted and action to change behavior must be put in place.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated the relational skills and conflict management techniques among staff in Baptist Government Hospital Eku, Delta State. Therefore; specifically, the purpose of the study is to determine;

1. The relationship between relational skills (RS) and conflict management strategies(CMS) in Baptist Government Hospital Eku.
2. The singular and combined relationship between relational skills; dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation strategies as conflict management strategies.

## Hypotheses

The following hypothesis was formulated to guide the study:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between relational skills (RS) and conflict management strategies(CMS) in Baptist Government Hospital Eku.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no singular and combined significant relationship between relational skills; dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation strategies as conflict management strategies.

## Methodology

The study explored a correlational survey research design, carried-out at ex-post facto, with questionnaire as the major instrument of data collection. The Baptist Government Hospital and College of Nursing Science Eku in Delta State were used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 123 staff (respondents) across the institution. The sampled respondents were considered to be representatives of the entire population using Krejcie and Morgan table (Bukhari, 2020). The study is a typical questionnaire survey research. It is correlational because it seeks to establish relationships among the variables. The population for the study comprises of all the staff in the hospital. Precisely 180 including intern and NYSC members. 123 questionnaires were administered through two trained research assistants covering a period of two weeks since the respondents mostly run shift duties and 120 were retrieved immediately representing a response rate of 98% and deemed usable. The questionnaire, which was developed by the researcher, was tagged the "Relational Skills and Conflict Management Strategies Scale (RSCMSS)". It was developed at a four-point rating scale, allowing the respondents to indicate whether they "Strongly Agree" (SA) = 4, "Agree" (A) = 3, "Disagree" (D) = 2 or "Strongly Disagree" (SD) = 1 with the statements in the instrument. The instrument was moderated by an expert in the field of measurement and evaluation and psychology who affirmed its validity. Reliability index of 0.8 was established for the test-retest method at an interval of 3 weeks. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis; the hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

## Results

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between relational skills and conflict management strategies in Baptist Government Hospital Eku.

**Table 1: Relational Skills and Conflict Management Strategies.**

	Variable Num	Mean	SD	r-Cal	p-Value	Decision
RS	120	10.13	2.682	.525	.001	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
CSM	120	18.83	4.862			

Table one above, illustrated that relational skills and conflict management strategies were positively related,  $r = .525$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $p < .05$ . This indicated that there was a significant relationship between relational skills among staff and conflict management strategies because the  $p$ -value is less than the .05 level of significance. Therefore, H<sub>0</sub>, which stated that there is no significant relationship between relational skills and conflict management strategies was rejected.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no singular and combined significant relationship between relational skills, dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation strategies as conflict management strategies.

**Table 2: Relational Skills, Dialogue, Negotiation and Reconciliation Strategies in Conflict Management.**

	Variable Num	Mean	SD	r-Cal	p-Value	Decision
DS120	0.23	2.676	.545		.000	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
NS	120	8.94	2.574	.387	.000	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
RECONS	120	11.8	3.202	.371	.000	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
DS, NS, RS	120	10.15	2.707	.327	.000	H <sub>0</sub> Rejected
RS	120	10.13	2.682			

Table two above demonstrated that Relational Skills, Dialogue, Negotiation, and Reconciliation Strategies were positively related individually and collectively and significant in conflict management  $r(158) = 0.408$ ,  $p = .000$ .

This indicated a significant relationship between Relational Skills, Dialogue, Negotiation, and Reconciliation Strategies and conflict management strategy is less than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore,  $H_0$ , which stated that there is no significant relationship between Dialogue, Negotiation, and Reconciliation Strategies in Conflict Management was rejected.

