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## **Determinants of Conflict Management in State Corporations in Kenya: A Case Study of the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Services**

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### **Abstract:**

*The main purpose of the study was to investigate factors affecting conflict management in state corporations in Kenya, specifically at the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Services. The objectives of this research were to investigate the effects of power, organization culture, leadership style, and attitude on conflict management in state corporations in Kenya. A descriptive research design was used during the study. Data were collected by using a questionnaire. The target population was 62 employees who were considered for the study. The data collected was analyzed both qualitative and quantitative. The presentation of the data collected was done using tables, graphs, and charts.*

- *Seventy percent of the respondents were of the opinion that power has an effect on conflict management in State corporations.*
- *Sixty-nine percent of the respondents stated that organizational culture affects conflict management in State Corporation.*
- *Seventy-six percent of the respondents were of the opinion that leadership style affects conflict management in State Corporation.*
- *Seventy-two percent of the respondents suggested that attitude affects conflict management in State Corporation.*

*The study recommends that for there to be effective conflict management, there is the need for each and every part to be involved in looking for conflict resolution to highly consider the power of those particular individuals chosen to manage conflict, embracing the norms, values, and beliefs aimed at supporting effective conflict management, enhancing the democratic style of leadership which gives individuals involved in conflict management capability of making an autonomous decision without any interference. Last but not least, there is the need for the parties involved in conflict management to consider having a positive attitude towards others. Therefore, it was concluded that power, organizational culture, leadership style, and attitude affect conflict management in State Corporation.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, management, culture, leadership, attitude

### **1. Background Information**

The concept of conflict is controversial. Psychologists and sociologists have given different meanings. It is defined as a process by few, an obstructive behavior, and goal incompatibility by others. Conflict can be expressed as follows: Conflict is a process where perception (real or otherwise) leads to disruption of a desirable state of harmony and stability in an interdependent world.

Characteristics of conflict include:

- Conflict is a process,
- Conflict is inevitable,
- Conflict is a normal part of life,
- Perception,
- Opposition,
- Interdependence and
- Interaction

Everyone is inflicted with conflict, and conflict is not unidimensional (Maltz & Kohli, 2000).

Conflict management is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Conflict management involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for managing conflict in the organizational environment. All members of every organization need to have ways of keeping conflict to a minimum – and solving problems caused by conflict before conflict becomes a major obstacle to one's work (Furnham, 2000).

Conflicts may be intrapersonal (conflict with self), interpersonal (between two persons), and organizational. Whether real or perceived, organizational conflict is of two types: intra-organizational and inter-organizational. Inter-organizational conflict occurs between two or more organizations. Different businesses competing against each other are a good example of inter-organizational conflict. Intra-organizational conflict is the conflict within an organization and can be examined based upon a level (such as department, work team, individual), and can be classified as interpersonal, intra-group, and inter-group. Once again, interpersonal conflict, whether substantive or affective, refers to the conflict between two or more individuals (not representing the group they are a part of) of the same or different group at the same or different level in an organization (Thomas et al., 2010).

Conflict can be Constructive or Destructive, creative or restricting, and positive or negative. Destructive conflicts are also known as dysfunctional conflicts because such conflicts prevent a group from attaining its goals. Conflict is destructive when it takes attention away from other essential activities, undermines morale or self-concept, polarizes people and groups, reduces cooperation, increases or sharpens difference, and leads to irresponsible and harmful behavior, such as fighting and name-calling. On the other hand, constructive conflicts are also known as functional conflicts because they support the group goals and help improve performance. Conflict is constructive when it:

- Results in clarification of important problems and issues,
  - Results in solutions to problems,
  - Involves people in resolving issues important to them,
  - Causes authentic communication,
  - Helps release emotion, anxiety, and stress,
  - Builds cooperation among people through learning more about each other,
  - Joins in resolving the conflict and
  - Helps individuals develop understanding and skills
- (Morrison and Robinson, 2007)

Conflicts may be distributive and integrative. Distributive conflict is approached as a distribution of a fixed amount of positive outcomes or resources, where one side will end up winning and the other losing, even if they do win some concessions. On the other hand, integrative – groups utilizing the integrative model see conflict as a chance to integrate the needs and concerns of both groups and make the best outcome possible. This type of conflict has a greater emphasis on compromise than the distributive conflict. It has been found that integrative conflict results in consistently better task-related outcomes than distributive conflict (Maak, 2004).

