

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT AMONG  
UNIVERSITY EMPLOYEES: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA  
STUDENTS AFFAIRS UNIT**

**By**

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**A dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in association with Zimbabwe Open University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Science in Peace, Leadership and Conflict Resolution.**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA**

**LUSAKA**

**2019**

## DECLARATION

I, **Mwamba Mukuka Brenda**, do hereby declare that this dissertation represents my own work and that it has not been previously submitted for a degree at this or any other University.

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**APPROVAL**

This dissertation of **Mwamba Mukuka Brenda** is approved as fulfilling part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Science in Peace, Leadership and Conflict Resolution by The University of Zambia in association with Zimbabwe Open University.

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Date:

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my dear husband Phinias Makondo and my sons Emmanuel, Daniel, and Joshua.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My sincere gratitude goes to all the people who rendered support and help for me to successfully complete my dissertation. The process of earning a Masters degree and writing a dissertation is long and arduous and one cannot do it alone.

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Ms Simuyaba, E. for her guidance, encouragement, patience, motivation, enthusiasm and immense knowledge which enabled me to complete this piece of work. Thank you madam for the scholarly criticisms and guidance throughout my writing process.

I send my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. G. Muleya the course Coordinator of this programme for his tremendous support, encouragement, understanding, enthusiasm and positivity towards all students throughout the period of the study. His class was just amazing. His idea of bringing experts on each topic he handled gave us the opportunity to get full understanding on various topics.

I further thank my lecturers Dr. Moyo and Mr Mwanabayeke for their availability, knowledge and wisdom during our learning and all the lecturers that taught me in this programme.

I also wish to acknowledge my late mother Bibian Bubenshi for sacrificing for me and making me be the person that I am today.

I furthermore extend my gratitude to Micheal Phiri who helped me during the course of my research. I am grateful for the guidance, encouragement and support.

I also wish to thank all my respondents for their availability during the research .Without your contribution this dissertation was not going to be written.

Finally, I give thanks to the Almighty God who has given me the finishing grace, To Him am grateful.

## **ABSTRACT**

Conflict is an inseparable part of people's lives. It is difficult to define as it occurs in many different settings. The essence of conflict seems to be disagreement, contradiction, or incompatibility. Thus, conflict refers to any situation in which there are incompatible goals, cognitions, or emotions within or between individuals of groups that lead to opposition of antagonistic interaction. It has its positive sides, although varying views of it may be held. Some may view conflict as a negative situation which must be avoided at any cost. The major aim of the current study was to explore the nature and sources of organizational conflict among employees in the Student's Affairs Unit at the University of Zambia. Firstly, the study sought to

describe the nature of conflict among the employees in the unit. Secondly, the study investigated the sources of organizational conflict among employees in the unit. Thirdly, it established the factors that influenced persistence of conflict in the organization and lastly it sought to highlight the strategies currently used and those needed by the student's affairs management to resolve the persisting conflicts at the institution.

A qualitative design was used and Semi-structured interviews were carried out. Purposive sampling was used for the institution and convenient sampling was used for the participants. Two groups of participants involving subordinate employees (n=15) and supervisory employees (n=5). . Codes were identified and themes were developed through thematic interpretive analysis.

Results on the nature of conflict revealed that conflict was characterised by two main forms. Vertical conflict and horizontal conflict which were generally non-confrontational. Eight themes emerged under sources of conflict and these included political interests, tribalism delayed salaries, overstaying in position of power by managers and lack of dialogue between managers and subordinate employees. On factors perpetuating the persistence of conflict, the study revealed absence of proper space for dialogue, insufficient education among employees, jealousy and intimidation. The study further revealed strategies needed for resolving destructive conflict at the institution and these included capacity building of the counselling center, frequent open meetings and the need for workers unions to facilitate conflict resolution more actively.

Lastly, the findings revealed that organisational conflict at the institution was largely influenced by cultural, psychosocial and political factors. The study therefore recommends the need for human resource managers in organisations as well as labour policy makers to manage organisational conflict through enhanced transparency, improved communication and capacity building of counselling centers at institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: *Nature, organisational conflict, university of Zambia, source*

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## **LIST OF ACCRONYMS**

DOSA: Dean of Students Affairs

UNZA: University of Zambia



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

The concept of conflict because of its ambiguity and pervasive nature, has acquired a multitude of meanings and connotations. Like other terms, conflict generates considerable ambivalence and leaves many scholars' and administrators quite unsure about its meaning and relevance; and how best to cope with it. Conflict situations are inevitable in one's personal life, in organizations or even between nations. Conflict is a process in which one party suggests that its interests are being opposed by another party. As a rule, people see only the observable aspect of conflict angry words, actions of opposition, etc. But this is only a small part of the conflict process (Bercovitch, 1983; Mashanne and Glinow, 2008).

Conflict is an inseparable part of people's lives. It has its positive sides, although varying views of it may be held. Some may view conflict as a negative situation which must be avoided at any cost. Others may see it as a phenomenon which necessitates its management. Still, others may consider conflict as an exciting opportunity for personal growth and so try to use it to their best advantage. Wherever one may fall on this continuum of viewpoints concerning conflict, rarely would one expect to be in a continuous state of conflict as the basis for employment (Bercovitch, 1983; Nebgen, 1978).

According to Coser (1967), conflict is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate the rivals. It is also defined from communication perspective as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from other parties in achieving their goals (Hocker & Wilmot, 1985). There is also conflict within individuals between competing needs and demands to which individuals respond in different ways.

Since conflict is seemingly unavoidable, it is obviously necessary for managers to be able to recognize the source of the conflict, to view it's constructive as well as destructive potential, to learn how to manage conflict and to implement conflict resolution technique in a practical way

(Fleerwood, 1987). Conflict is now seen as having the potential for positive growth. Deetz and Stevenson (1986), list three assumptions that indicate that conflict can be positive. Their belief is that management of conflict serves as a more useful conception of the process of conflict resolution. Their assumptions are as follows: Conflict is natural; Conflict is good and necessary; and most conflicts are based on real differences.

The assumption that conflict is good and necessary is suggested because conflict can stimulate innovative thinking when properly managed. Lacking conflicts, thought and actions are performed because they are routine. Conflicts allow an examination of necessity of these thoughts and actions. The third assumption points out that people are frequently timid in facing the reality that legitimated differences may exist and instead blame conflict on poor or non-existent communication. It may seem easier to live with unresolved misunderstanding than to face the fact that real, fundamental differences do exist and so demand recognition and management (Deetz and Stevenson, 1986).

However, conflict in organizations is a daily occurrence because a consensus of opinion concerning rules governing the organization seldom exists among staff and line employees. They see one another as adversaries, and not as partners working towards a common goal as the case should be in the organization. There is potential of conflict in practically every decision that the manager must make. Moreover, coping efficiently and effectively with potential conflicts is possibly one of the most important aspects of the manager's position (Nebgen, 1978).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Conflict in organizational settings has often led to distrust and hostility among professional and academic administrators thus contributing in hampering effective and efficient attainment of the goals and objectives of university education (Etzioni, 2004). It appears that despite this situation, stakeholders and those directly involved seemed to be condoning this silent war and pretending that all is well. This probably explains the scarcity of research on this matter. In most organizations, role conflict is perceived to scarcely play anything but disruptive and negative roles (Etzioni, 2004).

The university education sector today is not different from the industrial sector for it also stands to market its goods in the global market and the inputs expended must also account for the outputs obtained to be able to defend its viability for continued absorption of scarce resources. Obviously, organizational conflicts in the case of university of Zambia are bound to also be disruptive and negative as people involved often see one another as enemies. This is unwelcome for the university community and definitely unwanted. It therefore becomes salient that the nature of organizational conflict among University of Zambia Dean of Students Affairs (DOSA) management be investigated to proffer feasible strategies for minimizing or avoiding it.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This study explores the sources of conflict and job satisfaction among UNZA DOSA employees in order to establish effective institution conflict management strategies. Secondly, the results of this study may inform human resource management at UNZA by bringing to light the main and unique sources of conflict which can give management direction in conflict management within the organisation to promote job satisfaction and high productivity in the organisation. Lastly, the study will add to the body of research in research on organisational conflict management.

### **1.4 Aim of the Study**

To explore the nature and sources of organizational conflict among the employees of the University of Zambia Students Affairs unit.

### **1.5 Objectives**

- (a) To describe the nature of conflict among the employees at the University of Zambia Students Affairs Unit.
- (b) To investigate the sources of organizational conflict among employees at the University of Zambia Student Affairs Unit.
- (c) To establish the factors that influences persistence of conflict among employees of the University of Zambia Student Affairs Unit.
- (d) To establish strategies used by the Students Affairs management unit to resolve the existing conflicts at the University of Zambia Student Affairs Unit.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

- (a) What is the nature of conflict among the employees of the Students Affairs Unit of the University of Zambia?
- (b) What are the sources of organizational conflict within the Student's Affairs Unit of the University of Zambia?
- (c) What factors influence the persistence of organizational conflict within the Students' Affairs Unit of the University of Zambia?
- (d) What strategies are being used by the Student's Affairs management to resolve the existing conflicts in the Students Affairs Unit of the University of Zambia?

## **1.7 Delimitation**

Despite having so many sections of human resource, the study will only be conducted among the employees of the University of Zambia Student's Affairs Unit. Secondly, the organization chosen for the study was the University of Zambia.

## **1.8. Theoretical framework**

### **1.8.1 The Human Relations or Contemporary View (1940-1970)**

According to the human relations contemporary view, conflict is a natural occurrence in all groups. It believes that conflict may benefit a group's performance (Robbins, 2005). Although disputes happens from time to time and it is not wise to put too much effort into avoiding or preventing the conflict. Concentrating only on large or critical conflicts allows people to resolve the conflict in a better and more effective way (Leung, 2010). According to this view, conflict is seen as a natural and inevitable outcome of people working together in groups and teams. Thus it needs not necessarily be viewed negatively, but rather positively as a potential force in contributing to the performance of individuals (Robbins, et al., 2003).

### **1.8.2 The Interactionist View**

According to this view, conflict is not only a positive force, but is also necessary for an individual to perform effectively (Robbins, et al, 2003). Resolving conflicts means challenging normal processes and procedures in an effort to improve individual productivity or introduce

innovative systems (Robbins, et al, 2003). Conflict is necessary to perform effectively, but not all conflicts are good. This school of thought has identified several types of conflict:

The interactionist interpret conflict in a totally different way from traditionalists and people with a contemporary view. According to interactionist, conflict can be identified as either dysfunctional or functional. Conflict is a part of people's lives and a natural phenomenon in all organizations. A low level of conflict will not be harmful for daily operations but will help to create smooth functioning by better understanding of existing issues. Conflict at the desired level can inspire creativity when handling issues and resolving conflict. Thus, conflict can be positive in work environments, but whenever a critical or major conflict occurs, it should be resolved as the undesired level of conflict can be harmful and dysfunctional for the organization (Leung, 2010).

### **1.8.3 Operational definitions**

*Organisational conflict:* Disagreement among Student Affairs Unit employees both overtly and covertly that involves their interactions as employees both at personal level and professional level.

*Students Affairs Management:* Personnel involved in the administration of the student's affairs starting with the Dean of students Affairs, other administrative officers and supervisors at various levels of the departments within the student's affairs unit.

*Sources of conflict:* underlying points of perceived disagreement which result in conflict

*Employees:* Every UNZA employee working for Students Affairs Unit except those in management.

*Nature of conflict:* The characteristics of conflict and the situation in which it takes place. General description of conflict as observed and experienced by the participants.

*Subordinate employee:* All the employees who are not in managerial positions or supervision level.

*Student Affairs Unit:* A section of the University of Zambia which deals with student affairs.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Overview**

In any organization, just like the University of Zambia, there are many causes of conflicts; however, conflicts within an individual usually arise when a person is uncertain about what task is expected to do, if not clearly defined by the supervisor or the person in charge (Henry, 2009). Furthermore, if the tasks of individuals working as a group are not clearly defined by the management they will lead to more conflicts. Conflicts between individuals may result from role-related pressures. Conflicts would arise between individuals and groups if the goals were not specified for individuals within a group (Duke, 1999). This section reviews existing literature on organizational conflict and effectiveness of conflict management strategies. It further identifies the gaps existing in literature in terms of context, approach and nature.

#### **2.1 Studies on Nature of Conflict**

Previous studies have recognized different types of conflict in organization and its association with performance. Among the forms of conflict identified, organizational scholars in their studies have found that horizontal and vertical inequality is among the major types of organizational conflicts. Research findings indicate that societal inequality can be viewed in many ways that is the distinction between vertical inequality and horizontal inequality (inequality among individuals and among groups (Stewart et al, 2009; Graham and Pettinato, 2002; Luttmer, 2004; Alesina and Rodrik, 1994; World Bank, 2006; Hener, 2010). Vertical inequality consists in inequality among individuals or households, while horizontal inequality is defined as inequality among groups, typically culturally defined (i.e. by ethnicity, religion or race) (Stewart et al, 2009). However, the nature and extent of vertical inequality in organizations of any society is important to consider for a number of reasons: one is that of creating a just society; secondly, the extent of inequality, for any given national income per capita, determines the level of poverty; similarly, thirdly, happiness tends to be higher in more equal societies (Graham and Pettinato, 2002; Luttmer, 2004); fourthly, there is evidence that more equal economies grow faster (Alesina

and Rodrik, 1994; World Bank, 2006); and fifthly, higher inequality is associated with higher rates of criminality. Therefore developing policies to reduce vertical inequality is important (Bourgignon, 2001).

