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## Comparative Effects of Leadership Styles on Workplace Conflict in the Nigerian Civil Service

Obeta, Roseline, Uzoamaka

Ph. D. Student, Department of Public Administration,  
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

### Abstract:

*The study investigated the effects of leadership styles on workplace conflict among civil servants in Delta state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to ascertain the influence of transformational, Transactional and Laissez-faire leadership styles on workplace conflict among the civil servants. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The population of the study includes 31 civil servants in the Delta state ministry of health, Asaba. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data which was analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions, while t-test was used to analyze the hypotheses. The findings of the study indicated that there are significant relationships between transformational leadership style and workplace conflict ( $t_{cal} < t_{crit}$ ,  $0.2873 < 2.04$ ), transactional leadership style and workplace conflict ( $t_{cal} < t_{crit}$ ,  $0.6998 < 2.04$ ), and also laissez-faire leadership style and workplace conflict ( $t_{cal} < t_{crit}$ ,  $0.0974 < 2.04$ ). The study recommended that managers should imbibe practical leadership styles that achieve organizational goals and objectives and employees job satisfaction in order to reduce incidences of workplace conflict.*

**Keywords:** Laissez-faire, leadership, transactional, transformational, workplace conflict

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Background to the Study

One of the enduring characteristics of human relationships is the emergence of conflict. This arises from the dissimilarity between goals, values, perceptions, and ideas inherent in human nature. According to DeDreu & Gelfand (2008:6) as cited in DeChurch & Mesmer-Magnus (2013), conflict is 'a process that begins when an individual perceives differences and opposition between himself and another individual or team about interests and resources, beliefs, values, or practices that matter to them'. This assertion is based on the premise that every individual has their own interests. There are lots of interests in literature and among researchers towards conflict, especially as it relates to organizational settings. This is predicated on the negative effect that conflict situations can have on organizational outcomes (Oladeji & Ayionde, 2018; Cetina & Kinikb, 2015), and employee outcomes (Mullins & Christy, 2013).

In the process of these human interactions within the organizational context, certain conflicts may arise, which if not properly handled may give rise to certain organizational dysfunction, Chaudhry & Asif (2017) argued that conflict is a cohesive framework of behavior and perception of organizational members, which is triggered (or maintained) by the feelings of being deprived with an awareness of incompatibility with others. In the discussion of types of conflict, the workplace, the study adopted the classification in Jehn's (1995, 1997) seminal work, where he identified three broad categories of conflict in the organization to include task conflict (TC), relationship conflict (RC), and process conflict (PC). These conflicts usually revolve around certain parameters which include conflict about *what* should be done (task conflict), conflict about *human interactions* (relationship conflicts), and conflicts about *how* things should be done (process conflict). It is in the context of these scenarios that such disagreement evolves.

Although researchers assessed the relationship between organizational leadership and employee performance (Akanji, Mordi, Ajonbadi, & Mojeed-Sanni, 2018), a clear description of the leadership qualities associated with successful organization is illusive. Considering the different leadership styles found among organizational leaders and the array of influences on employees' performances, it is difficult to identify the most effect leadership style exhibited by organizational leaders (Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, & Nwankwere, 2011). A typical look at the leadership styles involved is necessary.

#### 1.2. Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) introduced the concept of transformational leadership in the management literature. According to him, transformational leaders seek to influence and modify the attitudes and beliefs of their employees in order to achieve optimal performance. The two ways that transformational leaders do this is through inspiration and charisma. According to Doucett, Fredette, Simard, & Tremblay (2015), transformational leaders are visionary in approach (similar to visionary leadership), hence they seek to enhance the outcomes of their employees through encouragement, motivation and

influence. Transformational leaders assist their followers to achieve certain organizational goals by working with and through them (Tajasom, Hung, Nickbin, & Hyun, 2015). One key attribute of transformational leadership is that there is genuine interest of the leader in the following beyond the structural framework of interaction in the organization. The leader is genuinely committed to the success of the follower; hence it exceeds the reward and exchange normally observed in the organization.

Another hallmark of transformational leadership is that followers develop trust and respect towards the leader. Bass & Bass (2008) identified four dimensions of transformational leadership to include: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

### *1.3. Transactional Leadership*

Transactional leadership emphasizes most on achievement of objectives and fulfillment of goals. They are more interested in task completion and the performance of the employees. One of the distinguishing characteristics of transactional leadership is that belief within the leader that each and every member of the team accepted taking orders the moment they accepted and joined the team, therefore, in this scenario, complete compliance from the followers is expected and loyalty should be assured. Under this arrangement, the leader often uses both positive and negative reinforcement to ensure compliance through rewards and punishments. The relationship between the leaders and followers are more of master-servant relationship, where strict obedience is expected. Therefore, the relationship that subsists between leaders and followers under this style is transactional in nature.

### *1.4. Laissez-faire Leadership*

The laissez-faire leadership is an extreme in terms of leadership style. It is based on the principles of minimal involvement of leadership. It abdicates a lot of responsibilities to the followers in terms of decision-making processes. According to Chaudhry & Javed (2012), laissez-faire leadership style gives maximum autonomy to the followers to carry out their tasks and set deadlines for themselves. They may provide leadership services when requested upon to do so, but most times, they keep out of the way. Laissez-faire leadership style could be effective where there are already laid down process of task. However, where such is not the case, there is usually chaos when the followers do not have a clear idea of what they are doing in terms of managing organizational resources.

### *1.5. Transformational Leadership Styles and Workplace Conflict*

Transformational leadership is an intrinsically based motivational process whereby leader engage followers to create a connection that raises the level of effort and moral aspiration in both (Singh & