

AVOIDANCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND WORKPLACE HARMONY IN OIL SERVICING FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

¹Dr Dumo Nkesi Opara and ²Mbani Holmes Berewa

¹Department of Office and Information Management, ²MSc Student of Department of Management, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Email: dumopara@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between avoidance management strategies and workplace harmony in oil servicing firms in Rivers State. The study adopted cross sectional and ex-post facto design. Data were generated by quantitative and qualitative method. The study used purposive sampling techniques. A total population of 330, sample size of 321 was determined using Yaro Yamane's formula at 0.05 level of significance. Also, 321 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents, while 317 copies were completed and retrieved. The instruments were validated with reliability above 0.7 co-efficient, using Cronbach Alpha technique. The reliability coefficient analysis was avoidance ($\alpha = .882$), accommodating ($\alpha = .878$), mediation ($\alpha = .866$), infrequent strike ($\alpha = .884$), mutual trust ($\alpha = .870$), management workers cooperation ($\alpha = .882$) and organisation culture ($\alpha = .887$). Three hypotheses were raised which was tested with Pearson Product Moment Correlation. From the findings, the concept of avoidance conflict management strategies creates positive impact on infrequent strike, mutual trust and management workers cooperation. In conclusion, avoidance strategies have significant influence on the workplace harmony of the oil servicing firm. Based on the findings and conclusion, this study contributes to the knowledge that effective conflict management encourages enthusiasm, boosts morale, and stimulates individual and organizational development; while ineffective conflict management produces more conflict and destructively effects the whole organization. It could be recommended that oil producing firms in Port Harcourt should endeavor to adopt and use mediation as a means of settling organizational conflicts to achieve lasting harmony. Also, workers or employees should do their best to avoid confronting organizational matters in such a way that it will result to management- worker non-cooperation.

Keywords: Avoidance, Frequent Strike, Mutual Trust Cooperation

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is phenomenon that exists in every organization and it can demoralize employees work performance, but it depends on the ability of employers and employees to manage the conflict. Workplace harmony is imperative in achieving organizational high level of productivity (Galdi, 2016). But the researchers have observed that many organizations have failed to manage conflict existing between workers [union] and their employers. At the same time, much less work has been done to rigorously research and understand the motivations and means employed by individuals who choose peace instead of violence. In large part, our theories and strategies begin from the recognition that violent conflict exists and so we seek to move toward peace. That the opposite is also true – peace exists alongside and even in the midst of violence – somehow is less apparent to us, or at least less thoroughly examined. The same linear thinking from negative to positive also tends to dominate the practices and policies of the peace building community, including governmental and nongovernmental actors. Despite a common recognition that peace is the ultimate goal, we have yet to develop a strong theoretical foundation or build a strong body of evidence to explain how and why individuals and communities opt for peace over violence more often than not, and, notably, why they do so even in the midst of severe violence. If, as Kenneth and Elise Boulding proposed, what exists is possible, then people choosing to actively pursue peace

amid violence represents a critically understudied area of human possibility for transforming our world. It encompasses developing theories of individual and community agency for peaceful change, what I call peace agency; addressing questions of how choices at the micro level affect broader societal transformation, or systems change; and considering how the field as a whole can transform our own understanding, relationships, and resources in ways that strengthen the ability of local communities and individuals to choose peace in transformative ways. My research will explore the question of why and how people choose peace in the midst of violence, with hopes of gaining insight into the motivations and means that drive individuals to make and sustain those choices. Motivations may include beliefs and values, attitudes, or personal experiences. They may include categories I have not considered. By examining means as well, I hope to understand not just why people are motivated to act for peace, but how they do so. That is, what are the strategies they employ and the resources – internal or external – upon which they draw the energy and ability to sustain their choices over time, often despite considerable risks to themselves. In pursuing this research, I will draw from the pioneering work of theorists and practitioners who have studied the causes and consequences, the means and motivations, of peace. My methodology will include interviews of individuals who have chosen peace in the midst of violence (as will be defined within the study), focused on understanding motivations and means of those choices. It will take an iterative, grounded-theory approach, recognizing the research question is a theory-building one, without specific hypotheses that will be tested. At the same time, some preliminary hypotheses regarding motivations and means will be used in the development of the interview questions and process. For instance, consideration of the role of values and conscience that may motivate individuals toward peace; the effects of direct experiences with violence or peace; or the influence of leaders or personal mentors in shaping decisions.

Another issue that necessitated this study is the increasing frequency of industrial strike and low cooperation between management and workers in oil producing firms in the Niger delta and Rivers State in particular (Ndule&Ekechukwu, 2015), It is therefore, imperative to empirically investigate how conflict management strategies influence workplace harmony in Oil producing Firms in Rivers State.

