Conflict Management and Employee Commitment among Academic Staff in Public Universities in South East, Nigeria

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Abstract: The seeming non recognition and the reluctance to wade into interpersonal conflict in the studied Universities necessitated this study. The broad objective was to determine the type of relationship that exists between conflict management and employee commitment among academic staff in selected Public Universities in the South East. The study employed a survey research design; questionnaire was the instrument of data collection. The population of the study was 460 and the sample size was 210 arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan formula. A total of 190 copies of questionnaire were analysed. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient at 5% level of significance. The findings revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee commitment with a correlation coefficient of 871 (r =.871 < .05) and that there is a significant positive relationship between integrating style and employee commitment with a correlation coefficient of 902 (r =.902 < .05). It was concluded therefore that the style adopted in managing conflict and the emotional level of the people involved has an effect on the how fast and well the conflict will be managed. Sequel to this, it was recommended among other things that the academic staff of the studied universities should always put the feeling of others into consideration while resolving conflict, the people in conflict should be open minded and ready to hear out the other person so as to take the best possible and rational decision while managing conflict and that emotions should be kept in check and regulated so as to be sensitive to certain issues.

Keywords: Conflict, Conflict Management, Emotional Intelligence, Integrating Style and Employee Commitment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations like the public universities in the south east are made up of people from different background, different views about life, different expectations and different mind-sets. These group of people are brought together to ensure that the institutions mandate of producing quality graduates to drive the affairs of not just the country but that of the world is achieved. To achieve this lofty goal, the employees have to work together in different capacities; it could be belonging to the same departments or committees or teams. They would have to share ideas and perceptions about things. Etim & Okey (2013) captured these differences thus: in universities, people with differing nature like students, lecturers and administrative staff have to work harmoniously together. These differences breed arguments and disagreement between or among the different

components; hence conflict is unavoidable in organizations. Awan & Ahson (2015) opine that conflict is a natural and an inevitable part of people working together. Akomolafe (2002) states that conflict is unavoidable in any organization, while Ajayi & Ayodele (2002) posits that conflict is inevitable.

Conflicts connote disagreement, quarrels, and disapproval. It is a situation where two or more parties are at loggerheads; not agreeing on a particular or range of situations or things. Mba (2013) points out that the word conflict brings to mind images such as antagonism, struggles between parties, opposition processes and threats to cooperation. It is a disagreement over social issues, beliefs and ideologies (Tillett & French, 2006). They further define it as "when two or more people perceive that their values or needs are incompatible". Conflict exists when there is a problematic situation, differing perceptions and desired outcomes, interdependence, potential to adversely affect the relationship if unaddressed and a sense of urgency (Cahn & Abigail, 2007).

Conflict may arise because of litany of issues in universities. Mgbekem (2004) posits that conflict could be as a result of task interdependence, scarce resources, goal incompatibility, communication failures, individual differences and poorly designed reward system. To Oseremen & Osemeke (2015), it could be because of clash between formal authority and power, disputes over how revenues should be divided, how the work should be done and how long and hard people should work. There are also subtler forms of conflict involving rivalries, jealousies, personality clashes, role definitions, and struggles for power and favour (Oseremen & Osemeke, 2015). These forms and causes of conflict could have devastating effect on the organization depending on how it is handled. There are two possible outcomes of conflict, one is destructive and unhealthy and the other has a problem-solving base where those involved are willing to sublimate personality differences, to listen to others' views and to be open and candid to each other, to be supportive and helpful whereas the former defeats cooperation (Mba, 2013). Albert (2001) avers that there are productive and destructive conflicts. He states that a conflict is said to be positive when it is constructively discussed by the parties and amicable terms for settlement reached. This brings to the fore the two major categories of conflict outcomes; destructive and constructive conflict. Bacal cited in Waitchalla & Radnan (2006) assert that the outcome of conflict in organisations can either be functional or dysfunctional. Functional conflict supports an organisation in achieving its goals while dysfunctional conflict prevents an organisation from achieving its goals. Most conflicts ordinarily end up being dysfunctional to the organization with the exception of those that are properly handled and managed. This calls to mind the importance of conflict management in the public universities in the south east as a catalyst to engender commitment from the academic staff.