## 2. Literature Review

Mozes et al. (2011) argue that power can be usefully conceptualized as a mutual interaction between the characteristics of a person and the characteristics of a situation, where the person has access to valued resources and uses them to achieve personal, relational, or environmental goals, often through using various strategies of influence. Power is understood in relational terms, and power itself is distinguished from sources of power, the effective use of available power, and strategies for deploying power. In view of what the author has stated, it is clear that the effect of power on conflict management has not been stated, thus creating a gap.

Turnbull et al. (2010) maintain that in each major period, the culture has a different function to perform. For example:

- At the birth stage, culture is the glue that holds the organization together,
- At the succession stage, culture becomes the battleground between conservatives and liberals,
- At organizational mid-life, the dominant culture begins to weaken, providing an opportunity for change,
- At organizational maturity, culture becomes a constraint on innovation after the maturity stage,

Culture can be transformed evolutionarily or can be destroyed and completely replaced through a massive replacement of key people. Considering what the author has stated, it is clear that the effect of organizational culture on conflict management has not been stated, thus creating a gap.

According to Morrison and Robinson (2007), well-skilled and talented workers may easily find a good job, position, and workplace elsewhere; however, the effective way to retain these talented employees is to enhance a friendly and close working environment and to promote leader support. An organization must groom leaders to support the employees and well-build the work environment where workers want to stay. Providing opportunities to test their abilities and providing the level of performance can enhance employees' capabilities and want to stay in the organization. Considering what the author has stated, it can be noted that the effect of leadership styles such as democratic, laissez-faire, participative and autocratic on conflict management has not been stated, thus creating a gap.

Rolston (2010) defined an attitude as a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual's response to all objects and situations to which it is related. A simpler definition of attitude is a mindset or a tendency to act in a particular way due to both an individual's experience

and temperament. In view of what the author has stated, it is clear that the effect of attitude, for instance, in terms of an employee having a negative attitude towards a particular staff involved in conflict management, has not been stated, thus creating a gap.

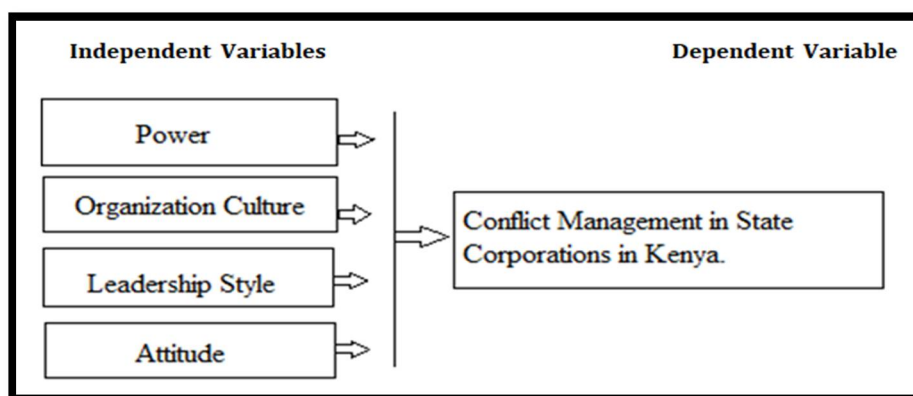


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework  
Source: Author

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

#### 3.1. Study Design

In this study, a descriptive research design was used by the researcher. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) note that when the purpose of research happens to be an accurate description of a situation or an association between variables, then the suitable design is the one that maximizes reliability and minimizes biases of the data collected and analyzed. Therefore, it had an approach of establishing various variables which determined effective conflict management in any state corporation to enhance effective conflict management.