Similarly, longitudinal and descriptive surveys studies such as that of (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001; Auvinen & Nafziger, 1999; Lichbach, 1989) have describe horizontal inequalities as particularly important in conflict-prone societies, since there is growing evidence that the nature and level of horizontal inequality are important determinants of the risk of violent conflict. Violent conflict in turn undermines development and increases poverty levels (Stewart, 2001; Collier and World Bank, 2003). Thus, although it seems plausible that high levels of vertical inequality would generate resentment and fuel conflict, the evidence on the relationship between vertical inequality and conflict is inconclusive (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Auvinen and Nafziger, 1999; Lichbach, 1989). Group inequality generates powerful grievances which leaders can use to mobilize people to political protest, by calling on cultural markers (a common history, language or religion) and pointing to group exploitation. Such mobilization seems especially likely where there is political, economic inequality and academic inclusively, because then not only are the group leaders excluded from formal political power, but the mass of group members are economically deprived and consequently have significant grievances (Lichbach, 1989). What matter, of course, are not actual inequalities but *perceptions* of inequality and unfairness in the system.

Another cross-sectional study by Imazai and Ohbuchi, (2002) agrees with other previous studies that indeed vertical and horizontal are among the salient forms of organizational conflict. Vertical conflict occurs in groups of different hierarchical levels, such as supervisors and salesmen. Similarly in the business context, Alabar (2007) pointed that vertical conflict occurs between channel members at different levels of the distribution system for instance between manufacturers and wholesalers/retailers or between a wholesaler and a retailer. In the vertical conflict, differences in status and power between groups are in general larger than in the horizontal conflict (Robins, 1983). This is because these aspects tend to equalize in equivalent hierarchical levels. When vertical conflict takes place between operational workers and administration, their sources refer to: (i) psychological distance: workers do not feel involved in

the organisation and feel that their needs are not met; (ii) power and status: workers feel powerless and alienated; (iii) differences in value and ideology: this difference represents underlying beliefs on objectives and goals of an organization and; (iv) scarce resources: disagreements regarding benefits, salary and work conditions.

On the other hand, horizontal conflict occurs between individuals of the same level, such as managers in the same organization. Horizontal Conflict refers to conflict between employees or departments at the same hierarchical level in an organization (Ayaga and Timothy, 2015). Horizontal conflict occurs between intermediaries at the same level in a marketing channel such as between two or more retailers or two or more wholesalers that handle the same manufacturer's brands. Two sources of horizontal conflict are most common. Thus a primary source of horizontal conflict is scrambled merchandising in which middlemen diversify by adding product lines not traditionally carried by their type of business (Kotler, 2003).

Furthermore, a case study by Hener (2010) has added Line Staff conflicts, Role conflicts, Interpersonal conflict, Intrapersonal conflict, Intra-group conflict and intergroup conflict. Line staff conflict occurs between support staff and line employees, within a department or an organization while role conflicts can stem from an incomplete or otherwise fallacious understanding of the assignment given to an employee at a specific moment in time (Spaho, 2013; Chigozie, 2017; Stryker and Macke (2008)). It is argued that conflict is a dynamic process that does not appear suddenly, but takes some time to develop and passes through several stages. However, people within the same line of authority are more likely to disobey or differ in terms of political, economic or academic interest (Hener, 2010).

Interpersonal conflict represents a conflict between two individuals, colleagues, employees and managers, or between the management and the executive director (CEO) (Spaho, 2013). People are different from one another, there are varied personalities which usually results to incompatible choices and opinions. Obviously, it is a natural case which can eventually help in personal growth or developing relationships with others. In contrast, Intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual, it comes from the people themselves. For example, intrapersonal or personal conflict could occur when the employee finds that he has to perform a task for which he

is not enough competent (Hener., 2010). He becomes anxious, unsure of himself. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, values, principles and emotions (Jokanović et al., 2017).

Intragroup conflict this happens among individuals within a team. The misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intragroup conflict. It arises from interpersonal disagreements (e.g. team members have different personalities which may lead to tension) or differences in views and ideas (e.g. in a presentation, members of the team might find the notions presented by the one presiding to be erroneous due to their differences in opinion) (Adomi, 2005; Osabiya, 2015; Hener, 2010; Spaho, 2013). However, within a team, conflict can be helpful in coming up with decisions which will eventually allow them to reach their objectives as a team (Rahim, 2002). Unfortunately, if the degree of conflict disrupts harmony among the members, then some serious guidance from a different party will be needed for it to be settled (Bingham, 2004).

Intergroup conflict: this takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. For instance, the sales department of an organization can come in conflict with the customer support department. This is due to the varied sets of goals and interests of these different groups (Hotepo et al, 2010). In addition, competition also contributes for intergroup conflict to arise. There are other factors which fuel this type of conflict. Some of these factors may include a rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which establishes their own identity as a team. However, there are two kinds of intragroup conflict (Jehn, 1995) task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict is a perception of divergence among group members or individuals about the content of their decisions, and involves differences in viewpoints, ideas and opinions. Examples of task conflict are conflicts about the distribution of resources, about procedures or guidelines, and about the interpretation of facts. Relationship conflict is a perception of interpersonal incompatibility, and includes annoyance and animosity among individuals. Examples of relationship conflict are disagreements about values, personal or family norms, or about personal taste. Jokanović et al (2017) further argued that intergroup conflict may occur between the various groups, and in particular between the various departments and divisions (sales, marketing, and finance, academic), between the syndicate and the management, or between the suppliers who supplied the same organization.

On the basis of results, research has shown that within an organization, conflict can be constructive or functional and destructive or dysfunctional (Jehn, 1995; Hener, 2010; Rahim, 2002; Adomi, 2005; Osabiya, 2015; Chigozie, 2017). It aptly argued that conflicts are a threat to efficient operations, prevent progress and success of the organization, and then they are destructive or dysfunctional. On the other hand, if conflicts are contributing to the success and prosperity of the organization, then we are talking about functional or structural conflict (Jokanović et al., 2017). Functional conflict is conflict or tension within a group that leads to positive results. 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; joining in resolving the conflict, and helps individuals develop understanding and skills (Chigozie, 2017).

In contrast, destructive conflict features are: the inability of groups whose members are in conflict to find a solution to the problem or to find solutions that are of poorer quality, actors in the conflict are apathetic or increasingly aggressive and hostile towards each other, the energy is located at conflict and not in solution, making difficult to performing work tasks (Jehn, 1995; Ikeda et al, 2005; Henry, 2009). These conflicts should be, in any case, solved and eliminated, or they should be translated into constructive. Pondy (1967) considers that the conflict is a negative outcome of the cooperative organization system, which leads to performance degradation companies. Similarly, Mitroff and Emshoff (1979) argue that destructive conflicts inhibit the search for information in the decision making process.

Of the above mentioned nature and types of conflicts, process conflict has been the least examined. In one study, process conflict was associated with a lower level of group morale as well as with decreased productivity (Jehn, 1992). The logic proposed was that when a group argues about who does what; members are dissatisfied with the uncertainty caused by the process conflict and feel a greater desire to leave the group. In addition, Jehn (1997) noted that process conflicts interfere with task content quality and often misdirect focus to irrelevant discussions of

member ability. In a more recent study, Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999) found that groups who continually disagreed about task assignments were unable to effectively perform their work.

## **2.2 Causes of Organisational Conflict**

The focus of conflict researchers has not been on determining the causes of conflict rather its sources (Deutsch, 1990; Wall and Callister, 1995). Dirks and Parks posited that the interdependence of the disputants, with actual or perceived differences in goals, values, or aims, who view the other party as potentially interfering with the attainment of those goals, values, or aims lead to conflict in the workplace (Dirks and Parks, 2003). Putnam and Poole (1987) viewed the competition for resources, coordination of systems, work distribution, and participation in decision making as key factors to conflict in organizations. The rising conflicts between departments within organizations are attributed to the increasing strains produced by resource and workflow interdependence between departments and differences in their short-term objectives and their desires for autonomy (Barclay, 1991; Dutton and Walton, 1966; Gresham et al., 2006; Lovelace et al., 2001; Nauta and Sanders, 2001; Van De Ven and Ferry, 1980).

In his Bosnian case study, Spaho (2013) noted dependence in work activities and differentiation of organizational units and incompatibility of operating goals as among salient causes of conflict in workplaces. Dependence in work activities is common when a member of an organization cannot start his or her job, since another member has not finished his/her job, or if an individual significantly influences a colleague's job, then this might cause conflict. It is clearly observed that organizational causes of conflict are consequence of the characteristics of organizational design, limited resources and characteristics of organizational systems, such as: compensations, decision-making, planning and budgeting (Petković et al., 2008). Differentiation of organizational units and incompatibility of operating goals is as a result of specialization of organizational units (manufacturing, purchasing, finance, sales, etc.) manifests in everyday work as differences in working manners, goals and culture. These differences, as well as difference in their operative goals create a potential for emergence of horizontal conflict (Ikeda, 2005).

Other studies have indicated sharing limited resources and compensation system as some of the factors resulting into organizational conflicts. Resources in an organization are related to of

power and influence, with each department trying to obtain a larger share. These resources are not only financial, but are also related to information technology, human resources, redistribution of employees and many others (Jung, 2003). The insufficiency of resources can also be a foundation for a potential conflict. At the same time, the compensation system has a direct influence on people's behavior, their satisfaction and feeling for justice and equality. In this situation, conflict can start because of inconsistencies, which means that the employees in different departments might be rewarded by using different criteria (Spaho, 2013; Pondy, 1966; Derr, 1975). Salaries of employees will always be a cause of dissatisfaction of individuals, because it is difficult to be objective and measure all the employees' achievements and contributions at their workplaces. However, it is possible to standardize the criteria for awarding compensation, in order to make the differences rational and acceptable (Jung, 2003).

Hampton (1986) described Difference in Personal Trait/Behavior and Difference in Perceptions as among the major causes of organizational conflicts. In an organization setting people differ in terms of such personality like authoritarianism, dogmatism, hostility, aggressiveness, self-esteem, reaction to provocation and predisposition to distrust and suspicion (Robbins, 1983). There are some people who are predisposed to disagree on every issue or belong to the opposition on every issue. In contrast, perception is the way people view issues differing perception over what constitutes reality between individuals and groups is also a major source of interpersonal or inter-group conflict. Differences in perception precipitates disagreement hinder inter-group report and make co-operation and joint decision making impossible. Thus, difference in personal trait and perceptions become fertile groups for conflicts.

In a Ukrainian cross-sectional study, John (2006) found that differences in background and Difference in Value are major causes of organizational conflict. It is emphasized that people in the work place may differ in their background, age, education level attained, work experience and social relations (Luthons, 1985). The potential for interpersonal and inter-group conflict is highest when organisation members differ markedly in the characteristic decrease the interpersonal report and collaboration between unit representatives in organisation (John, 2006). Thus cultural difference plays an important role in organisations cooperation (Osabiya, 2015). Values are the very core of individual personalities and deeply affect people's thought and actions for

example professionals such as medical doctors and teacher' value freedom and autonomy, but their subordinate believe in closely watching over their work as subordinates. This difference in value is often a source of conflict between professional and bureaucratic orientation within formal organization (Bingham, 2004).

Aggyris (1994) also included Work Interdependence and Difference in Unit Orientation and Goals as factors precipitating organizational conflict. One of the features of organization is division of labor and committed task specialization, which is the process of dividing jobs into more homogenous acts of task. This division of labour and specialization often creates a situation whereby two or more different unit must depend on one another to complete their respective task, this create interdependence among the organizational groups (Luthons, 1985). A potential for conflict exist in such a situation of interdependence of work activities. The more interdependence, two or more departments or one another is more the potential for conflict to exist (Aggyris, 1994; Jung, 2003; John, 2006). The division of labor and task specialization or differentiation on that often characterized units to formulate their goals or objectives and to develop a narrower orientation towards the goals and problems of the organization. Therefore, the more the conflict between the two groups two units, the more the conflict between the two groups (Aggyris, 1994).

Other research have indicated Difference in Performance Criteria and Reward System, Mutual Dependence on Limited Resources and Differences in Status as major causes of conflict in workplaces (Barclay, 1991; Dutton and Walton, 1966; Gresham et al., 2006; Lovelace et al., 2001; Nauta and Sanders, 2001; Van De Ven and Ferry, 1980). It is noted that conflict amongst unit can arise if work activities are evenly distributed, but the reward of reward system are dissimilar the more the evaluation and reward management emphasis the separate performance of each department rather their combined performance the greater the conflict. One of the facts of organization life is that the resources that are personal, materials, equipment, operating funds, space and many other limited. Management must decide at a particular point in time on how to allocate these scare resources among the various departments in order to effectively attain the organizational goal and objectives. The dependency of limited resources is therefore a potential for conflict between units in an organization (Lovelace et al., 2001). Similarly, division of labor

and task specialization often led to a situation where some units come to be viewed as more important than others and therefore possess higher status. This will finally results too many status hierarchies within the organization.

### **2.3 Causes of Conflict in the African Historiography**

In a similar context, African literature such as a Nigerian cross-sectional study by Osabiya (2015) indicated organizational indistinctness and neglect and Poor Communication Skills as plausible factors fueling organizational conflicts. It was found that unclear organization of work or delegation of authority can cause conflict. If obligations and responsibilities of employees are not clearly determined, conflicts are unavoidable Low level of formalization stimulates conflicts, especially in small and mid-sized enterprises, where there is no specialization of employees, or delegation of authority among managers (Ikeda, 2005). Similarly, people also differ in communication skills and ability simple misunderstanding that maybe a source of conflict between individuals or group may erupt from the inability to articulate ones position clearly to others. It could be due to semantics that is the same words or phase may have different meaning to different individuals or groups, these differences in meaning may lead to communication breakdown which is a forerunner of harmful misunderstanding and consequently conflict between individuals or group in organization poor communication is not only a case but can be a result of conflict (Osabiya , 2015). Therefore, communication problems, different goals status incongruent can result to difference in perception.