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 (2015) 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. Hart (2000) posits that 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. Capturing it in a different way, Rum, Troena, Hadiwidjoyo & Surachman (2013) opine that one knowledge and skills that need to be owned by leaders, managers, and administrators is conflict management skills. This is because unmanaged conflict may result in withdrawal of individuals and unwillingness on their part to participate in other groups or assist with various group action programs in the organization (Mba, 2013). 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 (Akanji, 2005). Efficient and effective management of conflicts is fundamental to the development of any society and organization. Managing conflict towards proactive and constructive action is the best approach in resolving conflict in universities (Etim & Okey, 2013).

Conflict results to positive outcomes if managed and resolved properly. This is however contingent on the type of conflict at hand. Conflict could be intrapersonal (within an individual), interpersonal and or intergroup. Rahim (2001) opined that conflict may be interpersonal which is occurring between a supervisor and his subordinate or between two individuals at the same level of the organizational hierarchy or inter group with which often occur between two trade unions, between two departments or between management and workers while attempting to implement the policies and programme of the organization. Luthans (2001) maintains that people at work may encounter conflict at the intrapersonal level (within an individual), the interpersonal level (individual to individual conflict), the intergroup level (conflicts among groups or team), or the inter-organizational level (conflict among organization). The focus of this study is however the interpersonal type which within the context of this study is the conflict between or among academic staff in Abia State University Uturu (ABSU), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli (COOU), Ebonyi State University (EBSU),University of Nigeria Nsuka (UNN) and Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO). Managing this type of conflict appears dicey because sometimes, the universities or its management may not be aware of such conflict and so depends solely on the people involved. Hence, calling into mind the emotional intelligence of the people involved and the strategies the individuals involved chooses to adopt in managing the conflict. This is the reason why this study was necessitated to examine the role played by emotional intelligence and integrating style of managing conflict on employee commitment in the selected public universities in the south east.

Statement of the Problem
Conflict has to do with disagreement and antagonism between or among people or group within the context organizations like the studied universities. As a result of this, different strategies and approaches have been suggested by conflict resolution experts like the widely used Rahim model which looks at concern for people and concern for others as its main theme. The approach to be adopted however depends on the form of conflict, whether it is intrapersonal, interpersonal and intergroup conflict. The focus of this study is on interpersonal conflict which is a conflict between or among academic staff in the studied universities. These conflicts could be as a result of work related issues or issues that have nothing to do with the job. It could be issues of who takes which class and at what time, it could be issues of what courses to be taken, how marks are awarded. The conflict could also be as a result of differences in ideology and perception of individuals about each other. These types of conflict are rarely noticed by the university management and even when they do, it appears that the authorities are reluctant to wade into such interpersonal issues. It is important to note that despite the fact that the crisis is between or among individual, its effect could be as devastating as the intergroup or inter-organizational conflict. This is the reason it is expedient to carry out this study to find out the role the emotional level of these conflicting academic staff play in determining their commitment level. It is also

necessary to examine how the approach chosen by the staff relate with the commitment level of the employees.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to determine the type of relationship that exists between conflict management and employee commitment among academic staff in selected Public Universities in the South East. Specifically, the study seeks to:

a) To ascertain the type of relationship that exists between emotional intelligence and employee commitment among academic staff in selected Public Universities in the South East.
b) To examine the type of relationship that exists between integrating style and employee commitment among academic staff in selected public universities in the South East.

Research Hypotheses

a) There is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee commitment among academic staff in selected public universities in the South East.
b) There is a significant positive relationship between Integrating Style and employee commitment among academic staff in selected public universities in the South East.

Scope of the Study

The study focus is on determining the relationship that exists between conflict management and the commitment level of academic staff. The universities selected for this study include Abia State University Uturu (ABSU), Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli (COOU), Ebonyi State University (EBSU), University of Nigeria Nsuka (UNN) and Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO). These universities were selected using Table of random Numbers. The Faculty of Management Sciences or Business Administration of these schools was selected for this study.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Review

Conflict

Conflict in ordinary parlance has to do with misunderstanding, disagreement, rancour and dissatisfaction with a particular situation or a particle thing. Corroborating this definition, Fadipe (2000) posits that conflict is a form of disagreement in an establishment between two individuals or groups who have cause to interact formally or informally. To Schramm-Nielsen (2002), it is a state of serious disagreement and argument about something perceived to be important by at least one of the parties involved. It is an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities (Wilmont & Hocker, 2001).In the words of Schermerhorn, Hunt & Osborn (2006), it occurs whenever disagreements exist in a social situation over issues of substance or whenever emotional antagonisms create frictions between individuals or groups. Basically, Miller & King (2005) opine that it is a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups over compatible goals. From the foregoing therefore,

it can be clearly seen that conflict has to do with incompatibility between or among people or groups.

