

Influence of Conflict Handling on Organizational Commitment of Employees in Public Hospitals in Nakuru City in Kenya

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Abstract: A good management of employee relationship is necessary for health facilities to achieve their objectives, and for employees to feel engaged at work. Therefore, the general objective of the study was to examine the influence conflict handling procedures on organizational commitment of employees in level four and five public hospitals in Nakuru, Kenya. The study employed descriptive research design. The target population of this study consisted of employees working in level four and five public hospitals in Nakuru city. There are seven (7) level four and five public hospitals in Nakuru city. Random sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 89 employees. The study used 5 Likert scale structured questionnaires to collect data. The study established that conflict handling had a strong positive significant relationship with organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru city in Kenya. On the other hand, regression analysis demonstrated that conflict handling had significant influence on organizational commitment of employees. As such, the study concluded that conflict handling, had a significant influence on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru city Kenya. Therefore the study recommended that public hospitals should ensure that they have proper discipline procedures that will help ensure the maintenance of employees organizational commitment.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict handling, commitment, employee relationship, public hospitals

I. Introduction

In the present business environment, the need for an employee relationship management within the enterprise is critical and the reason behind this is the growing size of the organizations. Employee relationship management helps the organization to strategize the overall growth of the organization which includes the growth of every individual in the organization. Employee relationship management is not a product, or a technology rather it is an approach or a blueprint that aims to bring conversation into newer avenues within an organization [1].

A good management of employee relationship is necessary for organization to achieve its objectives, and for employees to feel engaged at work. Accordingly, no task can be accomplished if conflicts and misunderstandings existed between organization and its employees [2]. Employee Relationship Management (ERM) creates productive and secure workplace through promoting commitment; facilitating the task of employees in achieving organizational objectives; minimizing workplace conflict and increasing trust between employees and organization. Therefore, organizations might achieve some opportunities in competition area, when they concerned with satisfaction of both internal customers (employees) and the external ones [3]. In addition, ERM will be effective tool if there is feeling of togetherness; harmonious and warm relationships between employees and management, because this kind of relationships fosters, the rate of achieving organizational objectives [2].

Employee relations are concerned with managing and maintaining the employment relationship, which involves handling the pay-work bargain, dealing with employment practices, terms and conditions of employment, issues arising from employment, providing employees with a voice and communicating with employees. It consists of the approaches and methods adopted by employers to deal with employees through their unions or individually [4]. Harmonious relations between the employer and his employees are necessary to that endeavor. Relations between the

employer and his employees may assure that the responsibilities and authorities granted to the separate institutions under the Constitution and by statute are carried out in an atmosphere which permits the fullest participation by employees in the determination of conditions of employment which affect them [5].

Effective employee relations enhances positive communication and attitude between management and employees, promotes the overall wellbeing of employees during their tenure at the company and helps in preventing and resolving problems involving employees' that affect work situations. Employee relationship management entails the ability to, balancing life and work needs, employee needs open, the ability of the organization to keep good relations with its stakeholders including trade unions, employees, suppliers and customers and measuring and monitoring results. Organizations normally engage in various employee relationships management practices to develop healthy relationships and extract the best out of each team member [6].

According to Khan and Abdullah [7], precise goals drive people to achieve them, which foster commitment. Mutual trust is a crucial variable that determines the organization's performance, effectiveness, and efficiency. Over the course of a relationship, trust may build, wane, or reappear. As the relationship deepens, individuals have more opportunity to observe and learn about one another, and they might infer if a certain action is trustworthy or untrustworthy. Trust encourages cooperative conduct, reduces conflict, and fosters good employee opinions of their supervisors, thereby increasing employee work satisfaction in a business. It also fosters a positive work atmosphere, which enhances the job performance of employees within the firm [8]. To achieve sound industrial relations which make employee more committed to their work, certain basic requirements are necessary namely: need for free trade union movement, need to establish good relations between employers and trade union, need for effective communication, need for clearly defined procedures, need for freedom in negotiating, and need for integrity.