Moreover, other African studies points to cultural differences on the causes of conflict. In a study that was conducted by Kipyego (2009) in Kenya has argued that, people disagree and see things differently because of different levels of education, social standing, religion, personality, belief structure, past experience, affection shown in the home and a lot of other factors that affect human behavior. For example, there are differences in approach as to what is considered polite and appropriate behavior. In some cultures the word yes means, I hear and in others, it means I agree. The level of tolerance for being around someone speaking a foreign language; politeness measured in terms of gallantry or etiquette, for example standing up for a woman who approaches a table, yielding a seat on the bus to an older person and manner of expected dress are all examples of what causes conflict between people (Kipyego,2009).

Another earlier South African study (Thomas and Bendixen, 2000) substantiates the findings of with kibyego (2009) as they found that cultural diversity in the workplace was also among the major sources of workplace conflict. They argue that diversity brings variety in organization like in the case of South Africa and its transformation of the social system from the typical apartheid system. The researchers found that workplace diversity represented a fertile ground for organizational conflict pointing out that although it is difficult to do away with workplace diversity, managements should be culturally conscious and they should invest more in cooperative strategies to reduce the differences and increase the similarities among employees in organizations (Thomas and Bendixen, 2000).

Okotoni (2003) in a Nigerian study investigated the sources of conflict in the school organization. He has attributed the sources of conflict in school organizations as being the fact that teachers work in highly demotivating conditions due to poor pay by the government coupled with lack of clear increments in salaries, this has however resulted in the causes of conflicts between teachers and head teachers in secondary schools (Okotoni, 2003).

South African studies on conflict management in private sector organizations reveal that factors such as the heterogeneity of the workforce, loyalties of groups, diverse economic interests, among other, are relevant sources of workplace conflict (Renwick, 1975; Weider and Hatfield, 1995). These studies showed that causes of conflict at the organisational level would include factors such as resource availability, affirmative action programs, the scope and content of work, the introduction of new management techniques, and differences of a cultural and racial nature.

#### **2.4 Sources of Conflict in the Zambian Context**

However, local literature by Namwila (2016) used a descriptive survey to find out the causes of conflicts in schools. Interestingly, the findings showed that incompetence of the head teachers, favoritism, educational level, scarce resources, unsatisfactory, class allocation, poor work culture, laic coming, lack descent accommodation, not submitting teaching files on schedule, lack of teaching resources and the introduction of the new curriculum are some of the major causes of conflict in schools. Findings of the study further established that conflict management styles are used by head teachers, Heads of Department and subject teachers. The findings showed

that head teachers were able to manage conflict using conflict management styles such as compromising, dialogue and avoidance while the heads of department and teachers used completion and confrontation as conflict management styles.

In addition, Sompa (2015) in a Zambian study provided evidence of the causes of conflict in school organizational settings between teachers and head teachers. The findings showed that absenteeism, teachers having higher qualifications than the head teacher, late coming, incompetence on the part of the head teacher, unsatisfactory class allocation, and teachers negative work culture, favoritism and not submitting teaching files on schedule were all tantamount to conflict (Sompa, 2015). These findings show results on organizational conflict in the school setting, however, there is still lacking information on the nature conflict and management strategies in institutions of higher learning such as the University of Zambia.

## **2.5 Studies on Strategies of Conflict Management in Organisations and their Effectiveness**

Ways of managing organizational conflict are as varied as its causes, origins and contexts (Katz, 1960). The purpose of conflict management, whether undertaken by the parties in conflict or whether involving the intervention of an outside party, is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process (e.g. hostility, use of violence) and help the parties possessing incompatible goals to find some solution to their conflict. Thus, effective conflict management succeeds in (1) minimizing disruption stemming from the existence of a conflict, and (2) providing a solution that is satisfactory and acceptable (Zafar et al, 2014). We describe efforts directed towards containing or limiting some aspects of behaviour as strategies of conflict settlement and efforts directed towards the parties' attitudes, situations as well as behaviour as strategies of conflict resolution. Skilled administrators are aware of these methods and techniques and know how to utilize them effectively.

All organisations, however simple or complex, possess a range of mechanisms or procedures for managing conflict. These are built into the organisational structure and are consciously employed by administrators to influence the course and development of a conflict. The success or

effectiveness of such procedures can be gauged by the extent to which they limit conflict behaviour and the extent to which they help to achieve a satisfactory solution.

Most studies on conflict-management strategies at the individual level have adopted the Dual Concern Model, which was originally proposed by Blake and Mouton (1964) and later adopted with some modifications by several scholars, among them Pruitt and Rubin (1986), Rahim (1983) and Thomas (1976). The basic premise of this model is that the mode an individual employs in managing conflicts derives from two underlying motives: concern for the self and concern for the other party. The first dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which an individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns. The second dimension explains the degree (high or low) to which an individual seeks to satisfy the concerns of others. Combining these two dimensions yields five specific styles of handling interpersonal conflict: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising.

Tjosvold (1989) took a somewhat different theoretical approach in his extensive research. His theory rests on the fundamental assumption, advanced by Deutsch (1973), that the ways in which individuals perceive their goals in relation to those of their counterparts govern both their attitudes and their actual interactions in conflict situations. That is, according to these perceptions cooperative or competitive intentions to the other party in the conflict. In accordance with Tjosvold's (1989) approach, there are two strategies for conflict management in teams: cooperative and competitive. Our decision is supported by three main arguments. First, the dual concern model outlined above highlights the individual motivational underpinnings of conflict management approaches. Therefore, its focus is on conflict resolution as the outcome, rather than on overall effectiveness (Rahim et al., 2000). Tjosvold's approach, in contrast, underscores individual cognitions about whether the goal structure of the other parties to the conflict are distinct or mutual goals. Therefore, this approach is more appropriate for the study of teams in general, and particularly for team effectiveness (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 2000). Secondly, other studies that have adopted Tjosvold's approach have stressed the critical role of contextual cues in shaping the chosen conflict style (Tjosvold et al., 2005).

Moreover, cooperative and competitive conflict management strategies are both active conflict-engaging patterns, but they reflect different levels of cooperativeness or concern for others. The cooperative style involves a high level of concern for the self as well as for the other party. This style has also been described as a problem-solving, collaborative, integrating, solution-oriented, win-win or positive-sum style. The competitive style, in contrast, involves a high level of concern for the self but a lower level of concern for the other party. It is also known as a competing, controlling, contending, win-lose, or zero-sum style (Rahim, 2001; Rahim et al., 2000).

Studies that have extended the cooperative competitive conflict management typology to organizational settings (Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Tjosvold, 1999; Tjosvold et al., 2005; Tjosvold, Morishoma, & Belsheim, 1999) have demonstrated that conflict dynamics and team outcomes are greatly affected by whether team members emphasize a cooperative or a competitive conflict-management approach. According to Deutsch's (1973, 1980) theory of cooperation and competition, team members may choose to emphasize their common goals. In such a case, they tend to view conflict as a joint problem that needs common consideration and solution, and they recognize that the success of one member promotes the success of all the others. Reinforced by this mutual affirmation and success, team members are confident they can handle their conflicts and interpersonal difficulties successfully. They are able to make better decisions, which in turn improve team performance.

On the other hand, team members may also choose to emphasize their divergent goals. In this case, the success of one member distances the others from attaining their goals. They tend to view conflict as a win-lose struggle: if the others win, they lose. This emphasis on competitive interests leads to tough and closed-minded discussions. Competitive approaches frustrate communication and result in deadlocks or imposed solutions. Studies have shown that team members who try to outdo one another do not utilize each other's ideas and resources, hide information, and block each other's efforts, thus generating distrust. Because of the lack of psychological support and the disruptions in communication and exchange of ideas, competitive interaction results in poor team performance (Johnson, Maruyama, Johnson, Nelson, & Skon, 1981; Tjosvold, Hui, Din & Hui, 2003).

Part of Zambian literature on organizational conflict management has focused on the conflict management in the school setting between management staff and teachers. Sompa (2015) investigated management strategies of interpersonal conflict between teachers and head teachers in secondary schools of Lusaka Province. Through a qualitative design, the study established that teachers and head teachers were able to manage conflict through different management strategies such as confrontation, avoidance, dialogue, maintaining government policy by giving teacher's copies of working conditions, charging the teacher, mediation, communication and scolding the teacher (Sompa, 2015).

Research has also shown that understanding emotional intelligence among managers is one effective way to manage conflict in the work place. Managers should be emotionally intelligent because unmanaged emotions are a common source of conflict in work places (Jordan & Troth, 2002). In a quantitative study that examined the role of emotional intelligence on conflict resolution, the authors found that scores in emotional intelligence among managers were positively associated with productive work relationships in group tasks among employees (Jordan & Troth, 2002).

## **2.6 Theoretical Literature Review**

### **Conflict Theory**

Wright Mills has been called the founder of modern conflict theory (Knapp, 1994). In Mill's view, social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the "unequal distribution of power and resources in the society" (Knapp, 1994). The power elites of the American society, (i.e., the military – industrial complex) "emerged from the fusion of the corporate elite, the pentagon and the executive branch of government". Mills argues that the interests of these elites were opposed to those of the people. He theorized that the policies of the power elites would result in "increased escalation of conflict of weapons of mass destruction, and possibly the annihilation of human race" (Knapp, 1994).

A recent articulation of the conflict theory is found in Alan Sears (Canadian Sociologist) book: "A Guide to Theoretical Thinking" (2008). According to Sears' (2008):

Societies are defined by inequality that produces conflict, rather than order and consensus. This conflict based on inequality can only be overcome through a fundamental transformation of the existing relations in the society, and is productive of new social relations. The disadvantaged have structural interests that run counter to the status quo, which, once they are assumed, will lead to social change. Thus, they are viewed as agents of change rather than objects one should feel sympathy for. Human potential (e.g., capacity for creativity) is suppressed by conditions of exploitation and oppression, which are necessary in any society with an equal division of labor. These and other qualities do not necessarily have to be stunted due to requirements of the so called “civilizing process” or “functional necessity”. Creativity is actually an engine for economic development and change.

The role of theory is in realizing human potential and transforming society, rather than maintaining the power structure. The opposite aim of theory would be objectivity and detachment associated with positivism, where theory is a neutral, explanatory tool.

### **Perspectives on Conflict**

There are various perceptions regarding conflicts. Conflict is a reality in everyone’s life and should be considered a natural process that occurs daily. As a group performs its assigned tasks, conflict inevitably arises (Robins, et al, 2003).

Conflict is viewed as natural due to life’s uncertainty. Conflict is good and necessary because it can stimulate innovative thinking when it is managed in the right way. Lacking conflict, thoughts and actions are performed because they are habitual. Conflict allows an examination of the necessity of these thoughts and actions. People find it easier to live with unresolved misunderstanding than facing the fact that fundamental differences do exist, and demand recognition and appropriate management (Deetz and Stevenson, 1986). Conflicts are an integral part of a human’s life in all aspects. One cannot avoid conflicts in families, at work or even when watching the news on television (Viletta Bankovs Kay, 2012). Historically, the following views on conflict are identified:

#### **Traditional View (1930-1940):**

One school of thought says that conflict must be avoided as it reflects malefaction within the group. Conflict is viewed negatively and is associated with violence and destruction. Conflict is a result of poor communication and a lack of trust between people. Conflict can be eliminated or

resolved only at high level of management. According to this view, all conflicts should be avoided. Thus, there is need to pay attention to causes of conflict and correct them in order to improve group and organization performance (Robins, 2005). Most conflicts have negative connotations, invoke negative feelings and often lead to destruction. Whether the effect of conflict is good or bad depends on the strategies used to deal with it (Rahim, 1986).

### **Categories of conflict**

So far, it is quite evident that to say that conflict is all good or bad is inappropriate and naïve. Whether a conflict is good or bad depends on the type of conflict. Specifically, it's necessary to differentiate between functional and dysfunctional conflicts (Robins, 2005).

### **Functional or Constructive Conflict**

The interactionist view does not propose that all conflicts are good. Rather, some conflicts support the goals of the group and improve its performance; these are functional, constructive forms of conflict (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2008). Robbin (2001) defines functional conflict as the conflict that supports the goals of the group and improves its (group's) performance. The argument is that if conflict leads to normal competition among groups and the groups work harder and produce more, it is advantageous to the group and the institution. It is viewed as a confrontation between two ideas, goals and parties that improves employees and organizational performance (Robbin, 2001). One of the main benefits of constructive conflict is that it gives its members a chance to identify the problems and see the opportunities. Also, it can inspire to new ideas, learning, and growth among individuals (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2008).

### **Dysfunctional/Destructive Conflict**

There are conflicts that hinder group performance; these are dysfunctional or destructive forms of conflict ([www.csupomona.edu](http://www.csupomona.edu)). Conflict is inevitable and desirable in organisations, but when not effectively handled, conflict can tear relationships apart and, thus, interfere with the exchange of ideas, information and resources in groups and between departments. Dysfunctional conflict hinders and prevents organisational goals from being achieved (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2008).

Dysfunctional conflict usually hinders organisational performance and leads to decreased productivity. This conflict orientation is characterized by competing individual interests overriding the overall interest of the business. Managers withhold information from one another. Employees sabotage others' work, either intentionally or through subtle, conflict-motivated disinterest in team work (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2008).

Research on conflict resolution has revealed conceptually, some of the values cardinal in conflict resolution and management. These values include respect for all, participation and empowerment, respect for diversity and justice. Conflict scholars have stressed different values, as necessary in conflict management.