Bringing conflict to the domain of organization, it implies a person's or group action natively affecting the actions or plans of another person or group. It begins when one party perceives that another party in an organization has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about (Robbins & Judge, 2009). PalukuKazimoto (2013) states that in organizations, 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's attempting to achieve objectives. It is a state of friction caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people working together (Oseremen & Osemeke, 2015).

Conflict could come from different sources as Jennifer & Jones (2007) posits. They state that the main sources of conflict in an organization include differentiation, task relationships and scarcity of relationship. Mullins (1999) identified three potential sources of organization conflict. They are:

1. Individual - such as attitude, personality characteristics of particular person, needs, illness and stress.
2. Group - such as group skills, the informal organization and group norms.
3. Organization - such as communications, authority structure, leadership style and management behaviour.

Rahim (2002) posits that conflict may occur due to a number of factors such as

I. When a part is required to engage in an activity that is inconsistent with his goals, needs or interest.
II. When one party holds behavioural preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with another person's implementation of his or her preferences.
III. When a party wants some mutually desirable resource that is in short supply.
IV. When a particular party possesses attitudes, value, skills and goals that are salient in directing his or her behaviour but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes and values, skills and goals held by other(s).

Conflict Management

Conflicting situations in organizations often result to negative outcomes such as anger, reduced concentration and commitment, employee turnover and general reduction in not just the performance of employees but also the organizational performance. In a bid to turn the tide and make the consequences of conflict to be less destructive to the employees and the organization, conflict management was instituted. Conflict management is one of the most discussed issues in conflict literature as aptly captured by Balay (2007) who states that conflict management is one of the most essential issues in the conflict literature. Management of conflict makes conflicts to be functional and functional conflicts are beneficial to the firm(s) in question. Functional conflict, results in positive benefits to individuals, the group, or the organization (Schermerhon, Hunt, & Osborn, 2000). It can also be valuable to an organization since it promotes innovative

and creative problem solving, develops genuine harmony between individuals and clarifies issues for the benefit of the members and the organization (Schermerhorn et al., 2000).

At this juncture, one will wonder what conflict management is. Well, conflict management is that which tries to channel the negative energy and consequences of conflict to positive outcome and result for the persons or group involved and at the end, the organization becomes better for it. Rahim (2002) opines that conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. Hellriegel (2010) states that it is the interventions designed to reduce the negative consequences of conflict. The aim is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting because properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes (Alpert, Tjosvaldo, & Law, 2000). It broadens understanding of the problem, increases the resolutions and tend to work towards consensus and to seek a genuine commitment to decision making (Knippen, Yohan & Ghalla, 2011). The ability to divert this energy into productive achievement for both parties involved in the conflict are what conflict management is all about (Prentice, 2006). Blake & Mouton (2009) posit that the most important aspect of a successful conflict management is the attempt to shift the behavioural and attitudinal components of a relationship from a competitive to a cooperative orientation.

Different approaches and methods have over the years been advocated to be used in appropriately managing conflicts in organizations. Bringing to the fore the importance of these approaches, Sanda (2008) posits that conflict management strategies are important in every organization in order to generate creative thinking and to establish a problem-solving attitude. Ford (2007) provides a four-way process which includes assessment and inquiry, addressing the design, implementation and evaluation aimed at reaching a valid and objective conflict management decision. SkjØrshammer (2001) revealed that when in conflict, professionals use three major behavioural approaches to handle the situation: avoidance, forcing, and negotiation/compromise, usually in that order. Gobeli, Koening & Bechinger (1998) classify the conflict management approaches as withdrawal/avoidance, imposing/forcing, compromising/give and take, smoothing/ harmonizing, and confrontation/problem solving. Rahim & Magner (1995) suggest that people may select from five styles in handling conflicts: avoiding (the person, issue, the situation), accommodating (giving in), compromising (both parties make adjustments), competing (forcing to satisfy one's desires) and collaborating (problem solving). Blake & Mouton (2009), offer an approach which emphasizes consultation- based interventions, openness of communication, greater participation in decision-making and problem-solving interactions.

Mullins (1996) & Sev (2006) suggested number of ways in which harmful effects of conflict can be avoided. They posit that the strategies adopted will vary according to the nature and sources of conflict. These include:

a) Clarification of goals and objectives
b) Resource distribution
c) Personnel policies and procedures
d) Non – monetary Rewards
e) Development of interpersonal group process skills
f) Group Activities
g) Leadership and Management

h) Organizational Processes
i) Socio- technical approach
j) Negotiation

Emotional Intelligence

The term Emotional Intelligence (EI) has no single generally agreed definition. It is suffering from definitional unanimity. Corroborating this statement, Lopes, Salovey, Côté & Beers (2005) posit that different researchers have defined EI in many ways. However, the central point about EI is that it has to do with putting into consideration the feelings of others while relating or settling issues like conflict with them. It has to do with feelings and how it is handled while dealing with others. Mandell & Phewanti (2003) opine that EI is a set of abilities that involves perceiving and reasoning abstractly with information that emerges from feeling. It is the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer & Salovey, 2001).

Baron (2002) posits that EI addresses one's ability to identify, interpret, and control his or her own emotions, as well as stay in tune with, understand, and relate to the emotions of groups and individuals. It is the ability of individuals in handling relationships with others (interpersonal) and controlling their emotions (intrapersonal) (Fletcher, 2007). EI can be described as having four branches: the ability to accurately perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion into thought, understand emotion, and regulate emotions in the self and others (Mayer & Salovey, 2001). Barron (2000) describes it as an array of emotional and social knowledge and abilities that influence our overall ability to effectively cope with environmental demands. The author further states that it is comprised of five high level factors which are intrapersonal skills-the ability of being aware and understanding emotions, feelings and ideas in the self, interpersonal skills-the ability of being aware and understanding emotions, feelings and ideas in others, adaptability-the ability of being open to changes in our feelings depending on the situation, stress management-the ability to cope with stress and control emotions, and general moods-the ability of feeling and expressing positive emotions and being optimistic. Kim, Cable, Kim & Wang (2009) state that people with high level of EI can gather and regulate the emotions accurately and then use that information to make decisions and to enhance the performance by changing the behaviours in a desired manner.

Integrating Style of Resolving Conflict

This is one of the five conflict handling styles suggested by Rahim. Rahim (2001) specified two fundamental dimensions of concern for self and concern for others. The first one shows the level of the individual's desire for satisfying self-concern whereas the second one shows the level of desire for satisfying the concerns of others thus, making a case for the five conflict management behaviours or strategies. Our concern in this study is on integrating style of conflict management. This style has a high concern for self and others. This style is also known as problem solving. It involves cooperation between the parties (i.e., frankness, exchange of information, and examination of differences to reach an acceptable solution between the two parties. Gray (1989) describes integrating style as a process through which parties who see different aspects of a

problem constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible.

Integrating or collaborating style of conflict management is linked with problem solving and involves openness, sharing information, searching for alternatives and examination of differences to reach an effective solution acceptable to both parties (Copley, 2008). It contains two processes: Conflict diagnosing and developing alternative solutions to the problem (Weitzman & Weitzman, 2006). This style produces more desirable outcomes when used. Trudel & Reio (2011) found that individuals that use integrating style experience rude behaviours less.

Employee Commitment

Employee commitment means different things to different people at different times. That notwithstanding, it is one of the most studied behavioural performance indicators in organizational studies and management literature. Employee commitment has to do with the level of loyalty and identification an employee has for the organization he is working for. It is that which makes an employee to give the best to ensure that the organization performs well. Ming-Huei Jian (2007) opines that employee commitment is an employee's identification with the organization and his psychological support to its mission. It is an employee's identification with the organization and its goals as well as the extent of his willingness to be a member of it for a long time (Chau-Chiuan Yu, 2005). It is one's own investment in an organization and inclining to attitudes resulting in social qualities (Balay, 2000).