Today, Healthcare organizations are facing a major challenge with regard to human resource management. The World Health Organization's (WHO) World Health Report 2006 already warned of the worrying staff shortages faced by hospitals and health centers worldwide and the difficulties in managing them. More recently, the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development goals (SDGs) report indicates that nursing staff is understaffed and unevenly distributed. Healthcare institutions face multiple challenges, characterized by several factors that have been widely reported in the scientific literature [9]. These include increasing societal expectations on these organizations, together with continuous technological and clinical advancement. Another indicator that has been extensively discussed is the adequate management of human resources. Healthcare institutions, like other organizations, need to have good professionals to achieve their objectives, although the treatment of patients and the expected quality of medical care mean that the appropriate management of human resources takes on greater importance in these organizations [10].

II. Statement of the Problem

According to Okoroafor, Kwesiga, Ogato, Gura, Gondi, Jumba, & Asamani [11] 66% of the 189932 health workers in Kenya are employed in the public sector with the remaining 34% employed in the private sector. However, the private sector is the main employer of doctors at 55% in comparison to the public sector's 45%. Further, approximately 62% of medical specialists are employed in the private sector. The variations in the numbers of specialized medics paint a grim picture on the situation of health workforce in the public sector and their commitment. The health sector report by the republic of Kenya reported that Kenya is currently grappling with human resource crisis within the public health sector arising out labor emigration with many professionals seeking better employment opportunities in other countries. The efficient delivery of quality health services requires the availability of skilled human resources for health in adequate numbers and rationally distributed at all levels of care [12]. RoK (2023) observed that efforts must be made to enhance the capacity of local health institutions and improve working conditions to retain skilled personnel and ensure quality service provision. Various studies have been done in regard to employee relationship management as well as commitment. However, there are hardly sufficient studies examining conflict handling procedures and organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals. Therefore, this study aimed at examining the influence of conflict handling procedures on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru Kenya.

III. Purpose of the Study

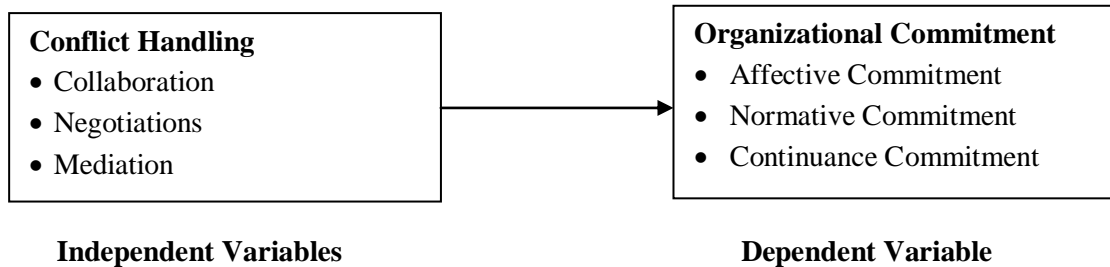
To evaluate the influence of conflict handling on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru City in Kenya

IV. Hypothesis of the Study

H₀: Conflict handling does not have any statistically significant influence on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru City Kenya.

V. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a figure that shows the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. In this study the dependent variable was organizational commitment while independent variable was conflict handling procedures.



VI. The Red-Hot-Stove Theory

The red-hot stove theory of Douglas McGregor [13] gives a good illustration of how to impose disciplinary action without generating resentment. This theory draws an analogy between touching a hot stove and undergoing discipline. When you touch a hot stove, your discipline is immediate, with warning, consistent and impersonal. The Red hot stove theory emphasized on how rational discipline could be affected in n organization. For discipline to be rational, the theory draws a comparison between touching a hot red stove and experiencing discipline. The reaction is immediate, consistent, impersonal and without warning. The burn is immediate and the redness of the stove is a warning indicating danger. Also, an many times as the stove is touched, the same burn is experienced, that shows its consistency.