Hypotheses

Based on the research questions, the following null hypotheses were formulated:

1. Avoidance does not have any significant influence on infrequent strike in Oil producing firms in Port Harcourt.
2. Avoidance does not have any significant effect on mutual trust in Oil producing firms in Port Harcourt.
3. Avoidance does not have any significant influence on management- workers' cooperation in Oil producing firms in Port Harcourt.

Avoidance Strategies and Workplace Harmony

According to Fisher (2000), avoidance occurs when the cooperation and persistence of satisfying one's personal needs is very low. Conflict is a natural element of high-performing workplace employees and teams. When conflict is managed well, it can be a highly effective means of identifying and resolving tough workplace challenges, often resulting in improved relationships and Solutions Armstrong (2009). Avoiding conflict, discouraging it or allowing chronic unhealthy conflict to remain unresolved can be disastrous to organizational health, Moriarty (2007). Avoidance is characterized by behavior that either ignores or refuses to engage in the conflict. While avoidance is considered as a negative strategy that shows low concern for both parties' interests. Avoiding conflict is sometimes a strategy reason especially when the relationship is short-term and the issue is not important or when the situation has a potential to escalate to violence. Avoidance may include saying the issue isn't important enough to spend time on or saying there isn't enough time to do the topic justice Moriarty (2007). The goal of using avoidance is to delay. It is appropriate

to use this style when there are issues of low importance, to reduce tensions, or to buy time. Avoidance is also appropriate when you are in a low power position and have little control over the situation, when you need to allow others to deal with the conflict, or when the problem is symptomatic of a much larger issue and you need to work on the core issue.

Overuse of the avoidance style can result to a low level of input, decision-making, and allowing issues to fester, which can produce a breakdown in communication between team members as put by Okoth (2012). People who overuse avoidance cannot speak frankly without fear of repercussions. The overuse of conflict avoidance can often be a result of childhood experiences, past work-related incidents, and negative experiences with conflict resolution. A milder form of avoidance behavior is when the team member procrastinates about getting work done and deliberately takes an opposing point of view inappropriately during a decision-making situation, or is timid, withdrawn, or shy. Extreme behaviors can occur when avoidance is overused. A person begins to be negative, critical and sarcastic. Other extreme avoidance behaviour includes becoming passive aggressive by being late and not paying attention at meetings. It also lends a greater importance to this style as compared to the other styles because you have devoted such a disproportionate amount of time to the style.

Underuse of the avoidance style results in hostility and hurt feelings. In addition, work can become overwhelming because too many issues are taken on at once, resulting in an inability to prioritize and delegate. When avoidance is underused a team member may deny that there is a problem and allow their hurt feelings to prevent communication. Bricoe and Schuler (2004) have offered procedures for turning dysfunctional conflict into functional conflict, stating that too many organizations tend to take a win-lose, competitive approach to conflict or at worst avoid conflict altogether. Such a negative view of conflict ensures that a group is ineffective and the activity within it becomes destructive. Some practicing managers view group conflict negatively and thus seek to resolve or eliminate all types of disputes (Dowling et al, 2008). These managers contend that conflicts disrupt the organization and prevent optimal performance. As such, conflicts are a clear indication that something is wrong with the organization and that sound principles are not being applied in managing the activities of the organization.

In the workplace, managers sometimes avoid directly dealing with conflict among co-workers by simply separating them. In workplaces and other situations where continued contact with a person cannot be severed, workers may abstain from confrontation as being too risky or uncomfortable, opting instead to avoid directly dealing with the situation by venting to others or engaging in passive aggressive methods of attack such as gossip. Unresolved conflict in the workplace has been linked to miscommunication resulting from confusion or refusal to cooperate, increased stress, distrust. Kehinde (2011), some possible results of conflict-averse include poor-performing executives can survive because the president doesn't investigate or act on employee complaints; conflict can become malignant between departments, because there is no tie breaker to force resolution; and ineffective managers are passed from one department to the next. Kehinde (2011) is in agreement with Ogungbamila (2006) and Omoluabi (2001) who note that this strategy has the tendency to prompt counterproductive work behavior.