A committed employee is the one who stays with the organisation through thick and thin, attends work regularly, puts in a full day, protects company's assets and shares company goals (Meyer and Allen cited in Chen & Jiang, 2009). Akintayo (2010) posits that employee commitment is the degree to which the employee feels devoted to their organization. Ongori (2007) described it as an affective response to the whole organization and the degree of attachment or loyalty employees feel towards the organization. It is simply employees' attitude to organization (Zheng, 2010). A conflict that is not well managed could result to a deflated commitment from the employee. Kirchoff & Adams (1982) captured it thus: the total implication of the negative effects of conflict is reduced employees' commitment to organizational goals and organizational efficiency.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Daniel Goleman theory of Emotional Intelligence (EI). This theory is also known as The Mixed Model developed by Daniel Goleman in 1998. The theory focuses on EI as a wide array of competencies and skills that drive leadership and employee performance. It proposes that EI consists of four major tenets: knowing our own emotions, managing one's emotions, recognizing the emotions of others and handling relationships. In relating this theory to this work, knowing ourselves, our emotions and that of others will enable the people in conflict to not just think about what is good for them but to also think of what other people will gain and benefit and to act upon it so that the parties will get a win-win situation. It will also guide the emotions of the people when settling or managing the conflict so that at the end, the staff will be happy and this will engender greater commitment by the staff.

Empirical Review

Mba (2013) carried out a study on conflict management and employees performance in Julius Berger Nigeria Plc. Bonny Island. The research question addressed the extent of the relationship between conflict management strategies and employees' performance and employees/management perception of the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in Julius Berger Nigeria Plc. Bonny Island. A descriptive research design was used in executing the study using 50 purposively selected sample respondents consisting of 25 managerial employees and 25 non-managerial employees. The core aspect of the study is the use of cross sectional survey research design in generating the required primary data. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results from the data analysis indicated that significant relationship exists between conflict management strategies and employees' performance and no differences exist between managerial and non-managerial employees 'perception of the effectiveness of conflict management strategies. The research therefore recommended among others: promotion of industrial democracy, regular management/employees meetings, and strict implementation of collective agreements and regular review of personnel policies.

Saranya (2016) studied the Influence of conflict management styles and its impact on organizational commitment is examined among Women Employees in IT sector in Chennai city. Data were obtained from 108 women employees working in IT sector through questionnaire. The variables were measured under the different conflict management styles such as Confrontation, Public/Private behaviour, Emotional expression, Conflict approach and Self-disclosure whereas organizational commitment was measured using Affective commitment, Continuance Commitment and Normative Commitment. Results from correlation revealed that the highest correlation between all the factors of conflict management and organizational commitment. There is a positive correlation between all the factors. Regression analysis revealed that emotional expression with the beta coefficient of 0.402 is having larger impact on the conflict management style and organizational commitment. Better conflict management practices lead employees with greater commitment and better job performance.

Awan & Saeed (2015) looked at conflict situations and its causes, as well as possible solution of improve working environment in an organization in Askari Bank Ltd in Pakistan. A formal questionnaire was constructed and survey method was used to collect data from a target group of respondents. Descriptive analytical techniques such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation & variance and factor analysis were applied to analyze and interpret the data. Ratio analysis was used to analyze Askari Bank's performance. The major findings are that Education does not have any effect on the opinion of respondents on Conflict Management Strategies. Similarly, there is no significant difference between the opinion of male and female respondents regarding the causes of conflict. However, there is a significant effect of conflict on organizational performance. The study suggested that Management must adopt Conflict Management strategies that improve the Performance of the Organization, besides ensuring a free flow of communication between the management and the employee as well as promote interpersonal relationships among co-workers to boost their morale.

Studying Nigerian Breweries Plc, Iganmu, Lagos State, Nigeria, Ndulue & Ekechukwu (2016) examined the impact of conflict management on employee's performance. A survey research design was used in the study. Data was collected from primary source with the use of

questionnaire. The duration of study was between 2005 - 2014. Ordinary Least Square was adopted and the finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between conflict management and employees performance in Nigerian Breweries Plc. The study recommended that the management of Nigerian Breweries Plc should improve in the area of conflict management approaches (bargaining, compromise and forcing) since it improves employees' performance.