In a view of this study, the study would be guided by the red-hot-stove theory, and how are they practiced or applied? What are the reactions of workers affected by these measures? And finally what is the effect of these disciplinary actions on the moral and performance of the workers. The study will equally draw a line between what disciplinary approach is practiced and how disciplinary action is taken [13].

In many organizations including private hospitals, the behaviour and conduct of the employees is being guided by the rules and regulations, which is the red-hot- stove. When employees are either as individual or group, it means the red-hot-stove has been touched. When such act is committed it is expected that disciplinary action be taken. When the red-hot-stove is touched, the reaction is immediate, consistent, impersonal and without warning [13]. As such, the question is, is the disciplinary action or measure taken against the private hospital staff immediate, consistent, impersonal and without warning? In other words, are the rules and regulations as applied on the staff for an act of misconduct in consonance with the basic principles of the theory?

VII. Conflict Handling and Organizational Commitment

The importance of conflict management can hardly be overemphasized as it plays a great role in making the outcomes of conflict to be positive. Awan & Saeed [14] stated that if conflict is managed properly, it will be a catalyst for change and can have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and performance of the organization. A successful organization in the future must create the capability to absorb conflict which is conflict management mechanism in order to minimize the rate of conflict and improve performance. The types of conflicts found in organizations and which individuals find themselves in, include interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, intra-group and inter-organizational conflicts [15]. Interpersonal conflicts are conflicts carried out between two individuals. Intrapersonal conflicts are issues that individuals have within them. Intergroup conflicts are conflicts that arise among groups competing to achieve the same goals of the organization. Intra-group conflicts are usually conflicts arising within the group due to various reasons.

Moreover, a study by Binyanya [16] examined conflict management styles and employee performance in hospitals in Kenya. The study undertook a desk review methodology. The findings from the study concluded that compromising, avoiding and dominating styles are commonly used styles among public hospitals, the doctors, nurses and clinical officers. In their study, Rajasekar et al. [17] examined the role of conflict management styles on organizational commitment among bank employees in India. Data was collected from 50 bank employees and the data analysed through path analysis. The study established that conflict avoidance and compromise styles have a significant influence on organizational commitment among employees in commercial banks.

Compromising style encourages participation of all the parties, the style is partially assertive and cooperative and the style leads to temporal solutions when being used. The avoiding style is preferred because it involves withdrawing from the conflict at hand whereas the dominating style is preferred because the style is used in case of an emergency and involves speedy decision making. With all this in place, conflicts are managed which leads to temporal and fair solutions which satisfy all the parties. Therefore, the styles when used leads to increase in employee performance in the work place [16].

Constructively managed conflict induces a positive performance while poorly managed conflict heats up the environment to bring about 'dislocation of the entire group and polarization, reduced productivity on job performance, psychological and physical injury, emotional distress and inability to sleep, interference with problem activities, escalation of differences into antagonistic position and malice and increased hostility [18]. In his study, Omondi [19] examined stakeholder conflicts and its effects on the performance of expansion projects at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport. The study used descriptive research design with a sample of 114 respondents. Questionnaires were used for primary data collection. The study established that the project implementation and expansion at JKIA are negatively influenced by stakeholders engaged conflicts.

The Health care delivery occurs within complex system of institutional environment, multidisciplinary professionals, technology, financial, legal regulations and patient, family and community based needs. Care giving teams are expected to represent the multiple disciplines on which patients depend for health service. Each member of the team brings specific knowledge and skill to care planning and delivery they often represent differing perspectives on what that care should include and how it should be administered [20].

In her study, Francis [21] examined conflict management styles and employee performance in public hospitals in Nyeri County Kenya. The study sought to establish the effect of compromising styles, dominating styles, avoidance styles, accommodating styles and integrating styles on employee performance in public hospitals. A descriptive research design was used in the study with a sample of 166 respondents. Primary was collected using semi structured questionnaires. The study established that hospitals generally use compromising styles, avoidance style and dominating styles due to their prevalent advantages. Moreover, the study established that integrating styles and accommodating styles are hardly used in hospitals.