Among them is respect for everyone in the organization. From a conflict resolution perspective, conflicts can and must be resolved by taking into account the needs of the people affected by the conflict. In other words, for a solution to be lasting, it must meet the needs of all those involved in the conflict. A solution, in which one party's needs are met at the expense of the needs of the other party, is neither just nor likely to last for a long time (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Kazan & Ergin, 1999).

Another factor is participation and empowerment. Hughes (1993) argues that conflict resolution is based on the view that people have a right and an obligation to participate in decisions that affect their lives. As such conflict resolution stresses that people are most likely to achieve their own goals and have rewarding relationships when they co-operate. In the same vein, society will be more productive. This means that when in conflict, people should consider each other as allies in helping to create a solution to a common problem rather than enemies who are to be defeated (Hughes, 1993).

Furthermore, some researchers have felt that one of the fundamental tenets of conflict resolution is that the parties in the conflict need to respect and understand each other's needs and perspectives. This is not only understanding and respecting people that you agree with, but also attempting to understand and respect people that you disagree with, and respecting their right to disagree (Kazan & Ergin, 1999; Bodtker & Jameson, 2001).

Other researchers have stressed that absence of justice in an organisation is a barrier to conflict resolution. Moreover, most people practicing and writing about conflict resolution agree that it is

necessary that solutions are just and fair. In conflict justice can be of two kinds: procedural and substantive. Procedural justice means that the procedure for dealing with conflict is fair. Conflict resolution techniques are very useful in ensuring procedure justice, such as ensuring that all the parties affected by the conflict are present. Substantive justice amounts to ensuring that the solutions produced are fair. This, however, is more theoretical than practical. For instance, if parties in mediation agree to what the mediator believes is an unjust solution, there is very little the mediator can do to facilitate a more just outcome (World Bank, 2005). Rahim, et al (2000) also adds that justice is one of the most important concerns for employees in organisations. Justice and fairness encourages positive attitudes and facilitates conflict management. Employees' perception of organisational justice will be positively associated with their use of the more cooperative (integrating, obliging and compromising) styles of managing conflict with their supervisors (Rahim, et al, 2000).

Additionally, Galtung (1996) identified non-violence as being among the most salient virtues in an organisation that aims at reducing the chances of conflict. He has argued that conflict resolution promotes the use of non-violence techniques wherever possible. Based on the argument that violence is generally unethical and ineffective, conflict resolution techniques seek to highlight and create non-violent options for dealing with conflict. While acknowledging that the use of force cannot always be avoided, it is argued from a conflict resolution perspective that by increasing the acceptance of non-violent methods for dealing with conflict and training people in these skills, a great proportion of conflict can be more effectively addressed without violence (Galtung, 1996).

Lastly, other conflict scholars have suggested that transformation of individuals and their communities is another important attribute necessary in conflict resolution. Changing the way we deal with conflict helps us live a more rewarding and responsible life. Changing oneself is also an essential part of creating community change, as one is providing positive role models for others, and taking responsibility of the role one plays as part of one's own community. However, for community change, we also need to be proactive and consider other ways to influence the communities such as through conflict resolution training and direct intervention (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001). According to Rubin & Sung (1994), once conflict escalates, it often reaches a

stalemate, a situation in which neither side can win but neither side wants to back out or accept loss either.

### **2.6.1 Perspectives on Conflict Resolution**

Scholars have argued that there is a difference between resolving a conflict and managing conflict. Resolving a conflict ends the dispute by satisfying the interests of both parties. Managing a conflict contains specialized interaction that prevents a dispute from becoming a battle. Managing a conflict attends to personal issues so as to allow for a constructive relationship, even though the objective issues may not be resolvable (Rubin & Sung, 1994).

Segel & Smith, 2011 have argued that the ability to resolve conflicts successfully depends on the ability to. Manage stress quickly by staying calm. In this way a person can properly read and interpret verbal and non-verbal communication; secondly, control emotions and behavior. When a person can control his emotions, it is simpler to communicate the needs without threatening, fighting or punishing others; thirdly, Pay attention to the feelings and works of other people; and lastly be aware of and respectful of differences by avoiding disrespectful words. In this way problems can be resolved faster (Segel & Smith, 2011).

#### **Conflict Resolution Skills**

*Quick Stress Relief:* Stress is an individual's adaptive response to a situation which is challenging or threatening. Research has found that people have a fairly consistent psychological response to stressful situations. This response was called "general adaptation syndrome". It provides an autonomic defense system which helps to cope with environmental demands.

*Emotional Awareness:* Emotional awareness is very useful for understanding yourself and others. If a person doesn't know how he feels in a certain way, he/she will not have effective and productive communication.

*Non-Verbal Communication:* Non-Verbal communication plays a big role in conflict resolution as during the conflict process the most important information is exchanged in a non-verbal way. The elements of non-verbal communication are emotionally-driven facial expressions, posture, gesture, pace tone and intensity of voice. The most important communication is wordless because sometimes words cannot reflect all the issues. In the middle of a conflict it is useful to

pay attention to the other person's non-verbal signals. It may help to figure out what the other party is really saying and to respond in the right way to build trust, and get to the root of the problem (Segel and Smith, 2011).

### **Conflict Management/Resolution Styles**

Dealing with conflict between and among individuals can be one of the most frustrating and uncomfortable experiences for an administrator. Any attempt by an administrator to alter a specific conflict position requires that he/she be knowledgeable of its origin. An understanding of the source improves the probability that the proper resolution or stimulation technique will be selected (Robbins, 1974).

De Church, et al (2001) argues that active conflict management allows groups to openly talk about issues and disagreements, allowing them to share information and confront a conflict together. In addition, Tjosvold, et al (2002) argues that openness makes it possible to contradict arguments. Research has shown that there are great possibilities in open conversation and argument confrontation. The positive effects of conflict management are, according to De Church, et al (2001), a result of the active approach which benefits team effectiveness.

Moreover, the most important element of the conflict management strategy is the early recognition of the conflict and paying attention to the conflicting parties. These elements are important when a manager deals with functional or dysfunctional conflicts. There should be early indication of the conflict and early evaluation of its impact on performance of employees. It is also necessary to make a plan to encourage functional conflict or manage dysfunctional conflict (Brodtker, et al, 2001). The approach to the conflict and the conflict management style also depend on the participant's emotional involvement in the conflict (Brodtker, et al, 2001).

Brodtker et al (2001) argue that conflict is formed by three major elements:

- Attitudes: cognitive ideas and emotion;
- Behavior: evident behavior and potential aggressive actions; and
- Contradiction: values and interests.

Brodtker, et al., (2001), argue further that for a conflict to take place, these three elements must be present. Moreover, to resolve a conflict, one must identify and deal with all these elements; otherwise the attempt to manage the conflict will be unsuccessful.

Conflict can be either complex or simple. The more complex a conflict is, the more the potential for a creative, constructive transformation or solution of the conflict. If the conflict is too simple, the parties will not be motivated to get engaged and they will tend to ignore it. This can lead to greater problems in the organization which can in turn, lead to poor performance. When there are more elements, the conflict becomes too complicated to manage. Darling and Fogliasso (1999) conclude that it is impossible to eliminate conflict totally. Managers who try to eliminate conflict will not last, while those who manage it well typically experience both institutional benefit and personal satisfaction.

## **2.7 Conclusions of literature and Gap identification**

In conclusion the literature review has explored existing research both empirical and theoretical from around the world. Conflict management, causes and sources are among the most covered areas in organizational research. Research in Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Zambia has focused on conflict in educational institutions such as secondary schools. Theories on conflict management have been reviewed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nature of conflict. Little however has been done on the nature of conflict in university administrations and existing review only has findings about universities on Nigeria. Zambia in particular has not yet paid much attention to organizational conflict in university administrations until the current study. This empirical study is necessary in the design and establishment of contextually effective strategies of resolving negative or destructive traces of conflict while maintaining the positive and productive forms of conflict. The study also fills the gap in literature on Zambia and generally organizational conflict in organizations such as universities.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Approach and Design**

The current study used a qualitative design. Qualitative design was used to collect data on the sources of conflict in order to get more insight into the experiences of the employees on the nature and sources of conflict. The study used a phenomenological approach and a descriptive approach. In phenomenological research, the researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. Understanding the "lived experiences “marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method, and the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning (Creswell, 2009). In this process, the researcher "brackets" his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2009). This study used this design and method in order to explore the nature and sources of conflict through the experiences of the employees.

#### **3.2 Population**

A study population is coverage of participants who qualify to participate in the study but only a portion from that pool are included in a study (Cresswell, 2009). The population covered the university of Zambia students’ affairs unit employees both management and subordinate employees.

#### **3.3 Sample and sampling procedure**

The final sample was 20 participants comprising 15 subordinate staff and 5 management staff. The sample size was arrived at 20 because of the availability of the participants who were accessible during the period of data collection. Moreover, in phenomenological studies 20-25 participants are considered adequate (Cresswell, 2009). The sampling method used was convenience sampling.

**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of informants**

Variable		N
Subordinate employees		
Sex	female	5
	males	10
Supervisory/management		
Sex	Male	4
	Female	1

*Some demographics held for confidentiality and anonymity reasons*

Table 2 above shows that there were 5 females 10 males in the subordinate employee category while in management categories comprised 4 males and 1 female. Therefore this means that a total of 20 participants took part in the study.

### **3.4 Instruments**

There are a number of data collection techniques used such as questionnaires (unstructured) and observation checklist in qualitative data collection. This study in particular used semi-structured interview guides to collect data by audio recording the interviews and part of the data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews are important in phenomenological qualitative studies as they give the respondent a flexibility to freely express and describe their feelings and experiences (Creswell, 2009). A pilot study will be done to test the instruments capacity to collect data that will be needed for the study.

### **3.5 Data collection techniques**

Interviews was conducted using open-ended questions. The interviews were held in a quiet place that was most convenient to the participant. The researcher was conduct the interviews herself. One typical feature of semi-structured interviews and semi structured questionnaires is that they have open ended questions which give the respondent the capacity to give out as much information as possible.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The study used thematic analysis as it is among the ideal data analysis methods in qualitative research. The researcher audio recorded the interviews and then transcribed them verbatim. Secondly, the researcher coded the data from the questionnaires as transcripts. The first phase involved reading of the transcripts to get a general view of the respondent's perspectives. Then through further reading, data was condensed through a deductive and interpretative method while insuring that the meaning is not lost in the process which may lead to the development of codes. The codes were further grouped into meaningfully related categories for the purpose of developing themes. The process was repeated several times to increase trustworthiness of the analyzed results.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

The study sought approval from the ethics committee of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zambia. The participants were protected by strictly observing all the ethical issues which were involved.

#### **3.7.1 Informed Consent**

All participants were asked to give written informed consent if they agree to participate in the study. Those who were uncomfortable to participate will have the freedom not to take part.

#### **3.7.2 Voluntary participation**

Respondents were allowed to participate in the study on a voluntary basis, meaning they had the right to participate or withhold participation. They were told that participation is entirely on a voluntary basis.

#### **3.8.3 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality were assured to them upon agreeing to participate in the study. They were assured that the information they were providing was for research purpose only and was going to be kept in a locked place such that only the researcher had access as the keys were kept by the researcher himself. When done with the research, the recordings were destroyed.

### **3.8.4 Anonymity**

Anonymity were ensured by assuring them that their identity was not going to be disclosed. To achieve this, names were not be recorded, mentioned or written anywhere.

### **3.8.5 Cost and Benefits to the Researcher and Respondents**

In terms of cost and benefits to the researcher and respondents. The benefits of the research were communicated to the participants by explaining to them that the results may not probably benefit them directly but will also benefit the other employees and managements at UNZA and also similar institutions countrywide. The benefits were also be communicated as they were improve conflict management strategies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

The current phenomenological study explored the nature and sources of organisational conflict among university of Zambia student's affairs unit employees. The study objectives were:

1. To describe the nature of conflict among staff in the university Students Affairs Unit.
2. To investigate the sources of organizational conflict among employees at the University of Zambia student affairs unit of the university of Zambia.
3. To establish the factors what influences persistence of conflict among employees of the university of Zambia student affairs unit.
4. To establish strategies used by the students affairs management unit to resolve the existing conflicts at the University of Zambia.

Findings are presented according to the study objectives. Few verbatim quotes have been inserted in the presentation of results. More verbatim quotations have been put in a verbatim summary table.

#### 4.2. Nature of Conflict among Employees in the University of Zambia, Students Affairs Unit

Bearing in mind that conflict can exist in many forms. It was important for the study to describe qualitatively, in what form the conflict exists. For this reason, the first objective aimed at describing the nature of conflict among the employees in the student's affairs units in order to understand the characteristics of the conflict that exists. Thematic analysis using interpretivism emerged from the study. The themes included vertical conflict, horizontal conflict and non-confrontational conflict.

##### 4.2.1 Vertical conflict

The study revealed that vertical conflict characterized the nature of conflict that existed at the institution. The conflict was described as vertical in experiences which were phrased by most employees as dean-subordinate misunderstandings, supervisor-subordinate disrespect and

managers personal grudges with subordinates. This theme was expressed by both the subordinate employees and those in management. Dean subordinate conflict meant the misunderstandings both verbal and non-verbal that existed between the top most manager in the unit (dean) and other subordinate employees. The following verbatim substantiates this finding;

*Yes conflict is inevitable. I have noticed that conflict is mostly between the management and non-management staff. Among non-management, it is there but I think it is more across levels. Of course among managers we usually notice some power related conflicts. Management staff, 2*

#### **4.2.2 Horizontal conflict**

Another theme that emerged from the study on the nature of conflict was the horizontal conflict. Horizontal conflict was a characteristic of conflict that involved lines of authority or levels of authority. Furthermore, this theme was mentioned to mean conflict that existed among employees at the same levels of authority. For instance among the top managers themselves and secondly among the subordinate employees themselves. One participant stressed this findings by saying

*Conflicts among subordinate employees themselves are common especially when it comes to making judgment over wrongful act by a student. When giving what type of a punishment to an offender. It becomes difficult on who should supervise who. We all feel superior and that being supervised by your fellow subordinate employee is not good. Giving each other shifts like which days to work during day time or night. Subordinate staff, P1*

#### **4.2.3 Non-confrontational conflict**

Another feature of conflict that was revealed under the nature of conflict was that mostly, conflict was non-confrontational and not-physically charged but it was in form of a cold war. Participants mentioned this theme to give more information on the nature of conflict.