Owoseni (2012) examined the influence of conflict management strategies on perceived organizational commitment in selected manufacturing companies in Nigeria. Subjects for the study were 253 respondents which comprised 198 males and 55 females. Three hypotheses were tested and the findings of the study revealed that there was a joint effect of yielding and problem-solving on organizational commitment $\{F(2,250) = 7.857; R = .243, R2 = .059, Adj. R 2 = 0.052; P < .05\}$. The result also showed that the joint effect of problem-solving, compromising, avoiding, forcing and yielding was significant $\{F(5,247) = 7.514; R = .363, R2 = .132, Adj. R 2 = 0.114; P < .05\}$. Lastly, the result also showed that there was no significant difference in the organizational commitment of male and female respondents $\{t(251) = 1.96; p > .05\}$. It was thus recommended among others that managers should develop diverse but appropriate strategies to resolve and manage conflicts as they arise before it escalates to unmanageable levels. Hence, organizations should take time to analyze the source, type and amount of conflict before making a decision on which strategy to adopt for the effective management of the conflict.

Ayodele & Adewumi (2007) compared the incidence and management of conflicts in secular and non-secular tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The sample of the study was made of sixty staff, and two hundred and forty students randomly selected each from two secular and two non-secular tertiary institutions in south western Nigeria. A validated questionnaire was designed and administered to collect data on the occurrence of conflict and conflict management strategies. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentage. In addition, t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics were used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that conflict is common to both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. The study however revealed that the level of occurrence of conflict is low in the two types of institutions. It was also revealed that there is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions. In addition, the study revealed that the conflict management strategies adopted by authorities of both secular and non-secular tertiary institutions are significantly related to their effectiveness. Based on the findings, it was recommended that authorities need to give prompt attention to addressing causes of conflicts. The use of dialogue in resolving conflicts should be embraced. In addition, all stakeholders in tertiary institutions are encouraged to employ religious exercises for divine intervention to reduce the emergence of conflict or for resolving existing conflicts.

Sev, Kwahar, Emakwu, Dewua & Agema (2016) carried out a critical analysis of conflict management approaches as a tool for productive performance in business organizations, a survey of Dangote Cement Plc, Gboko plant. The study adopted simple empirical survey methods with a view of eliciting relevant data for analytical purpose so as to answer several questions and attain the objectives of the study. Both primary and secondary sources of data collection were utilized in a bid to attain the necessary result. The sample size for the study is 269 derived from the population of 825 employee of Dangote Cement Plc, Gboko plant determined using Yaro-Yamane's formulae. Bartlett's test of Sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer Olkin measure of sampling

adequacy, construct validity determination and Cronbach alpha for reliability determination was applied too. Multiple regression test was adopted for testing two formulated hypotheses. The findings revealed that conflict management have positive impacts in enhancing productivity of employees of Dangote Cement Plc, Gboko plant. Another finding reveals that strategies and techniques for management of conflict have significantly impacted on the performance of Dangote Cement Plc, Gboko plant. The study recommended that the circumstance of conflict occurrence should be X-rayed, evaluated before deciding to adopt a suitable method, strategy and technique for conflict resolution and management. Secondly, the management of Dangote Cement Plc, Gboko plant should ensure that causes and varying forces that may cause conflict in organization are checkmated to ensure organizational success. These causes may include; limited resources, overlapping authority, inadequate treatment, differences in perception, role conflict, leadership styles and diversity differences amongst others.

Nel & De Villiers (2004) carried out a study on emotional intelligence that aimed to determine whether there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance in a call centre environment. The sample comprised 135 call centre agents who worked in client services, sales and administrative environments in a life insurance company. The correlation between variables was investigated with the use of Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient. The results showed a statistically significant and positive correlation between emotional intelligence and job performance in the call centre environment. It was concluded that there is a tendency for a high level of job performance in the respective call centres to be associated with a high level of emotional intelligence.

Barzegar, Afzal, Maleki & Koochakyazdi (2013) explored the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Decision-making Quality in Hospital Managers. A cross-sectional survey was conducted on 30 senior and junior managers of different departments of Shahid Hasheminejad Subspecialty Center. The study made use of questionnaire instrument for data collection. To analyse the data collected, Pearson correlation coefficient and multivariate regression analysis were employed. A strong correlation between EI and solution proposing was identified. The study concluded that a significant correlation between managers' emotional intelligence and their quality of decision-making was identified. In addition, multivariate regression analysis indicated that solution finding by the hospital managers is influenced by their emotional intelligence and further encourage hospital administrators to improve managers' emotional intelligence to achieve a higher organizational performance in health settings.

Agbor, Ebeh, Nwankwo & Agu (2014) examined the influence of emotional intelligence and gender on job satisfaction among employees of Owerri Municipal and Oguta Local Government Councils, in Imo State, South East Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. A total of 160 fulltime employees of Owerri Municipal and Oguta Local Government Councils participated in this study. They were drawn through accidental sampling. Copies of questionnaires were distributed to participants approached at their offices in the two selected councils while data was analyzed using f-test for 2-Way ANOVA on SPSS version 17. Results showed that emotional intelligence had a significant influence on job satisfaction and that gender has no significant influence on job satisfaction. Another important discovery of this study is that job satisfaction is not determined by gender. Based on this, females should not be discriminated against during employment.

Okon, Anietie & Abosede (2015) examined Emotional Intelligence and Employee Performance from the Nigerian Banking Industry. The target population of the study comprised

of all the employees in the banking industry, Akwa Ibom State. Sample size of 400 employees was selected using the convenient sampling technique. Data was collected using an adopted questionnaire which was earlier developed. Descriptive and inferential statistics provided the basis for the analysis. From the result, this study concludes that there is significant relationship between emotional intelligence and employees' performance since all the emotional intelligence factors studied are positively correlated with employees' performance. Therefore, it is recommended that organisations in the Nigerian banking industry develop training programmes in order to develop the emotional intelligence of their employees.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design because of the way the study is structured and how data will be elicited for the study. Nworgu (2006) posits that survey designs are designs in which a group of people or items are studied through collecting and analysing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. The target population of the study consisted of all the academic staff of all the public universities in the South East. The study population however is all the academic staff of Faculty of Management Science/Business Administration of the five selected universities which is 460. The sample size was 210 arrived at using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula. The formula is given thus:

$$s = \frac{x^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + x^2 P(1-P)}$$

Data for the study was used using self-designed questionnaire structure along Likert Scale five point format. The coding used are: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Disagree (3) and Strongly Disagree (2) and Undecided (1). The questionnaire consisted of just one section containing 15 items. Five items each for emotional intelligence, integrating style of conflict management and employee commitment. The instrument was validated using face and content validity while the reliability was measured using Spearman Brown Split Half Technique. 210 copies of questionnaire were distributed proportionately using Bowley's proportionate allocation formula. 190 copies of questionnaire were retrieved and analysed for the study. The analysis was done using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The formula is given as:

$$r = \frac{N\Sigma xy - (\Sigma x)(\Sigma y)}{\sqrt{[N\Sigma x^2 - (\Sigma x)^2][N\Sigma y^2 - (\Sigma y)^2]}}$$

The study made use of 5% (.05) level of significance and this guided the decision. The research hypothesis will be accepted if the probability value (p-value) obtained is less than .05 (p-value < 0.05), otherwise, the research hypothesis will be rejected (p-value > 0.05).

Test of Hypothesis

Table 1: Correlation Output.

Correlations

		EMOINT	EMPCOM
EMOINT	Pearson Correlation	1	.871[**]
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	190	190
EMPCOM	Pearson Correlation	. 871[**]	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	190	190

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).
Source: Field Survey Data, 2017
Computation: SPSS Ver. 20

Keys: **EMOINT =**
Emotional Intelligence   **EMPCOM =**
Employee Commitment

Table 2: Correlation Output.

Correlations

		INTEG	EMPCOM
INTEG	Pearson Correlation	1	.902[**]
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	190	190
EMPCOM	Pearson Correlation	. 902[**]	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	190	190

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).
Source: Field Survey Data, 2017
Computation: SPSS Ver. 20

Keys: **INTG**
= Integrating Style   **EMPCOM =**
Employee Commitment

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result obtained from test of hypothesis one indicated that Emotional Intelligence has a significant positive relationship with employee commitment. That is to say, the more employees are emotionally aware of the feelings of others and also regulate their own feeling so that the best solution that favours everybody is sought, the more committed the employees who are involved will be to duties. If people who are having conflict in the work place can put themselves in the shoes of others and behave accordingly, then the work place will be fun place to be and this will

inspire confidence and engender commitment. This finding is corroborated by Nel & De Villiers (2004) whose study showed a statistically significant and positive correlation between emotional intelligence and job performance. Similarly, Barzegar, Afzal, Maleki & Koochakyazdi (2013) found a strong correlation between emotional intelligence and solution proposing while Agbor, Ebeh, Nwankwo & Agu (2014) showed that emotional intelligence had a significant influence on job satisfaction.