A study by Mohamed, Butali and Kagumu [22] examined conflict management strategies and performance of public hospitals in Garissa level five hospitals in Kenya. The study set out to examine the relationship between avoidance, accommodating, dominating and compromising strategies and performance of Garissa level five hospitals in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design with a sample of 168 respondents. Questionnaires were used as the main primary data collection instruments. The study found out that avoidance, accommodating, dominating and compromising strategies had moderately positive significant effects on the performance of Garissa level five hospitals in Kenya.

VIII. Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment encompasses three dimensions: Affective commitment, normative commitment and continuance commitment. While the affective attachment an employee has to the organization is determined by the choice to remain committed to the organization due to some emotional identification; a normative commitment is the feelings of obligation of the individual based on perceived attachment to the organization goals. Finally, a continuance commitment is the extent to which an employee feels committed due to their own economics [23].

The phenomenon of the low level of commitment of the organization of the employees of the General & Financial Administration Bureau at the Rectorate of Cenderawasih University through the interview result is known that the employee does not fully understand the rules in performing the work, the employee feels uncomfortable performing his daily work because the result given to the agency is not in accordance with what he received. Working as little as possible without thinking about the impact it will have on what the next institution is expected to be like a much-delayed job, the low will of the employees in carrying out all the assignments assigned by the agency. These are the things that show the lack of organizational commitment that the employee seems willing to leave the agency to get a better job. This problem indicates organizational commitment is capable of affecting the performance of employees within the company [24].

Barron and Chou [25] suggest that employee commitment is the proper indicator of work performance and that leaders and supervisors should pay keen attention to their commitment through reciprocity tendencies. Choi et al. [26] further

explained organizational commitment as discernment and beliefs in which a subordinate accepts the values, mission, vision, objection, and goals of the organization and amenable to work and continue to be recognized as part and parcel of the enterprise. Again, Peng et al. [27] suggest that organizational commitment is a force that will secure a follower to a course of action, which is of importance to one or more targets. Given this, organizational commitment is attributed to critical work-related factors such as absenteeism, labor turnover, performance, and loyalty to the organization [28][29][27]. Therefore, a committed employee is an organizational competitive advantage.

A study by Gitau and Monari [30] examine the determinants of employee commitment in constitutional commissions in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design with a sample of 380 respondents. The study used stratified and simple random sampling methods to arrive at the sample projected. Primary data was used that was collected by the use of a structured questionnaire. The study findings established that compensation and reward had a significant effect on employee commitment.

Okello et al. [31] assessed employees' organizational commitment among the none-academic staffs of public universities along the lake region in Kenya. The study applied cross-sectional research design and a sample of 95 none-academic staffs as respondents. Data was collected using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were tested for validity and reliability before the data collection. Results from the study demonstrated that employees organizational commitment was a significant determinant of employees work output in the organization.

Fantahun et al. [32] assessed organizational commitment and associated factors among health professionals working in public hospitals of south western Oromia region in Ethiopia. The study utilized a facility-based analytical cross-sectional research design. A multistage sampling technique was employed to select 545 health professionals from public health facilities. Primary data was collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The study established that a higher level of organizational commitment was associated to satisfaction with recognition, work climate, supervisor support, and workload. Besides, good practice of transformational and transactional leadership styles and employee empowerment are significantly associated with high organizational commitment.

IX. Research Methodology

9.1 Research Design

According to Mafuwane [33] a research design is the strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research objectives and the execution, or implementation of the research strategy. Further, Cooper and Schindler [34] indicate that it is a time-based plan that guides selection of sources and types of information all based on the research questions. The researcher adopted a descriptive research design that is unrestricted. The target population of this study consisted of employees working in level four and five public hospitals in Nakuru city. There are six level four and one level five public hospital/s in Nakuru city with a total of 701 (IHRS, 2024) employees. A sample of 88 employees, were selected to be the study's respondents.