Enemy System Theory (EST)

The Enemy System Theory was developed to help explain intractable conflict and was used to explain the Cold War in the early 1990s before the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is a fusion of developmental psychology and international relations theory. This theory presents some important conceptualizations which help to create a sophisticated explanatory model of conflict. It has been used to explain terrorism in general, but it has not been widely adopted to explain the totality of conflict (Montville in Volkan 1990). It is a key assumption of this study that use of concepts from the Enemy System Theory and the Human Needs Theory offer a comprehensive and balanced theoretical explanation of conflict. It is hoped that this will further the development of a paradigm shift away from the current debate on internal - external explanations, and foster the development

of a more comprehensive approach based on the fusion of micro and macro approaches to conflict theory as an explanation of the conflict. The Enemy System Theory (EST) was developed in the late 1980s by a group of psychiatrists and international relations practitioners (former members of the American National Security Council and the U.S. State Department), as a model to explain the complexities of group behaviour, particularly with regard to antagonistic group relationships. The gist of the Enemy System Theory is the hypothesis that humans have a deep rooted psychological need to dichotomize and to establish enemies and allies (Volkan 1990).

This phenomenon happens on individual and group levels. This is an unconscious need which feeds conscious relationships, especially in our group lives. This is especially important with regard to the formation of ethnic or national group identities and behavior. Identification with these ethnic or national groups largely determines how we relate to people within our in groups and with those of our out-groups. How the masses within each group perceive themselves and their relationship will be based on cooperation, competition, or conflict. This is also determined by historic relations between these groups. Consequently, the theory combines concepts from individual and group psychology, as well as international relations theory. As Vamik Volkan explains: This particular approach requires a penetrating examination of how the human mind is reflected in the process of decision making by a large group. It explores the following phenomenon: the psychological need to have enemies and allies (Volkan 1988); the intertwining of the individual's sense of self and that of the group's identity with the concepts of ethnicity and nationality; and the ways in which wars, with all their logistical planning, are connected to man's primitive and unconscious impulses. In terms of large group interaction, most of these processes are involuntary (1990).

METHODOLOGY

The study was integrated with the cross sectional and correlational research design.

The targeted population was centred on thirty oil servicing firms in the Rivers State of Nigeria from the data base of Nigeria Midstream and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NPRA). But focused was on to five oil servicing firms that have met the statutory requirement of the regulatory bodies (NPRA) as at 2021 and authentic implementation of the standards procedure and policy guide that had obtain their license. They are Sabtech Oil Field Service Ltd, Obat Oil producing and Petroleum, LibroidNig Ltd and Amni International Petroleum Development Company that are currently practicing with license.

The population of this study consists of three hundred and thirty (330) managers of the selected Oil producing Firms. These are the entire managerial team clusters in the coast of the firms. More details are presented below:

Table .1: Population Distribution

S/N	Oil producing Firms	No. of Manager
1.	Sabtech Oil Field Service Ltd	85
2.	Obat Oil producing and Petroleum	83
3.	LibroidNig Ltd	80
4.	Amni International Petroleum Development Company	82
	Total	330

Source: Personnel Department of Selected Firms, 2022.

The census study approach was adopted, hence all 330 managers were chosen as the sample size. Purposive sampling technique was used to select only oil servicing firms that have interest on conflict management strategies and workplace harmony in the industry.

A total of three hundred and thirty (330) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the target sample elements. The researcher was able to retrieve and cleared 317copies of the completed questionnaire for coding, cleansing and data processing.

Descriptive statistics of percentage mean and standard deviation with inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient and multiple linear regression analysis was used

for data analysis. Percentage and mean was used to analyse data concerning the socio-demographic data and research questions, respectively because of test for relationship amongst the variables.

-Test of Research Hypotheses

The study proceeds to test for research hypothesis in light of the Pearson product moment and multiple regression analysis as follows.

Research Question One

How does avoidance correlates infrequent strike in the oil producing firms?

Test of Hypothesis One

Ho₁: Avoidance does not have any significant influence on infrequent strike in Oil producing firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Pearson Test for relationship between avoidance and infrequent strike
Correlations

		Avoidance	Infrequent strike
Avoidance	Pearson Correlation	1	.3178**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	317	317
Infrequent strike	Pearson Correlation	.3178**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	317	317

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: *Author's Field Survey (2022)- SPSS version 25 output*

Using the output in table 2, it can be observed that the Pearson correlation (PC) coefficient is 0.3178 which shows a strong and positive orientation of the relationship between avoidance and infrequent strike. The significance value of 0.000 which is less than the 5% significance level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study similarly observes in the regression output in Table 4.15 the coefficient of 0.439 which shows a t-statistics value of 10.873 (which is greater than the ± 1.96 threshold level) and a probability level of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This therefore reinforces the findings and on this basis, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate form of the hypothesis is accept therefore concluding that there is a significant relationship between avoidance and infrequent strike of oil producing firms in Nigeria.

Research Question Two

How does avoidance correlates mutual trust in the oil producing firms?