*Okay, the thing I have observed is that conflicts are there within the establishments and some people just pretend to smile at their bosses because they are protecting their jobs. Sometimes bosses just use their powers to give certain directives which show that people*

*are keeping grudges against each other. You know I am talking about the bad type of conflict not just a normal debate but the hatred type...it sometimes like a cold war from the history books if you know what I mean hahahahaha.....Subordinate staff P12*

### **4.3. Sources of Organizational Conflict among Employees of the University of Zambia Student Affairs Unit.**

The second objective of the study sought to identify the important sources of conflict in order to understand some of the context specific causes of conflict at the institutional unit. The underlying reason for studying the sources of conflict is to have critical starting points for conflict resolution intervention development. Political interests, tribalism, undermining, not being paid on time, corruption traps, not being paid on time, “Lack of proper communication between supervisors and subordinate employees”, “Lack of motivational initiatives” and “Gossip behaviors by subordinate employees”

#### **4.3.1 Political interests**

Political interest is also a theme that emerged strongly among the sources. Political interests which caused divisions were said to have been split between the ruling party and the opposition political party. The participants mentioned that difference in political interests affected aspects such as promotion and allocation of positions. Another interesting aspect of this finding was that these interests were covert in nature very difficult to notice unless extra attention was invested. Participants expressed this theme in the verbatim below;

*In every society nowadays political divisions are common and they negatively bring more conflicts. In DOSA this is common especially when it comes to decision making where others take their political interests into the affairs of the Unit. This is mostly done in silent and it is difficult to tell. Key custodian P1*

*Managers mostly do not like people with different political views to theirs. This makes it in most of the time favor only those employees with same political affiliations with them. They can easily promote those who support their political interests. Key custodian P2*

### **4.3.2 Tribalism**

Another source that emerged as a theme among a number of participants was tribalism. Tribalism was also expressed as favoritism, regionalism and nepotism. The participants said they witnessed favoritism when individuals from the same ethnic group got special favors or advantages in situations such as claiming for their overtime dues and also in moments of promotion. They mentioned witnessing regionalism, when they felt within the unit, there were teams of employees and managers from the same province who felt more special than members of other provinces. Nepotism was witnessed when others observed that a certain portion of employees especially in higher offices and supervisory positions were related by blood. These tribal divisions were found to fuel a number of conflicts amongst the employees. Two participants expressed their experiences and thoughts about this theme in the following verbatim quotes;

*Tribalism is common especially when it comes to promotions though this is difficult to point out. Most of the employees including the management they are from certain tribes which I can't tell. Key custodian P1*

*Tribe is also to some extent a very big issue. Special assignments and responsibilities are usually accorded to people who belong to a certain part of the country especially to the Eastern province. Key custodian P2*

### **4.3.3 Disregard for subordinate employees**

“Disregard for subordinate employees” was another major theme that emerged in the data among the sources of conflict. This theme was mentioned mostly by the junior employees and not management necessarily. This theme was expressed in statements such as ‘they don’t involve us in certain decisions’, ‘they think our responsibilities are not critical’, “they give instructions without consulting us” and “we feel disrespected”, and ‘they use bad language on us’. This finding emerged as a source of conflict as it was found to lead to other emotional reactions and formation of attitudes and behaviors amongst the employees in the unit;

*I would say we do have the authority to express our opinions when given an opportunity but this does not happen sometimes. Subordinate staff, P7*

*Yes we do have the authority to express our authority but they are not considered as such by the superiors. No matter how good is your point it is dependent of the managers opinion either to consider it or not. All I can say is that our views are not taken into consideration by the management. Subordinate staff, P3*

#### **4.3.4 Corruption traps**

Corruption traps were another aspects of the findings that characterized the sources of conflict among the university employees in the current study. Corruption traps were mentioned to mean fault finding, labeling and corruption scheme plots against other employees by some senior or fellow members of staff. This theme was expressed as a source of conflict by the participants because it brought shame and negative feelings when a member of staff was found to be trapped in a corruption offence planned by other members of staff. The motivation behind this scheme was mentioned by some employees in management as an informal quality check against corruption while the subordinate employees perceived it as an act of hatred. This theme however produced mixed results as some employees felt corruption traps were professionally necessary, others felt they were personal and aimed humiliating other employees. Around this theme was a complaint that superiors had a tendency of stereotyping other employees as corrupt even without cause and this was reported to negatively affect the employees at both personal and professional level. The following verbatim quotes substantiate this finding;

*Superiors in more often time label all subordinates 'corrupt'. This makes many of them used different method in just making sure that one is caught as a corrupt person. Subordinate staff P3*

Another expressed the theme in an example by saying;

*For example, some would send a student to bribe you for campus accommodation. If you are found wanting, the student will report you to them. This is common and most of the employees have been fired in that act. So there is a lot of spy when is hunted to be caught in a corrupt act. Subordinate staff P5*

#### **4.3.5 Not being paid on time**

The sources of conflict also covered financial causes. In expressing this theme, employees felt that delayed payment of their monthly salaries and allowances were a salient source of conflict. The participants mentioned that monthly salaries themselves were not a very huge problem but the allowances. They mentioned that the allowances were required to pass through some signatories who seemed to delay in doing the process. This system related problem brought conflict between the people responsible for the signing and the other members of staff. Under this theme, a certain section of participants felt that there were some individual employees whose allowances seemed to always be processed earlier than others and these suspicions gave birth to emotions that created a fertile ground for destructive conflict. The participants expressed this theme in the verbatim quote below;

*When in some workers are paid on time while others are not. For example most of us subordinate employees we are looked upon as least important workers and hence we are not considered on time. Subordinate staff, P11*

*Issues to do with payment are common problems in DOSA especially us the subordinates. Our salaries are not equivalent to the tasks are in some instances we are not paid on time. Subordinate staff, P5*

#### **3.3.6 Absence of proper vertical dialogue**

Absence of proper vertical dialogue was another theme that was mentioned by most subordinate employees and a minority of supervisors. This theme was expressed as poor communication with bosses, absence of proper channel of communication, miscommunication, not having frequent meetings, manager's avoidance of dialogue. This theme was cited as a source of conflict when subordinate employees felt there was not sufficient space for dialogue in the unit to allow members of staff to express their grief. The evidence of a conflict resolution committee was mentioned but not emphasized in the data. The managers on the other hand felt that employees themselves were not open enough to express their grief or discomfort during the meetings. The managers expressed ignorance to the reasons why some employees were not open. Thematic mapping of the findings showed that intimidation was among the reasons employees failed to

open up as they tried to protect their jobs. This theme was reflected in the following verbatim quotations;

*In most of the time, there is no proper channel through which subordinates can express their opinions. Subordinates are in most of the time not free communicate to the supervisors. Subordinate staff, P3*

Another participant added that by saying;

*Supervisors too are not really found to be accountable to subordinates. Misunderstandings are common due to insufficient communication channels. Things like who should lead who, who should we vote to power becomes a challenge since we do not really communicate properly. Subordinate staff, P4*

### **3.3.7 Overstaying in positions of superiority is demotivating**

This theme emerged mostly from the data on the subordinate employees. The participants mentioned this theme to mean that some of the managers had overstayed in their positions of power such that there was no innovativeness anymore and this was facilitating corruption within the system. This was found to be a source of conflict for those who desired progress and wanted to get ahead in their carrier within the university unit. They mentioned having upgraded their qualifications but were having problems with promotions because of people sticking to their positions. When managers were probed on this particular subject they mentioned that the system was running smoothly and everyone had the chance to move up within the system. This mixture of findings presented tension in the data as the results produced contradicting views. While others felt this was a source of conflict, some did not perceive it that way. This theme is reflected in the verbatim quote below;

*Most of subordinate employees are not motivated by superiors. For example some of us have been in the office for more than ten years but there is no a promotion. Whereas others have been here for just three to four years and they have been promoted. This also increases the chances of corruption in the department. That is why I say tribalism is common in DOSA. Subordinate staff P3.*

Another participant echoed the theme by saying;

*In terms of promotion preference is given to the ones who have served for a long period of time in the department whom most of them are not qualified. This has brought conflicts because most of the people serving in the higher offices are not qualified. Subordinate staff, P2*

### **3.3.8 Gossip behaviors**

Interpersonal factors emerged as major theme gossip behaviors representing sources of conflict. Employees mentioned gossip as backbiting, snitching, telling lies and spying. Gossiping among employees both vertically and horizontal was mentioned as a common source of conflict. Backbiting was mentioned to mean saying demeaning things behind a colleagues back. Snitching took place when some employees' ear dropped other people's conversation, distorted the message and told it to the subject of the initial conversation. Telling lies meant fabricating lies against other members of staff to superiors or same level employees. Moreover, spying happened when some employees were agents of the supervisors or other employees to spy on what others are doing or saying. However these behaviors became sources of conflict when the people being gossiped about discovered that a colleague was saying negative things about them. This cycle was reported to create a network of hatred amongst the employees which sometimes spanned into confrontational conflict. Confrontations were only common in horizontal circles but not vertically because of power dynamics across employees. This theme was expressed in the verbatim quotes below;

*Gossiping each other is common among DOSA employees especially the subordinates. This has brought a lot of misunderstandings in the department. Subordinate staff, P2*

Another participant expressed their observation by stressing that;

*Gossip and misinformation among subordinate employees here is common. There are many small groups within subordinate employees where people talk a lot about others especially if those that person has been promoted by superiors/ supervisors. Subordinate staff, P3*

#### **4.4. The Factors the Influence Persistence of Conflict in the Work Places**

While the second objective focused on the sources of conflict, the study under objective three sought to establish what perpetuated the conflict. It is important however in the process of organizational conflict intervention to separate random occurrences from constants. This section was interested in establishing the constants from the perspectives of participants that maintained the conflicts. A number of themes emerged among the perpetuating factors and these included; “Absence of Proper Space for Dialogue”, “jealousy”, “inadequate education”, “intimidation”, “discrimination”, “intimate relationships between members of staff” and ambition.

##### **4.4.1 Absence of Proper Space for Dialogue**

Absence of proper dialogue is a theme that emerged both among the sources and among the perpetuating factors of conflict. Participants felt that issues were mounting in people’s hearts and they could not express these issues because a proper space for effective communication was missing. From the perspectives of the managers, space for dialogue was there but was underutilized by the members of staff. However, the perspectives of the members of staff contradicted these views by arguing that they felt like managers were not ready to listen to them by observing their attitudes towards the junior employees. This contradiction showed strong signs of miscommunication and misunderstanding between subordinate and management staff. The following verbatim quotes substantiate these findings;

*Our staff are free to come and talk to us about anything bothering them. We very receptive. I don’t know for my friends but if I speak for myself, I feel I am very receptive. Some members of staff come to talk to me but if others don’t come, it means we are in harmony hehehhehehe .Management staff P6*

A subordinate staff contradicted management by saying;

*I think there is poor communication between superiors and subordinates and also among subordinates employs themselves. In short space for dialogue is very limited so we just keep what’s affecting us amongst ourselves. Subordinate staff P6*

#### **4.4.2 Personality factors like Jealousy**

Another theme emerging from the qualitative data as perpetuating conflict was jealousy amongst the members of staff. This theme was mentioned to have resulted from personality factors such as competition amongst the members of staff and also selfishness of some members of the unit. Participants observed competition in situations where some employees were aiming for certain higher positions to be above others such that they could go up to the extent of stepping on other peoples toes. Participants identified selfishness when they felt the reason why people were against other peoples initiatives or progress was because, they wanted to be the only ones progressing in the organization. The data mentioned that through the two situations, jealousy was the driving force of such behaviors amongst the members of staff. This theme came out strongly both among the management view points and subordinate staff view points;

*You know what?....One thing that has affected us is jealousy.....I think with this reason conflict cannot end. You how human beings are especially blacks. When someone does something good, they can't just appreciate the person but they will be jealous for him or her and create enmity. That is why we are not progressing in Zambia. Subordinate staff, P15*

Managers also seemed to agree with the subordinate staff through their view point to say;

*Just like in any organization some people are ambitious while some are not and that makes some so competitive. By this I mean completion can be good thing when it smart completion but some compete in very dirty ways such pulling others down through false reports against their potential threats. This becomes a challenge to eliminate negative completion because of jealousy. You know where there is jealousy people may end up killing each other so it is quite a concern that needs to be addressed by even us management. Management staff, P1*

#### **4.4.3 Insufficient education**

Insufficient education emerged as another factor that contributed to the persistence of conflict among the employees. This theme was mentioned by a number of participants as facilitating the persistence of conflict. Participants mentioned this theme to describe situations were some

members of staff were not using the opportunity to upgrade their studies and hence there ways of perceiving social situations in the organization was distorted.