In addition, a descriptive research design was used to provide facts and suggestions on major connections between variables and their apparent course. The population described what, why, and how factors like power, organization culture, leadership style, and attitude affect conflict management in state corporations in Kenya. This involved a field survey whereby the research design enabled subjects to be observed in the natural setup without manipulating the environment. It clearly dealt with a defined problem and objectives as it was collected from a relatively larger number of cases to be more representative and address the problem.

##### 3.1.1. Target Population

The target population is the complete set of individual events or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). The target population that was investigated adds up to a total of 62 employees, as shown below:

Category	Target Population	Percentage
Top-Level Management	3	5
Middle-Level Management	5	8
Support Staff	54	87
Total	62	100

Table 1: Target Population  
Source Author

##### 3.1.2. Sample Design

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) argue that sampling is the process by which an alternative small number of individuals, objects, or events is selected and analyzed to find out something about the entire top from which it was selected. A sample is a small proportion of the target population selected using some systematic form. The researcher used a census of 62 employees instead of the sample size because the size of the target population is small. Due to the use of the census, the researcher did not use any sampling technique. Census involved the use of the entire target population. Kothari (2004) argues that the benefits or rather advantages of using the census in research are that it increases confidence interval level and maximum chance of identifying negative feedback.

Category	Target Population	Census	Percentage
Top-Level Management	3	3	5
Middle-Level Management	5	5	8
Support Staff	54	54	87
Total	62	62	100

Table 2: Census  
Source: Author

### 3.2. Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) assert that the accuracy of data to be collected depends on the data collection instruments in terms of validity and reliability. Therefore, the researcher used questionnaires to gather information because it was fairly economical in terms of cost and time, and there was a possibility of checking the response's accuracy and incompleteness. However, Kothari (2004) points out that a questionnaire provides evidence of a pattern amongst a large population.

Questionnaires were hand-delivered and collected after a few days. The types of questions used included both open and closed-ended. Closed-ended questions were used to ensure that the given answers were relevant to the study. On the other hand, open-ended questions provided relevant explanations about the research questions posed by the researcher to respondents, giving them the freedom to express their feelings. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) opine that this method is effective for the study in that it creates confidentiality among the respondents as it allows the freedom of response, thus stimulating the respondent to think about his feelings or emotions and express what he considers to be important.

### 3.3. Validity of Research Instruments

Authority was obtained from relevant departmental sections of the organization to circulate questionnaires. According to Kothari (2004), validity is the degree to which result obtained from the analysis of data actually represents the phenomenon under study. However, Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) state that reliability is the measure of the degree to which research instruments yield consistent results. This study ensured reliability by pre-testing the questionnaire on five respondents. These respondents were not included in the final study. The questionnaires were then corrected before the final distribution.

## 4. Data Analysis, Presentation, and Interpretation

### 4.1. Response Rate

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Response	54	87
Non-response	8	13
Total	62	100

Table 3: Response Rate  
Source: Author (2016)

From table 3, the response that was obtained from the respondents was good enough for the analysis process. The researcher prepared 62 questionnaires, from which 87% of the sample population was an acceptable figure.

### 4.2. Summary of the Data Analysis

#### 4.2.1. General Information

The total number of questionnaires distributed out to the respondents during the study was 62. 54 questionnaires out of them were returned answered, while the remaining 8 questionnaires were returned unanswered. Of those questionnaires that were answered, 76% of the respondents were male, while 24% of the respondents were female. It clearly indicated that a high number of males dominated the study. From the response given:

- 4% of the total number of the respondents were aged below 25 years
- 35% of the total number of the respondents were aged between 25 and 30 years
- 28% of the total number of the respondents were aged between 31 and 36 years.
- 24% of the total number of the respondents were aged between 37 and 42 years
- 9% of the total number of the respondents were aged 43 years and above

In addition,

- 11% of the respondents had acquired a secondary level of education or rather a certificate
- 59% of the respondents had attained education up to the college level
- The remaining 30% of the respondents had attained their education up to the university level

Lastly but not least about the working experience:

- 6% of the respondents who participated in the study had a working experience below 1 year,
- 15% had a working experience of 1 to 3 years,

- 35% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study had a working experience of 4 to 6 years,
- 22% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study had a working experience of 7 years to 9 years,
- 15% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study had a working experience of 10 to 12 years,
- The remaining 7% of the respondents who participated in the study had a working experience of 13 years and above.