Test of Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: Avoidance does not have any significant effect on mutual trust in Oil producing firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 3: Pearson Test for relationship between avoidance and mutual trust
Correlations

		Avoidance	Mutual trust
Avoidance	Pearson Correlation	1	.772**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	317	317

Mutual trust	Pearson Correlation	.772**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	317	317

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: *Author's Field Survey (2022)- SPSS version 25 output*

In table 3, it can be observed that the Pearson correlation (PC) coefficient is 0.772 which shows a strong and positive orientation of the relationship between avoidance and mutual trust. The significance value of 0.000 which is less than the 5% significance level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study similarly observes in the regression output in Table 4.16 the coefficient of 0.682 which shows a t-statistics value of 14.632 (which is greater than the ± 1.96 threshold level) and a probability level of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This therefore reinforces the findings and on this basis, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate form of the hypothesis is accept therefore concluding that there is a significant relationship between avoidance and mutual trust of oil producing firms in Nigeria

Research Question Three

How does avoidance correlates cooperation in the oil producing firms?

Test of Hypothesis Three

Ho₃: Avoidance does not have any significant influence on management- workers' cooperation in Oil producing firms in Port Harcourt.

Table 4: Pearson Test for relationship between avoidance and cooperation
Correlations

		Avoidance	Trust
Avoidance	Pearson Correlation	1	.774**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	317	317
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.774**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	317	317

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: *Author's Field Survey (2022)- SPSS version 25 output*

Using the output in table 4, it can be observed that the Pearson correlation (PC) coefficient is 0.774 which shows a strong and positive orientation of the relationship between avoidance and cooperation. The significance value of 0.000 which is less than the 5% significance level ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The study similarly observes in the regression output in Table 4.19 the coefficient of 0.000 which shows a p-statistics value of 0.774 and a probability level of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 significance level. This therefore reinforces the findings and, on this basis, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternate form of the hypothesis is accept therefore concluding that there is a significant relationship between avoidance and cooperation of oil producing firms in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis sought to examine the relationship between avoidance and infrequent strike. Hence, it was hypothesized that avoidance does not significantly influence infrequent strike. This hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis (OLSM). As can be seen from our analysis of data this alternate hypothesis was accepted. This could be ascertained because the idea generation and creativity ability of the oil producing firm cannot be over emphasized. Based on the above, Bricoe and Schuler (2004) found that when avoidance is underused a team member

may deny that there is a problem and allow their hurt feelings to prevent communication. On the other hand, Okoth (2012) found that Overuse of the avoidance style can result to a low level of input, decision- making, and allowing issues to fester, which can produce a breakdown in communication between team members.

The second hypothesis sought to examine the relationship between avoidance and mutual trust. Hence, it was hypothesized that Avoidance does not significantly influence mutual trust. This hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis (OLSM). As can be seen from our analysis of data this alternate hypothesis was accepted. This explains while the oil producing was able overcome the storm from the Covid-19 pandemic that causes turbulent on business. Based on the above this exercise is in line with Also, Moriarty (2007) found that avoiding conflict, discouraging it or allowing chronic unhealthy conflict to remain unresolved can be disastrous to organizational health. On the other hand Underuse of the avoidance style results in hostility and hurt feelings. In addition, work can become overwhelming because too many issues are taken on at once, resulting in an inability to prioritize and delegate.

The third hypothesis sought to examine the relationship between avoidance and cooperation. Hence, it was hypothesized that avoidance does not significantly influence infrequent strike. This hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis (OLSM). As can be seen from our analysis of data this alternate hypothesis was accepted. This finding is aligned with that of Catherine and Masinde (2014) found and concluded that strategy had a positive effect on employee performance. They concluded that avoidance conflict resolution strategy affects employee performance and that organizational factors moderate the relationship between avoidance and employee performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of data and discussion of findings, the study concluded that avoidance influence measures of workplace harmony such as infrequent strike and management-worker cooperation in oil producing firms in Port Harcourt.

These revealed that the easiest way to understand the conflict is to have it theorized into situational, interactive and functional from staff and management developing mutual trust, cooperation and avoiding turbulence. These turbulence has it that the situational views conflict as an expression under certain situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Oil producing firms in Port Harcourt should endeavor to adopt and use mediation as a means of settling organizational conflicts to achieve lasting harmony.
2. Different levels of government should endeavor to put in place policies that will encourage organizations to accommodate workers interest in their plans.
3. Workers or employees should do their best to avoid confronting organizational matters in such a way that it will result to management- worker non-cooperation.
4. Mediation strategies should be encourage to prevent court cases

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