*Some of our colleagues have decided to relax and not upgrade their qualifications and those are the people who develop hate if there friend is progressing and sometimes, it becomes difficult for them to understand other peoples initiatives, they will see it as pomposity. Subordinate staff, 16*

#### **4.4.4 Intimidation**

The theme intimidation emerged strongly among the participants as a factor that perpetuated the conflict amongst the employees. This theme was mostly mentioned by the subordinate staff. Intimidation was expressed as lack of expressive freedom, putting ones job at risk and being spotted. The participants felt they had limited freedom to express themselves when direct threats where issued if they had an opposing view to the supervisor, in other instances employees were relocated to other departments if they held a different view from top management. Participants putting their jobs at risk when they witnessed experiences of some member's contracts not being renewed upon a dispute, some participants mentioned this theme as their own subjective thoughts about the consequences of disagreeing with top authority because they felt it would pose risk on their job security. Lastly participants mentioned that speaking out was a challenge because they were afraid of being negatively labeled by their superiors as disrespectful or proud. The participants mentioned that they felt this way through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors of their superiors whenever they held opposing views. They also felt that as long as this intimidation endured, destructive conflict was inevitable.

*The problem with this place is that expressing yourself can land you in trouble. There is no freedom of expression because there are times when those who have seemed to disagree with the top officials have been labeled as bad seeds or disrespectful employees. You know that that's a bad name righ. Subordinate member of staff, 7*

*You can't be understood by everyone you know sometimes, expressing your views is taken as a sign of stubbornness so sometimes I think it's better to be just quiet. Subordinate staff, 6*

#### **4.4.5 Discrimination**

Discrimination emerged as a theme representing perpetuating factors that maintain conflict among the members of staff at the students' affairs unit. Discrimination mentioned by the participants was both political and tribal in nature. Participants mentioned political and tribal discrimination was responsible for maintaining conflict among the employees. These interests interfered with the professional environment. This theme was present in the verbatim below;

Discrimination on the basis of political affiliation and tribe have been a challenge here. There just appointments and claims that are processed for individuals of certain tribes or political affiliations. It's rough, I think this is a pandemic. *Subordinate staff, 17*

#### **4.4.6 Intimate relationships between members of staff**

Another factor that maintained conflict among employees within the unit was intimate relationships among members of staff. Some participants felt that those employees that were secretly going out with superiors were the most stubborn to their supervisors. Participants further added that the attitude of some members of staff towards their supervisors and other employees was among the pervasive problems that maintained conflict. This theme did not come out among the management staff. The verbatim below substantiates these findings;

*What I have observed that some of those female members of staff who have intimate connection with the higher offices are the most proud and they feel they cannot be supervised. This is a problem I have observed. Subordinate staff, 14*

#### **4.5 Management of Conflict in the Student's Affairs Unit Management**

Under the fourth objective, the study sought to investigate how managers manage destructive organizational conflict among the employees in university of Zambia Student' Affairs Unit. Themes emerging from this objective included "Counselling center", "Managers not aware of some conflicts", "little attention paid to settling grievances" and lastly "managers are defensive".

#### **4.5.1 Counselling center**

Counselling center emerged as a theme around existing conflict resolution mechanisms existing in the establishment. Participants mentioned counselling center as a platform that was there to assist with conflict resolution among employees as well as students. They also mentioned that it was also responsible for undertaking disciplinary action. One of the members of management staff clarified this theme in the following quote;

*“The counseling center’s presence in campus creates a very big difference to the campus one of the main duties especially resolving conflicts. Dialogues are created where every employees is given a chance to speak their opinions towards conflict resolution. Seminars, workshops are held at the customer care. And there is a disciplinary in the department which disciplines every worker or member of staff. “Management staff*

Another participant from among the subordinate staff confirmed the previous quote given by management staff in the following quote but with some doubt in its effectiveness;

*“Yes they do. Mostly the counseling department does a lot on such issues. There is a staff disciplinary committee which starts from central DOSA administration up to counseling center. Though this is not effective in most of the time. “Subordinate staff*

#### **5.4.2 Managers not aware of some conflicts**

Interestingly, a different perspective emerged from some of the employees as they felt that managers were not actively involved in resolving conflict because management was not aware of some of these conflicts. This set of participants pointed to factors such as fear among the employees to express their grievances led to the managers not hearing about it.

*No they are not aware because they don’t check in the offices in most of the time. Subordinate staff, PI*

However, not everyone had the same view about awareness, some contradicted the above perspective as they felt that managers were aware but they did not take the employees grievances as very critical. The following verbatim substantiates these findings;

*They are aware [meaning the managers-author insertion] but they don't really pay special attention to most of the conflicts happening especially among subordinate employees. Subordinate staff, P3*

#### **4.5.3 Managers are defensive to criticism**

Moreover, “managers are defensive to criticism” was among the major themes of the study under management’s response to conflict. Some participants felt that managers had a problem with listening but were very quick at defending themselves. This attitude seemed to be a barrier to conflict resolution within the unit. The quote below substantiates these findings;

*They are very defensive, not ready to listen and understand grievances and they threaten the employees. Subordinate staff, P2*

Another participant added to the observation by stressing that despite having meetings, conflicts were still not resolved due to some process factors as clarified in the verbatim quote below;

*They call for meetings sometimes but mostly they don't really react to any of grievances. We have no right to criticize supervisors no how wrong they are. There is no freedom to correct managers. Subordinate staff, P 4*

#### **4.5. The Effectiveness of the Conflict Management Strategies Used By Dosa Management to Resolve Conflicts.**

The study under the fifth objective, explored from the perspectives of employees, the effectiveness of conflict management strategies used by students affairs unit. The findings were struck by tension. While others felt that the existing strategies were working effectively, some felt otherwise. This objective was not very fit to be investigated quantitatively but it was included to get the views of the members of staff on their appraisal of the situation from an experiential stand point.

##### **4.5.1 Effectiveness of the Strategies**

A number of recommendations of effectively managing conflict were revealed in the study. Participants made their own suggestions on how best they thought conflict resolution can be effectively managed among the employees. “Capacity building of the counselling center”,

“Frequent open meetings”, “Assigning responsibility or positions on merit” and “Unions should make conflict resolution a priority”.

#### **4.5.2 Capacity building of the counselling center**

Capacity building of the counselling center emerged as a salient recommendation. By capacity building, the participants meant appointment of professionally qualified staff at the counselling center, development of channels through which employees can lay out grievances without intimidation, workshops organized by counselling center aimed at training employees in effective conflict management. The following verbatim quotes substantiates these findings;

*The counseling department should be equipped with highly qualified personnel with all the knowledge for conflict resolution. Workshops should be promoted in the department so that people are trained on how to resolve conflicts.*

#### **4.5.3 Frequent open meetings**

Another recommendation that emerged from the findings of this study is that there should be an increase in open meetings. The participants also stressed on the quality of these meetings or the process factors necessary in these meetings if conflict management and resolution can be effective. The following verbatim quotes substantiate these findings;

#### **4.5.4 Assigning responsibility or positions on merit**

Another recommendation emerging from the analysis was that there were critical positions occupied by unqualified people within the system who have been appointed based on favoritism. However, it was important to base appointments on those who qualified both through hard work and through academic qualifications. The following verbatim echoed these findings;

*I think they should also be looking at the academic qualifications we are having when appointing some members of staff. Okay they do consider that but now that we are a lot who have studied, there seems to be people who are placed in certain senior positions without the appropriate qualifications. I can't mention here but there is supposed to be a predictable motivating system within the university which encourages us to study hard.  
Subordinate staff*

#### **4.5.5 Unions should make conflict resolution a priority**

Lastly some participants felt that workers union within the establishment were too dormant on resolving issues that gave rise conflict. The participants suggested that it was important for unions to be more vibrant and take conflict resolution to the top priority both for the sake job satisfaction and also organizational productivity. A participant expressed their disappointment with the functioning of the union in the following verbatim;

*Unions are not operational at the moment. Therefore, unions such as student unions, workers union and lecturers unions must come back and be there to provide checks and balances in*

#### **Chapter Summary**

The current chapter has presented the findings emerging from the thematic analysis of the data. The study has revealed the current sources of conflict, perpetrators of conflict, current strategies being used in conflict management as well as recommendations for effective conflict management with in the student affairs unit as an organization. A number of themes have emerged under each objective and it is certain that conflict does exists and the immediate context itself has the solution to the existing unresolved sources and perpetrators of conflict. Communication barriers seem to crown most of the findings. Cultural, Psychosocial (personality, intimidation, intimate relations) and political factors seem to also crowd the perpetrators of conflict as well as the sources. Recommendations seem to be centered on transparency, improved communication and capacity building in the organization.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on the presentation of results on the nature and sources of conflict among university employees in the students' affairs unit. This chapter is a discussion of findings in relation to literature which has been reviewed in chapter two and the theoretical framework (the human relations contemporary view and the interactionist theory). The current phenomenological study was anchored on answering four main research questions which were:

1. What is the nature of conflict among the employees of the Students Affairs Unit?
2. What are the sources of organizational conflict within the Student's Affairs Unit?
3. What factors influence the persistence of organizational conflict within the students' affairs unit?
4. What strategies are used by the student's affairs management to resolve the existing conflicts?

#### **2.1 Nature of Conflict among the Employees in the University of Students Affairs Unit**

Bearing in mind that conflict can exist in many forms. It was imperative for the study to describe qualitatively, in what form the conflict exists. For this reason, the first objective aimed at describing the nature of conflict among the employees in the student's affairs units in order to understand the characteristics of the conflict that exists. Thematic analysis using interpretivism emerged from the study. The themes included vertical conflict, horizontal conflict and non-confrontational conflict.

The study revealed that vertical conflict characterized the nature of conflict that existed at the institution. The conflict was described as vertical in experiences which were phrased by most employees as dean-subordinate misunderstandings, supervisor-subordinate disrespect and managers personal grudges with subordinates. This result was expressed by both the subordinate employees and those in management. Dean-subordinate conflict meant the misunderstandings both verbal and non-verbal that existed between the top most managers in the unit (dean) and

other subordinate employees. However, vertical conflict as found in this study tallies with Imazai and Ohbuchi, (2002) who argued that vertical conflict occurs in groups of different hierarchical levels, such as supervisors and salesmen. Alabar (2007) also pointed that vertical conflict occurs between channel members at different levels of the distribution system for instance between manufacturers or between a wholesaler and a retailer. Though in a different context, vertical conflicts seems to be common in both academic and industrial organizations. Conflicts of this nature could be as a result of power imbalances in the unit. This is also in line with the conflict theory which states that differences in status and power between groups are in general founding blocks of conflicts.

Furthermore, the study unveiled another form of conflict that was termed horizontal conflict. Horizontal conflict was a characteristic of conflict that involved lines of authority or levels of authority. This result was mentioned to mean conflict that existed among employees at the same levels of authority. Similarly, studies by (Ayaga and Timothy, 2015:4; Imazai and Ohbuchi, 2002; Alabar, 2007) points to the same by noting that horizontal conflict refers to conflict between employees or departments as the same hierarchical level in an organization. Thus, horizontal conflict occurs between individuals of the same level, such as managers in the same organization. Horizontal conflict is also similar to labeled process conflict which pertains to issues of duty and resource delegation, such as who should do what and how much responsibility different people should get (Jehn, 1997; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). Such conflicts are more likely to occur among people of the same authority or level of work position.

Another feature of conflict that was revealed under the nature of conflict was that mostly, conflict was non-confrontational and not-physically charged but it was in form of a cold war. However non-confrontational conflict is closely related to relationship conflict which is characterized by awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities, which includes affective components such as feeling tension and friction (Amason, 1996). Relationship conflict involves personal issues such as dislike among group members and feelings such as annoyance, frustration, and irritation (Amason, 1996; Pinkley, 1990). Moreover, non-confrontational conflict is detrimental to individual and group performance, member satisfaction, and the likelihood a group will work together in the future (Jehn, 1995; Shah & Jehn, 1993). In this regard grudges,

frustration, dislike, annoyance, and irritation may result into conflicts thereby compromising productivity in organizations like the Student Affairs Unit.

## **5.2 Sources of Organizational Conflict among Dean of Students Employees**

The second objective of the study sought to identify the important sources of conflict in order to understand some of the context specific causes of conflict at the institutional unit. The underlying reason for studying the sources of conflict is to have critical starting points for conflict resolution intervention development. Political interests, tribalism, undermining, not being paid on time, corruption traps, “Lack of proper communication between supervisors and subordinate employees”, “Lack of motivational initiatives” and “Gossip behaviors by subordinate employees” emerged as some of the common sources of conflicts emerged potential sources of conflict in the study.

The study revealed that political interest was one of the major sources of organizational conflicts within the student’s affairs unit. Political interests which caused divisions split between the ruling party (managers/supervisors) and the opposition political party (subordinate employees). It was noted that political interests affected aspects such as promotion and allocation of positions. Thus this was a potential ground for conflicts. Moreover, these interests were covert in nature very difficult to notice unless extra attention was invested. Interestingly, this result was consistent with what Fajana (2000) termed internal sources of conflict. According to Fajana (2000), internal sources of conflict refer to factors which are inherent within the framework of an organization. It is aptly stated that the major prime factor of internal sources of conflict is the “opposing interests” of industrial actors (Fajana, 2000). Similarly, “divergent interests” will bring about conflict in attempts by the two parties in organizations to try to share the industrial cake (major interest of the organization) (Ajibade, 2004). Considering the fact that political interests are the backbone of opposing interests, it was clear that such opposing interests may precipitate hatred and tension in organizations. Thus according to dysfunctional view, such conflicts usually hinder organizational performance and lead to decreased productivity. However, at a merit level, the conflict theory supports political interests in arguing that the disadvantaged (opposition party) have structural interests that run counter to the status quo, which, once they are assumed, will lead to social change. It is paramount to note that only if opposing interests are of positive change in an organization must be tolerated and emulated.