9.2 Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instrument is a device used to collect data in an objective and a systematic manner for the purpose of the research [35]. The main data collection instrument which was used in this study was questionnaires which contained close ended questions with the quantitative section of the instrument utilizing a 5-point Likert-type scale format. Questionnaires were preferred since they are effective data collection instruments that allow respondents to give much of their opinions pertaining to the researched problem. According to Kothari [36] the information obtained from questionnaires is free from bias and researchers influence and thus accurate and valid data was gathered.

X. Findings and Discussions

10.1 Response Rate

The researcher distributed 88 questionnaires to be filled by the respondents. 76 of the questionnaires were properly filled and returned. This represented a response rate of 86.36% which was characterized as very good [37].

10.2 Descriptive Results on Conflict Handling

The study sought to examine the respondent's views on conflict handling measures in their place of work. In this regard the mean and standard deviation values were established and the findings were presented as in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive Results on Conflict Handling

	N	Min	Max	M	Std
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When a conflict arise in our hospital, negotiations are held between the conflicting parties	76	1	5	3.83	1.063
Our hospital has a structured dialogue policy that guides our organization to resolve disputes	76	1	5	3.70	1.096
We are incorporated in conflict management which leads to mutual optimal solution	76	1	5	3.57	1.226
Our hospital has implemented a strategy that help resolve conflicts which in turn increases organizational commitment	76	1	5	3.67	1.051
We have leaders who implement dialogues that help to achieve quality employee performance	76	1	5	3.93	1.112
In our hospital we have an effective means of communication between the conflicting parties that solve conflicts in an effective manner	76	1	5	3.91	1.073
Valid N (listwise)	76				

The results from Table 1 clearly show that the respondents agreed with all the aspects relating to conflict handling in their respective hospitals. There was agreement (M=3.83, SD=1.063) that when a conflict arise, negotiations are held between the conflicting parties and that the hospital has a structured dialogue policy that guide their organization to resolve disputes (M=3.70, SD=1.096). The respondents further observed that they are incorporated in conflict management which leads to mutual optimal solution (M=3.57, SD=1.226) while at the same conceding that their hospital had implemented a strategy that help resolve conflicts which in turn increases organizational commitment (M=3.67, SD=1.051). Additionally, the hospitals had leaders who implement dialogues that help to achieve quality employee performance (M=3.93, SD=1.112) and the hospitals also have an effective means of communication between the conflicting parties that solve conflicts in an effective manner. The minimum and maximum values for all the aspects ranged between one and five showing the lack of consensus in respondents' views. As such, all the aspects returned standard deviation values greater than one which affirms the disparity in the respondents' opinions in regard to conflict handling in the hospitals.

10.3 Descriptive Results on Organizational Commitment

The study further sought to examine the respondents' views in regard to their organizational commitment in public hospitals. The means and standard deviation values were computed and the findings presented as in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Descriptive Results on Organizational Commitment

	N	Min	Max	M	Std
I do feel a strong sense of belonging to this hospital	76	1	5	4.38	1.006
I would be happy to spend the rest of my career with this hospital	76	1	5	4.13	.984
I feel that I have few options to consider leaving this hospital	76	2	5	3.87	.971
I believe in the value of remaining loyal to this hospital	76	3	5	4.29	.763
I enjoy discussing my hospital with people outside it	76	1	5	3.97	1.254
My needs are well catered for as long am working in this hospital	76	1	5	3.74	.957
I feel comfortable while carrying out my responsibilities	76	1	5	4.11	1.126
I feel satisfied with my work which helps me to build trust with my colleagues	76	1	5	4.20	1.020
I feel am valued and my needs are cared for and therefore I intend to stay in the organization	76	1	5	4.03	.832
Valid N (listwise)	76				

In regard to the organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals, Table 2 indicated that the respondents agreed with all the aspects. The respondents agreed (M=4.38, SD=1.006) that they do feel a strong sense of belonging to the hospitals they work in and that they would be happy to spend the rest of their career with the hospital (M=4.13, SD=.984). On the other hand, the respondents agreed (M=3.87, SD=.971) that they feel they have few options to consider to move out of the hospitals they work in and that they believe in the value of remaining loyal to those hospitals (M=4.29, SD=.763).