#### 4.2.2. Power

From the study findings, 70% of the respondents stated that power effects conflict management. The reason stated for this effect was that the parties involved in conflict management do not have the power to influence the solution-making towards the arising conflicts. This tends to make the management of conflicts very difficult. On the other hand, 30% of the respondents stated that power has no effect on power on conflict management.

#### 4.2.3. Organization Culture

Based on the analysis, 69% of the total respondents indicated that organizational culture effects conflict management. The reason highlighted for this effect was that the existence of negative beliefs, norms, and values in the organization, better conflict management usually tends to become very difficult. Most of the ways used in conflict management, such as mediation, usually get to be looked at as not providing the desired results. For instance, one party may have an option of being compensated for the offense he or she has faced from the other party. However, when the mediator, for instance, gets to look at the matter very clearly, he or she may have an option of no compensation. Thirty-one percent of the total respondents stated that organizational culture has no effect on conflict management.

#### 4.2.4. Leadership Style

76% of the total respondents indicated that leadership style has effects on conflict management. The reason for these effects was that, in most cases, the kind of leadership style adopted in the organization tends to influence how conflicts are managed in an organization. For instance, the dictatorial leadership style tends not to give the parties involved in conflict management autonomy in making decisions aimed at bringing about solutions to arising conflicts in an organization. Twenty-four percent of the respondents indicated that leadership style has no effect on conflict management.

#### 4.2.5. Attitude

According to the analysis, 72% of the respondents indicated that attitude has effects on conflict management. The reason stated for these effects was that the ways the parties in conflict in an organization perceive the conflict, solution makers tend to determine the effectiveness of conflict management. For instance, if the parties in conflict look at the other party intended to bring a solution to arising conflicts negatively, for instance, that the party is not competent in such matters, this tends to hinder effective conflict management. 28% of the respondents indicated that attitude has no effect on conflict management. Therefore, based on the study, it can be concluded that the majority of responses (72%) indicated that attitude has effects on conflict management.

### **5. Summary of the Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

#### *5.1. Summary of the Findings*

##### 5.1.1. How Does Power Affect Conflict Management in State Corporations in Kenya?

From the research study findings:

- 48% of the total respondents who participated in the study indicated that power has high effects on conflict management
- 28% percent of the total respondents who participated in the study indicated that power has moderate effects on conflict management
- 17% of the total respondents who participated in the study indicated that power has low effects on conflict management and
- 7% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that power has no effects at all on conflict management

##### 5.1.2. To What Extent Does Organizational Culture Affect Conflict Management in State Corporations in Kenya?

According to the research study findings:

- 33% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that the extent to which organizational culture affects conflict management is high
- 28% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that the extent to which organizational culture affects conflict management is moderate
- 22% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that the extent to which organizational culture affects conflict management is low



- 17% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that organizational culture has no effect on conflict management

#### 5.1.3. How Does Leadership Style Affect Conflict Management in State Corporations in Kenya?

From the research study findings:

- 59% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that leadership style has high effects on conflict management
- 28% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that leadership style has moderate effects on conflict management
- 9% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that leadership style has low effects on conflict management
- 4% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that leadership style has no effect on conflict management

#### 5.1.4. To What Extent Does Attitude Affect Conflict Management in State Corporations in Kenya?

According to the research study findings:

- 52% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that the extent to which attitude affects conflict management is high
- 29% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that the extent to which attitude affects conflict management is moderate
- 3% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that the extent to which attitude affects conflict management is low
- 6% of the total number of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that attitude has no effect on conflict management