Therefore, the perspective of functional or constructive conflict as unpacked by Robbin (2001) can be credited in arguing that functional conflict like (political interest) does in most of the time supports the goals of the group, competitiveness and improves its (group's) performance.

Furthermore, tribalism was also revealed as a major source of conflicts. Tribalism was also expressed as favoritism, regionalism and nepotism. These felt tribal divisions were found to fuel a number of conflicts amongst the employees. Culturally speaking, there is a tendency of people shaping their behaviors based on one's own ethnic background. Thus they shape their life towards their cultural belief systems and values. Tribalism therefore came out as a salient source of organizational conflict. Overwhelmingly, the findings of the study were consistent with other previous studies. A Kenyan study by Kipyego (2009) revealed that people disagree and see things differently because of different levels of education, social standing, religion, personality, belief structure, past experience, affection shown in the home and a lot of other factors that affect human behavior. Also, a South African study by Thomas and Bendixen (2000) noted that cultural diversity in the workplace is also among the major sources of workplace conflict. Although it is difficult to do away with workplace diversity, managements should be culturally conscious and they should invest more in cooperative strategies to reduce the differences and increase the similarities among employees in organizations (Thomas and Bendixen, 2000). To this effect, tribalism may stand to create hatred among people of different ethnic background. Therefore because of its utmost negativity to the organizations performance, tribalism is denied by the traditional view of conflicts (1930-1940) which opposes the existence of all forms of conflicts by arguing that conflicts is associated with violence and destruction and hence it must be avoided.

Disregard for subordinate employees also emerged as one the sources of conflict. This was mentioned mostly by the junior employees and not those in management. This finding emerged as a source of conflict as it was found to lead to other emotional reactions and formation of attitudes and behaviors among the employees in the unit. This finding was similar to earlier studies such as that of (Kipyego, 2009; Okotoni, 2003; Sompa, 2015; Renwick, 1975; Weider and Hatfield, 1995) among others who argue that lack of freedom to express one's own opinions, not given rights and not being considered worthwhile in decision making in an organization results into conflicts. The slight difference in the findings could be as a result of differences in

the context in which most of the previous studies focused much on the industrial organizations while this study focused on an academic institution. Notwithstanding, there was a huge similarity between disregard for subordinate employees and authority relationships conflict. As stated by Mcshare and Glinow (2008) that in many companies, there is an underlying tension between managers and employees because most people do not like being told what they have to do. In many organizations, managers have privileges (flexible hours, free personal long-distance calls, and longer breaks) (Mcshare and Glinow (2008)). Therefore, disregard for subordinate employees can lead to hatred especially from the subordinate employees to their supervisor or managers. This is also evident in the conflict theory where the elites who hold power (managers) suppress the lower class (subordinate employees). Thus, subordinate employees' opinions are not taken into consideration by managers. This results in most of the time to conflicts.

Moreover, “corruption traps” were other aspects of the findings that characterized the sources of conflict among the university employees in the current study. Corruption traps were mentioned to mean fault finding, labeling and corruption scheme plots against other employees by some senior or fellow members of staff. This however produced mixed results as some employees felt corruption traps were professionally necessary, others felt they were personal and aimed humiliating other employees. It was noted that superiors had a tendency of stereotyping other employees as corrupt even without cause and this was reported to negatively affect the employees at both personal and professional level. This result slightly contradicting with the earlier findings of (Kipyego, 2009; Okotoni, 2003; Sompa, 2015; Renwick, 1975; Weider and Hatfield, 1995) among others who collectively in their studies do not regard corruption traps as a source of conflicts. This slight contradiction could be as a result that the current study focused on academic institution whereas most of these empirical studies focused on industrial sector. Saliently, corruption traps should be seen positively only if it is professionally for quality check. However, this is not common. Thus backbiting, snitching, telling lies, spying shame and negative feelings towards those trapped into corruption acts becomes common in workplaces. Therefore, if this is rampant in an organization conflicts become inevitable.

The sources of conflict also covered financial causes. On one side, employees felt that delayed payment of their monthly salaries and allowances were a salient source of conflict. It was mentioned that monthly salaries themselves were not a very huge problem but the allowances.

Also the allowances were required to pass through some signatories who seemed to delay in doing the process. This system related problem brought conflict between the people responsible for the signing and the other members of staff. On the other side, some employees felt that there were some individual employees whose allowances seemed to always be processed earlier than others and these suspicions gave birth to emotions that created a fertile ground for destructive conflict. Interestingly, empirical research by Okotoni (2003) also attributed the sources of conflict in school organizations as being the fact that teachers work in highly demotivating conditions due to poor pay by the government coupled with lack of clear increments in salaries. According to Okotoni (2003) this has however resulted in the causes of conflicts between teachers and head teachers in secondary schools. Indeed good remuneration brings courage, hope, enthusiasm, hard work and job gratification among employees. However, not being paid on time meant not only demotivating but also tension, frustration and anger which if arise, becomes fuel to destructive conflicts. Thus, this remains a dysfunctional conflict which hinders organizational performance and leads to decreased productivity.

Moreover, absence of proper vertical dialogue emerged another crucial source of conflict. It was noted that poor communication with bosses, absence of proper channel of communication, miscommunication, not having frequent meetings, manager's avoidance of dialogue all remain ingredients of conflicts. It was revealed that subordinate employees felt there was not sufficient space for dialogue in the unit to allow members of staff to express their grief. The managers on the other hand felt that employees themselves were not open enough to express their grief or discomfort during the meetings. The managers expressed ignorance to the reasons why some employees were not open. Nonetheless, intimidation was among the reasons employees failed to open up as they tried to protect their jobs. This finding tallied with previous empirical research such as that of Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) who noted that the sources of organizational conflict have included inadequate communication, denial of rights and privileges, power tussles, personality clashes, and poor management strategies. This is also similar to (Fajana, 2000; Sompa, 2015; Glinow, 2008) who argue that lack of good communication and lack of freedom to express one's own opinions are the potential sources of conflicts. Indeed if employees or workers do not have a clear and free platforms for debates and expression, havoc becomes the order of the day. This may result into violence and lawlessness in the organisations. Thus, in line with

traditional view of conflict “absence of proper vertical dialogue” can be seen as a dysfunctional conflict.

The study also revealed overstaying in positions of superiority as a source of conflict. It was observed that those managers who had overstayed in their positions of power lacked innovativeness and creativity anymore and that this in often times facilitated corruption within the system. It is imperative mentioning that this was found to be a source of conflict for those who desired progress and wanted to get ahead in their carrier within the university unit. No promotions were granted to the subordinated employees even after having upgraded their qualification. The results showed that while others felt this was a source of conflict, some did not perceive it that way. This result was however to somewhat similar to most other studies in the available literature (Fajana, 2000; Sompa, 2015; Glinow, 2008; Okotoni, 2003; Jehn, 1995; Wilmot & Hocker, 2001; Xie, Song, & Stringfellow, 1998) among others who commonly argue that corruption becomes rampant among people who stay over time in superior positions. The uniqueness of this factor as a source of organization conflict might be as a result of the context in which the current study encompassed which is mostly academic and not industrial. It is noteworthy noting that overstaying in a certain position gives one experience and competence which to an extent is positive. Alas, this sometimes brings laziness, procrastination and relaxation among supervisors. Thus if that is the case, there is little or no possibility of creativity, innovation and productivity in the organization. Hence overstaying in positions of superiority to a larger extent is a dysfunctional conflict.

In addition, the study revealed gossip behaviors as one of the major sources of conflict. It was established that gossip as backbiting, snitching, telling lies and spying are common in workplaces. Gossiping among employees both vertically and horizontal was mentioned as a common source of conflict. However these behaviors became sources of conflict when the people being gossiped about discovered that a colleague was saying negative things about them. This cycle creates a network of hatred amongst the employees which sometimes spanned into confrontational conflict. Confrontations seem only to be common in horizontal circles but not vertically because of power dynamics across employees. Significantly, the finding was consistent with a couple of earlier studies. For instance, Zapf (1999) asserted that mobbing which is a form of work place bullying is targeted at specific individuals by certain groups in the organization.

Other studies like Wilmot & Hocker (2001) have documented that task interdependence alters the course and consequences of conflict. This is because high task interdependence implies the need for intensive interactions among members (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). Hence, backbiting, snitching, telling lies and spying in such interactions becomes the major source of conflicts. At this level, the traditional view of conflict (1930-1940) becomes efficacious in arguing that conflicts like (gossip behaviours) are not good and must be avoided at any cost.

### **5.3 The Factors That Influence Persistence of Conflict in the Work Places**

While the second objective focused on the sources of conflict, the study under objective three sought to establish what perpetuated the conflict. It is cardinal however in the process of organizational conflict intervention to separate random occurrences from constants. This section was interested in establishing the constants from the perspectives of participants that maintained the conflicts. A number of themes emerged among the perpetuating factors and these included; “Absence of Proper Space for Dialogue”, “jealousy”, “inadequate education”, “intimidation”, “discrimination”, “intimate relationships between members of staff” and ambition.

The study unveiled “absence of proper dialogue” both among the sources and among the perpetuating factors of conflict. On one hand, participants felt that issues were mounting in people’s hearts and they could not express these issues because a proper space for effective communication was missing. On the other hand, from the perspectives of the managers, space for dialogue was there but was underutilized by the members of staff. However, the perspectives of the members of staff contradicted these views by arguing that they felt like managers were not ready to listen to them by observing their attitudes towards the junior employees. Thus it was established that contradiction showed strong signs of miscommunication and misunderstanding between subordinate and management staff. However, this finding was consistent with previous empirical research such as that of Olaleye & Arogundade (2013) who noted that the sources of organizational conflict have included inadequate communication, denial of rights and privileges, power tussles, personality clashes, and poor management strategies. To this regard absence of proper space for dialogue created no opportunity for sharing ideas and debate especially from the subordinate employees. As a result, this led to persistence of conflicts in organisations likes in the student affairs unit.

Furthermore, the study revealed personality factor “jealousy” amongst the members of staff as a crucial factor that influenced the persistence of conflict in the unit. This resulted from personality factors such as competition amongst the members of staff and also selfishness of some members of the unit. It was observed that there was competition in situations where some employees were aiming for certain higher positions to be above others such that they could go up to the extent of stepping on other peoples toes. However, this is supported by the interactionist view with argues that conflicts should be accepted only if it support competition. Participants identified selfishness when they felt the reason why people where against other peoples initiatives or progress was because, they wanted to be the only ones progressing in the organization. The findings of this study although different, it showed a slight similarity with what (Amason, 1996; Pinkley, 1990) termed relationship conflict. This involves personal issues such as dislike among group members and feelings such as annoyance, frustration, and irritation. However, cross-sectional studies have shown that relationship, or affective, conflict is detrimental to individual and group performance, member satisfaction, and the likelihood a group will work together in the future (Jehn, 1995; Shah & Jehn, 1993). Research findings indicate that the anxiety produced by interpersonal animosity may inhibit cognitive functioning (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981; Roseman, Wiest, & Swartz, 1994). It must be mentioned that it is in these angles that hatred and jealousy develops and as such it becomes difficult to resolve conflicts of this magnitude. To this extent, jealousy is seen as a dysfunctional conflict.

The study also revealed insufficient education as another factor that contributed to the persistence of conflict among the employees. This was commonly mentioned to describe situations where some members of staff were not using the opportunity to upgrade their studies and hence there ways of perceiving social situations in the organization was distorted. Interestingly, this finding was consistent with other studies. Kipyego (2009) in a Kenyan study argued that people disagree and see things differently because of different levels of education, social standing, religion, personality, belief structure, past experience, affection shown in the home and a lot of other factors that affect human behavior. Similarly, a Zambian study by Sompa (2015) established that absenteeism, teachers having higher qualifications than the head teacher, late coming, incompetence on the part of the head teacher, unsatisfactory class allocation, teachers negative work culture, favoritism and not submitting teaching files on schedule all tantamount to conflict. Moreover, it is also argued that sources of organizational conflict have

included inadequate communication, denial of rights and privileges, power tussles, personality clashes, and poor management strategies (Olaleye & Arogundade, 2013). Although in a different perspective, insufficient education seems to precipitate the persistence of conflicts in work places. It should be emphasized that adequate education about conflict resolution and management remains a vivid mechanism for conflict free organization.

Nonetheless, intimidation emerged strongly among the factor that perpetuated the conflict amongst the employees. Intimidation was expressed predominantly as lack of expressive freedom, putting ones job at risk and being spotted. The participants felt they had limited freedom to express themselves when direct threats were issued if they had an opposing view to the supervisor, in other instances employees were relocated to other departments if they held a different view from top management. It was aptly argued by subordinate employees that this resulted in putting their jobs at risk when they witnessed experiences of some member's contracts not being renewed upon a dispute. On contrary, some argued that this was due to their own subjective thoughts about the consequences of disagreeing with top authority because they felt it would pose risk on their job security. For this reason, speaking out was a challenge for the subordinates as this showed they were afraid of being negatively labeled by their superiors as disrespectful or proud. The participants mentioned that this was through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors of their superiors whenever they held opposing views. The finding in the current study was consistent with (Olaleye & Arogundade, 2013; Mcshare & Glinow, 2008; Whitlam & Cameron, 2012; Renwick, 1975; Weider and Hatfield, 1995; Zapf, 1999) who argue that inadequate communication and poor management strategies, jurisdictional ambiguities, resource availability, affirmative action programs all results to conflicts in workplaces. They further argue that the scope and content of work, the introduction of new management techniques, and differences of a cultural and racial nature and mobbing in the organization are salient sources of organizational conflict. Therefore as long as intimidation endured, destructive conflict was inevitable.