On the other hand respondents were in agreement (M=3.97, SD=1.254) that they enjoy discussing their hospital with other people outside the hospital and that their needs are well catered for as long as they are working in that hospital (M=3.74, SD=.957). respondents also observed that they feel comfortable while carrying out their responsibilities (M=4.11, SD=1.126) and that they feel satisfied with their work which helps them build trust with their colleagues. Moreover, they agreed (M=4.03, SD=.832) that they feel they are valued and their needs are cared for and therefore they

intend to remain in the organization. The researcher noted that most of the aspects returned standard deviation values less than one indicating consensus in respondents’ opinions of these aspects. However, some aspects still had standard deviation values greater than indicating that respondents had diverse views in regard to these aspects.

10.3 Conflict Handling and Organizational Commitment

The study further sought to examine the relationship between conflict handling and organizational commitment. The composite mean scores for conflict handling and organizational commitment were correlated to establish the relationship. The results from Pearson correlation coefficient were established and presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Relationship between Conflict Handling and Organizational Commitment

		Conflict Handling
Organizational Commitment	Pearson Correlation	.815**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	76

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the Table 3 above, there exists a strong positive significant ($r=.815, p<.001$) relationship between conflict handling and organizational commitment. In this regard, conflict handling is a prerequisite factor in determining the organizational commitment of employees in the public hospitals. In line with these findings, Awan and Saeed (2015) affirmed that if conflict in an organization is handled properly, it would be a catalyst for change and can have a positive impact on employee commitment and performance of the organization. Moreover, Rajasekar et al., (2021) indicated that conflict avoidance and compromise styles have a significant influence on organizational commitment of employees which aligns with these study findings.

10.4 Conflict Handling and Organizational Commitment

The second objective sought to establish the influence of conflict handling on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru City Kenya. Simple regression analysis was performed to ascertain the influence of conflict handling on organizational analysis. The model summary results were as presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Model Summary on Conflict Handling and Organizational Commitment

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.815 ^a	.664	.660	.41501

a. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict Handling

The results in Table 4 above gave an R-squared value of 0.664 that means that conflict handling accounts for 66.4% of the change in organizational commitment. This indicates that conflict handling has a significant contribution in determining organizational commitment. The remaining 33.6% of change in organizational commitment was explained by factors outside of this model. The analysis of variance was undertaken to test the second hypothesis and the findings were presented as in Table 5

Table 5: ANOVA^a on Conflict Handling and Organizational Commitment

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	25.225	1	25.225	146.459	.000 ^b
	Residual	12.745	74	.172		
	Total	37.971	75			

a. Dependent Variable: Organizational Commitment

b. Predictors: (Constant), Conflict Handling

The analysis of variance gave F-value ($F_{(1, 74)} = 146.459, p=.000$) that was significant at $p<.05$ level of significance. As such, conflict handling has a significant influence on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals. Conversely, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) that conflict handling does not have any statistically significant influence on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru City Kenya was rejected. The researcher therefore concluded that conflict handling has a significant effect on organizational commitment of employees in public hospitals in Nakuru City Kenya.

XI. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study showed that conflict handling contributes significantly to organizational commitment of employees. As such, the study concluded that conflict handling is a significant determinant of employee commitment to the organization in public hospitals in Nakuru City Kenya. The study recommended that the public hospitals should put in place a conflict handling policy to ensure that employees coexist in harmony within the organization. The results showed that conflict management determines organizational commitment of employees in the public hospitals. Therefore, conflict handling should be well structured not to harm the organizational commitment of employees.

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