### **6. Conclusions**

From the research study findings, it can be concluded that power has an effect on conflict management. This information was obtained from the majority of the respondents who participated in the research study. The reason that was concluded for these effects was that the parties involved in conflict management not having the power to influence the solution making towards the arising conflicts tend to make management of conflicts very difficult. From the data obtained from the research study, it can be concluded from the majority of the respondents' responses that organizational culture has high effects on conflict management. The reason stated and concluded from these effects was that there are negative beliefs, norms, and values in the organization, so better conflict management usually tends to become very difficult. Most of the ways used in conflict management, such as mediation, are usually looked at as not providing the desired results. For instance, one party may have an option of being compensated for the offense he or she has faced from the other party, yet when the mediator, for instance, gets to look at the matter very clearly, he or she may have an option of no compensation. From the research study findings, it can be concluded that leadership style has high effects on conflict management. This conclusion was derived from the majority of the respondents' views. The reason for this effect was that, in most cases, the kind of leadership style adopted in the organization tends to influence how conflicts are managed in an organization. For instance, the dictatorial leadership style tends not to give the parties involved in conflict management autonomy in making decisions aimed at bringing about solutions to arising conflicts in an organization. From the study, it can be concluded from most of the respondents' responses that attitude affects conflict management. The reason for this effect was that the ways the parties in conflict in an organization perceive the conflict solution makers tend to determine the effectiveness of conflict management. For instance, if the parties in conflict look at the other party intended to bring the solution to arising conflicts negatively, for instance, that the party is not competent in such matters. This tends to hinder effective conflict management.

### **7. Recommendations**

In consideration of power, it is important for the organization with the main aim of enhancing effective conflict management to consider various powers that parties involved in conflict management should possess. One of the important powers to be considered is legitimate power. This power comes from having a position of power in an organization, such as being the boss or a key member of a leadership team. This power can be brought about as a result of the organization making sure that its employees recognize the authority of the individual. The other way to enhance conflict management is through the organization's consideration of the power that comes from experiences, skills, and knowledge, usually called expert power. The other type of power to be considered to enhance conflict management is referent power. This power comes from being trusted and respected by the conflict manager by the parties involved in a conflict.

There is a need for the organization to enhance effective conflict management by considering embracing cultures that agree with modern ways of solving conflicts, such as mediation. This can be done by inculcating employees with positive ideas on proper ways of solving conflicts in an organization should they arise.

On matters pertaining to leadership, there is the need for any firm to effectively manage conflicts upon arising to consider the use of appropriate leadership style. The best leadership style to ever use is the democratic leadership style. This leadership style tends not to affect parties involved in conflict management, as in the case of the dictatorial leadership style. Also, this leadership style tends to listen to the views of parties in conflict and come up with a desirable or better

solution as far as conflict resolution is concerned. A positive attitude is paramount to enhancing effective conflict management. The organization can enhance positive attitude by training its staff on better ways of conflict management. The other way is through choosing the right people to be involved in conflict management. It is essential to know that attitude, whether positive or negative, starts with the information that people have on the ways being used to resolve conflicts. Directing attitude judgments, the attitudes participants expressed to their ostensible discussion partners persisted when participants later indicated their judgments privately (Ahmed et al., 2010). Especially impressive is the persistence of attitudes designed to convey a favorable impression. Contrary to classic theories of social influence, attitudes directed by impression-related normative motives were no more "elastic" than those directed by accuracy-seeking, informational motives. Instead, it seems that impression and defense motives, much like the accuracy motives studied extensively in message-based persuasion research, can yield careful, systematic processing of relevant information that results in stable judgments.

## 8. Suggestions for Further Study

There is a need for further study to be carried out on how the employee-employer relationship affects conflict management in state corporations in Kenya. In addition, further research needs to be carried out on how conformance to the employment act affects conflict management in state corporations in Kenya. Last but not least, more research needs to be carried out on how organization policy affects conflict management in state corporations in Kenya.

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