The study also unveiled "discrimination" as a factor perpetuating conflicts among the members of staff at the students' affairs unit. Interestingly, this discrimination was mentioned to be both political and tribal in nature. Participants mentioned political and tribal discrimination was responsible for maintaining conflict among the employees. However, these interests interfered

with the professional environment. Research associated to intimidation has shown that factors such as the heterogeneity of the workforce, loyalties of groups, diverse economic interests, among other, are relevant sources of workplace conflict (Renwick, 1975; Weider and Hatfield, 1995). Similarly, inadequate communication, denial of rights and privileges, power tussles, personality clashes, and poor management strategies may result to conflict (Olaleye & Arogundade, 2013). It is certain at this juncture to make mention that intimidation may also take form of bullying to other employees which create fear. It is uncertain however to whether this was only among managers and subordinate employees or among the subordinate employees themselves. Whatever the case, intimidation remains as found in this study a salient factor that propagates the persistence of conflicts in the student affairs unit.

In addition, intimate relationships between members of staff were revealed to be a predominant factor that perpetuated the persistence of conflict in the student affairs unit. It was established that those employees that were secretly going out with superiors were the most stubborn to their supervisors. It was further added that the attitude of some members of staff towards their supervisors and other employees was among the pervasive problems that maintained conflict. However this finding seemed contradicting to most of previous studies (Kipyego, 2009; Okotoni, 2003; Sompa, 2015; Renwick, 1975; Weider and Hatfield, 1995) among others who do not recognize intimate relationship between members of staff as a source of organizational conflict. Surprisingly, intimate relationship as found in the current study came to be a pervasive problem that brought conflict in the unit. It was noted that employees who were secretly going out with managers were reluctant and did not strictly rules and regulations of the unit. This resulted into conflict with other employees who felt such employees were not cooperating with others. Therefore, as long as intimate relationship in the unit existed conflicts endured.

#### **5.4 Management of Conflict in the Student's Affairs Unit Management**

Under the fourth objective, the study sought to investigate how managers manage destructive organizational conflict among the university staff in the student's affairs unit. It was important to know how managers resolve existing conflicts so that the project interventions can bring quadruple changes in conflict resolution management in the unit. In this case, counseling and emergence conflict settlement meetings emerged the common methods managers use to resolve destructive conflicts in the unit.

The study found unearthed that “counseling center” was among the major existing conflict resolution mechanisms existing in the establishment. The counseling center was a platform that is there to assist with conflict resolution among employees as well as students. Most of the wrangles concerning subordinate employees and the student populace were sort to be resolved at the counseling center. It was further noted that counseling center was also responsible for undertaking disciplinary action. However, the finding was to somewhat contradicting earlier studies such as (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Kazan & Ergin, 1999; Rahim, et al, 2000; Gauturg 1996) among others who in their findings include participation and empowerment, respect for diversity and justice and non-violence as being among the most salient virtues in an organization that aims at reducing the chances of conflict. The contradiction in the current study might have been as a result of the context in which the study focused on academic institution while as most of these highlighted studies focused on industrial set up.

In addition, the study revealed “emergence conflict settlement meetings” as one of the major conflict resolution methods existing in the unit. These meetings were held both vertically (among managers themselves) and horizontally (among managers and subordinate employees). However, the nature of these meetings was critical. This was so because emergence conflict meetings took place only on critical issues. This means that those conflicts that had reached it highest potential were attended to using this method. Just like counselling, emergence conflict settlement meetings were found to be contradictory to the finding of (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Kazan & Ergin, 1999; Rahim, et al, 2000; Gauturg 1996) among others who in their findings include participation and empowerment, respect for diversity and justice and non-violence as being among the most salient virtues in an organization that aims at reducing the chances of conflict. The uniqueness of this finding maybe the fact that the study focused on the academic institution.

## **2.5 Summary of the Discussion**

This study also revealed eight sources of organization conflicts. These include; Political interests, tribalism, not being paid on time, corruption traps, lack of space for dialogue between managers and subordinate employees, overstaying in positions of superiority, Lack of motivational initiatives and Gossip behaviors by subordinate employees. Moreover, the study established what perpetuated the persistence of conflict. It is cardinal however in the process of organizational conflict intervention to separate random occurrences from constants. Absence of Proper Space

for Dialogue, jealousy, inadequate education, intimidation, discrimination, intimate relationships between members of are among salient factors perpetuating conflicts in academic institution like UNZA . Absence of Proper Space for Dialogue hinders the opportunity of junior employees to share and express their opinions about the welfare of an organization.

From the discussion above, it is evident that some of the themes that emerged were consistent with the findings of previous studies while some findings were unique to the current study resulting from factors such as varying context, organizational nature and areas of focus among conflict scholars. Zambia did not seem to do much on organizational conflict in institutions of higher learning but did more on conflict in secondary schools. All the findings on the nature and sources of organizational conflict seemed to be influenced by psychosocial, cultural, educational and power related factors. The next chapter focuses on conclusion and recommendations for this study.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion of the study. It brings out a number of recommendations proposed and areas for future research. Guided by the conflict theory and the interactionist theory as a theoretical framework, the current study explored the nature and sources of organizational conflict among university employees at the University of Zambia Student Affairs Unit. The study qualitatively explored the nature and sources of organizational conflict among university employees by getting views from two stakeholders (managers/supervisors and subordinate employees in the student's affairs unit).

#### 6.1 Conclusions

The study has shown that the nature of conflict include vertical, horizontal and non-confrontational conflicts. Vertical conflicts are common forms of misunderstandings between authorities (managers/supervisors) and subordinates (employees). Such conflicts are dominant in organizations that are characterized by a bureaucratic style. Those holding power will always enforce their interest first thereby suppressing the interests of the subordinates. This finding shows that differences in status and power between groups are in general founding blocks of conflict. Furthermore, horizontal conflicts are common between managers or employees of the same hierarchical level in an organization. Conflicts become salient among people of the same hierarchical level due the same authority that each member holds. Non-confrontational conflict involves (awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities, personal issues such as dislike, annoyance, frustration, and irritation) between members in the organization. These factors lead to irritation and friction which finally results into conflict in exchange of words like (cold war) that results into cognitive affection. Moreover, non-confrontational conflict is detrimental to individual and group performance, member satisfaction, and the likelihood of a group to work together in the future.

This study also revealed eight sources of organization conflicts. These included Political interests, tribalism, not being paid on time, corruption traps, lack of space for dialogue between

managers and subordinate employees, overstaying in positions of superiority, Lack of motivational initiatives and Gossip behaviors by subordinate employees. Political interests at this institution entail having different views and political affiliations. This was mentioned the participants a salient source of conflict. Political interests affected aspects such as promotion and allocation of positions. Considering the fact that political interests are the backbone of opposing interests, it was clear that such opposing interests have the potential to precipitate hatred and tension in the organization. Thus according to dysfunctional view, such conflicts usually hinder organizational performance and lead to decreased productivity. However, political interest is to somewhat supported in the theoretical framework in arguing that the disadvantaged (opposition party) have structural interests that run counter to the status quo, which, once they are assumed, will lead to social change. Tribalism was also expressed as favoritism, regionalism and nepotism. Thus managements should be culturally conscious and they should invest more in cooperative strategies to reduce the differences and increase the similarities among employees in organizations. Disregard for subordinate employees also emerged as among the sources of conflict. This was highly emphasized among junior employees. Disregard for subordinate employees led to other emotional reactions and formation of attitudes and behaviors amongst the employees in the unit. Overstaying in positions of superiority led to reluctance and lack of innovation among those serving in managerial positions. Corruption traps made those found wanting used to humiliate. Gossip behaviors take form of bullying, backbiting; snitching, telling lies and spying are common in workplaces. Therefore, because of the catastrophic nature of these sources the theoretical framework of traditional view (1930-1940) is adopted in arguing that conflicts are not good and should always be avoided.

Furthermore, the study established what perpetuated the persistence of conflict. It is cardinal however in the process of organizational conflict intervention to separate random occurrences from constants. Absence of Proper Space for Dialogue, jealousy, inadequate education, intimidation, discrimination, intimate relationships between members of are among salient factors perpetuating conflicts in academic institution like UNZA . Absence of Proper Space for Dialogue hinders the opportunity of junior employees to share and express their opinions about the welfare of an organization. Hence, legitimizing open meetings for interaction, sharing and discussions is of optimistic change in conflict management and resolution. Insufficient education results into poor execution of conflicts resolution and management. Therefore, increasing

education and trainings that are conflict based are important to all staff members. Employing conflicts resolution specialists in such departments is of positive impact. Jealousy is characterized by personality clashes which is obvious to conflicts. Intimidation occurs mostly between authorities (managers) and juniors. Moreover, intimate relationships among members of staff is an apple factor that leads to reluctance and disloyal to superiors. Realistically speaking, if these factors are rampant in a workplace, then conflicts are inevitable. Therefore, the dysfunctional view of conflict as used in this study can be adopted in that the above factors are of high negativity to an organization operations.

Moreover, the study unearthed strategies managers use to manage destructive organizational conflict among the university staff in the student's affairs unit. It was important to know how managers resolve existing conflicts so that there can be interventions that can bring quadruple changes in conflict resolution and management in the unit. Counseling and emergency conflict settlement meetings were the feasible methods managers' used in managing and resolving conflicts. The counseling center was a platform that is there to assist with conflict resolution among employees as well as students. What is not known however is how effective is the counseling center. It is not known as to how professional and excellent the counseling process is viable for conflict management and resolution. Nonetheless, emergency conflict settlement meetings were held both vertically (among managers themselves) and horizontally (among managers and subordinate employees). However, the nature of these meetings was critical. This was because emergency conflict meetings took place only on critical issues. This means that those conflicts that had reached its highest point were attended to using this method.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

The following recommendations are based on the findings of the study.

- i. The current study revealed lack of education among counseling staff. Therefore, it was recommended for capacity building of the counseling center. Thus there is need to appoint professionally trained staff at the counseling center.
- ii. The study spotted frequent open meetings and workshops that are conflict based as best mechanism for conflict resolution. One of the causes of conflict was noted to be as a result of lack interaction among managers and subordinate employees in the unity. There

were little or no times of organization platforms where employees and managers can interact or discuss on issues pertaining to the running of the unit. Thus, meetings that are conflict resolution oriented were spotted to enhance collaboration, cooperation, debates and sharing of ideas of organizational interests.

- iii. The study also unveiled that there were critical positions occupied by unqualified people within the system who have been appointed based on favoritism and tribalism. However, it was important to base appointments on those who qualified both through hard work and through academic qualifications. It was highly emphasized that individuals who are professionally qualified in conflict matters must be employed in the unit. This if significantly considered could improve productivity and the general performance in the unit.
- iv. Lastly but not the least the study revealed that workers union within the establishment should prioritize conflict resolution. Workers unions included (lecturers union, workers union and student union). However, it was suggested that it was important for unions to be more vibrant and take conflict resolution to the top priority both for the sake job satisfaction and also organizational productivity. These unions were projected to provide checks and balances in the student affairs unit.

### **6.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

- i. An evaluative study on the effectiveness of the counseling center and emergence conflict settlement meetings on conflict management should be conducted as the findings of this explorative study pave way.
- ii. A replication of the study with a large sample covering different organizations both academic and industrial sector is important to bring out more sources of organizational conflicts.
- iii. A study on knowledge about conflict management and resolution among managers could be helpful to increase awareness about conflict resolution in organisations.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1: CONSENT FOARM FOR PARTICIPANTS (Managers and Subordinate employees)**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA/ ZIMBABWE OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

**INSTITUTE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Brenda Mukuka Mwamba from the University of Zambia (UNZA)/Zimbabwe Open University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the nature and sources of organizational conflict among University of Zambia Dean of Students Affairs management. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one in my work place will be told.

I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question. Participation involves responding to an interview which will be audio recorded by a researcher from the University of Zambia (UNZA). It will take approximately 20-25minutes to complete the questionnaire. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this questionnaire, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the University Of Zambia, ethics committee.

For research problems or questions regarding subjects, Brenda Mukuka may be contacted through (Email: [mukukabre@gmail.com](mailto:mukukabre@gmail.com). Or call 0972995777

I have read and understood the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 2: Interview guide for supervisors and subordinate employees Questions and their possible probes**

1. From your experience, do you think conflict exists among employees in the Dean of Students Affairs Department? If yes ...would you kindly describe some your experiences where conflict was involved...?
2. What are some of the causes of conflict among Dean of Students Affairs (DOSA) employees?
3. From your experience do u feel disagreements exist among employees among DOSA employees? Tell me about some of the common disagreements or conflict you have witnessed? Who are usually involved in these conflict? Are there any other disagreements you know about amongst your selves as employees?
4. What do you think leads to these conflicts? What starts them? Do you have examples on how these conflicts are ignited among your colleagues....?
5. Are there any long term conflicts that seem not to be settled amongst employees that you have observed? What are some of these conflicts? What do you think maintains such conflicts? Do you have any examples of disagreements/conflicts that have gone unresolved among employees for some time now?
6. Do you think management is always aware of all the conflicts that are existing among DOSA employees?.....why do you think so
7. Are there any conflicts you felt management was aware about? What did management do about it?
8. How do feel management resolves conflicts amongst yourselves when they arise?
9. Do you feel the strategies used by management to resolve conflict are effective so far? Why do feel so?
10. Is there any way you feel management should resolve conflict to enhance performance amongst your selves?
11. What are some of the ways managers within DOSA respond to criticisms/grievances from fellow employees?
12. From your experience how do feel employees react to conflict? Why do you think they react that way....?

13. What do you think should be done to ensure a conflict free work environment within DOSA?