### Discussion

Findings from Table 1 indicated that relational skills and conflict management strategies were positively related and significant. This implied a reasonable degree of association between relationship and conflict management strategy within an organization. Based on the result it could be argued that, through relationships at the workplace, the team members probably develop different relational skills to preventing or handling conflicts when they arise. This assertion is in accordance with the work of Yusuf & Ibrahim (2019) that stated that through relationship with one another at work, staff members develop various skills to think together and bring out reasonable ways of resolving issues. According to Bill (1997), success in life depends on the support and help from other people, no one can make it alone. In his work, he said work hard at building successful relationships, because without friendship or relationship one is doomed to loneliness. One of the ways to work on relationships is to ensure that friends are not taken for granted but always appreciated, show mutual respect, recognize yourself-worth as well as other people's self-worth, and overlook other people's failure.

Findings from Table 2 indicated that dialogue strategy is positively related and significant with conflict management. This implies that there is a reasonable degree of association between dialogue as a strategy of conflict management. Based on the result it could be argued that, through dialogue, the team members probably develop skills to think creatively together to understand alternative ways and willingness to accept differences. This finding is in line with that of Aja (2013) that dialogue offers the team a relative sense of psychological safety. It also corroborates with the view of Benson (2016) that without dialogue, individuals and groups can neither exchange ideas effectively, nor develop shared understanding. The study also supports the work of Ogunsanwo (2002) indicating that a "win-win" approach is the most effective conflict management style in order to prevent crises, thereby improving workers performance in an organization.

From the result of Table 2, it was also deduced that negotiation strategy as a conflict management and relational skills were positively related and significant. This necessarily implies that there is a need for free flow of information in our institutions and organizations. Lack of access to information breeds rumors and invariably results in conflict. Adequate communication and negotiation in turn reduces conflict and maximizes productivity. The study is in line with the submission of Olagunju and Eweniyi (2002), in their study of strategies in conflict resolution among organizational workers. They concluded that both male and female workers had the same positive view of using negotiation strategy to resolve conflicts. The view of Akinboye (2002), Fabunmi and Alimba (2010) was equally corroborative, the importance of empathic communication through active listening in organizational conflict resolution cannot be over-emphasized. However, with integrative conflict management strategies, such as dialogue and communication, there is often high confidence and trust among organizational members, there exists loyalty to the school organization in the achievement of institutional performance.

Reconciliation strategy was also discovered to significantly and positively relate with relational skills. This indicated a degree of association between reconciliation as a strategy of conflict management in our institutions and organizations and relational skills. Reconciliation strategy involves letting go of grievances and giving peace a chance by taking all the parties involved into consideration. The study supports that of Edson (2010), that reconciliation eliminates hatred and miss trust, it promotes an encounter between open expression of the painful past hence enhancing long-term future interdependence. It is also in agreement with the work of Kelman (2010) which opined that reconciliation brings about changes to individual employees or group behaviour in an organization. Administrators may establish end of year parties, make-up parties, contests, incentive plans or bonuses because each participant will definitely relate with others thereby bringing about peace and improving organizational performance.

### Conclusion

Man is a social being that is encompassed with relationships, no matter how highly placed or lowly placed a person may be, he or she must relate with others. In relating with other people; there would likely arise some issues either directly or indirectly through misunderstanding, negligence, conflicting interests, strive for power or position etc. once issues starts coming up, work or progress is delayed hence there is need for every individual to know how to relate well with the people around them and to know different skills or strategies to employ whenever conflicts



arise in their environment especially in work places; this is in order to ensure peaceful and harmonious coexistence.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were generated from the findings;

1. Management of institutions and organizations should institutionalize dialogue. They need to explore dialogue strategy as a foremost step among others in managing conflict. Through dialogue, team members develop skills to accept differences, thereby preventing crises and improving performance.
2. Managers of tertiary institutions and organizations should improve their negotiation skills and be ready to provide communication channels. Administrators should ensure free flow of information in their organizations. They should be aware that lack of access to information breeds rumors and invariably results into crises
3. Workers in institutions should try as much as possible to imbibe relational skills in organization. They must note that a peaceable organization results when values are ensured as well as skills of cooperation, tolerance are supported in the culture of the organization that are components to relational skills.
4. Management and individual staff should try as much as possible to ensure that once there is any form of conflict, there has to be actions put in place to bring about reconciliation.

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