From the result of the second hypothesis, it was revealed that integrating style which is a type of conflict management strategy has a significant positive relationship with employee commitment. That is, if the conflict management style adopted by employees in conflict is such that a win-win situation is sought; a situation where the parties have high concern for themselves and for the other person a people, then this will influence the commitment level of the employees positively towards the organization. this result align with that of Mba (2013) whose result indicated that significant relationship exists between conflict management strategies (integrating style) and employees' performance. Also, the result of Saranya (2016) revealed that there is correlation between all the factors of conflict management and organizational commitment while Ndulue & Ekechukwu (2016) revealed that there is a significant relationship between conflict management styles which integrating style is a part of and employees' performance.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

It was revealed from the first hypothesis that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence and employee commitment among academic staff in selected Public Universities in the South East with a correlation coefficient of 871 (r =.871 < .05). from the test of the second hypothesis, it indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between integrating style and employee commitment among academic staff in selected Public Universities in the South East with a correlation coefficient of 902 (r =.902 < .05).

6. CONCLUSION

Following the findings, the study concludes that the style adopted in managing conflict and the emotional level of the people involved has an effect on the how fast and well the conflict will be managed which will tell off on the commitment level of the employees.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Sequel to the findings, the study recommends that:

a) The academic staff of the studied universities should always put the feeling of others into consideration while resolving conflict as this will go a long way in leaving the parties happy.
b) The people in conflict should be open minded and ready to hear out the other person so as to take the best possible and rational decision while managing conflict.
c) Various styles of managing conflict should be taught by the management of the Universities so that even when they do not know about the conflict like interpersonal conflict, the people involved will chose the best approach.

d) Emotions should be kept in check and regulated so as to be sensitive to certain issues as this will make the exercise of conflict managing an enjoyable engagement.

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Appendix B

SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT AMONG ACEDEMIC STAFF IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA.

INSTRUCTION:

Dear respondents, you are free to express your feelings about the questions and tick (√) in the appropriate boxes as it best represents your opinion.

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD
	Emotional Intelligence	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
1	I will always put the feelings of others into consideration in settling conflicts.					
2	I try to put my emotions in check while reconciling.					
3	My emotions take hold of me whenever I want to settle conflict with my colleagues					
4	I try to understand the other person whenever I am dealing with them.					
5	While interpreting the actions of others, I put myself in their shows.					
	Integrating Style					
6	When settling conflict, I always look for solution acceptable to all parties.					
7	I prefer openness while conflict is being managed.					
8	I like parties to conflict to exchange information truthfully when trying to find a common ground.					
9	I prefer to get what I want always.					
10	I prefer solutions that go beyond my own limited vision of what is possible.					
	Employee Commitment					
11	I will be more committed to my organization if conflicts between or among parties are resolved amicably.					
12	Conflicts that are settled to favour everybody will make me more loyal to the organization.					
13	I will work more harmoniously with people who consider the feelings of others in dealing with them.					
14	I will go the extra mile for my firm if I know that a win-win situation will always be sought if conflicts arises.					
15	My devotedness to my organization is contingent on how					

	interpersonal conflicts are managed.					

S/N	NAME	STATE	YEAR
1	Michael Okpara University, Umudike (MOUAU).	Abia State	1992
2	**Abia State University Uturu (ABSU).**	**Abia State**	**1981**
3	**Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli. (COOU)**	**Anambra State**	**2000**
4	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU)	Anambra State	1991
5	**Ebonyi State University (EBSU)**	**Ebonyi State**	**1999**
6	Federal University, Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI).	Ebonyi State	2011
7	**University of Nigeria Nsuka (UNN)**	**Enugu State**	**1955**
8	Enugu State University of Technology (ESUT)	Enugu State	1979
9	**Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO)**	**Imo State**	**1980**
10	Imo State University (IMSU)	Imo State	1981

Sources: Field Survey, 2017 & Internet source retrieved in 2017.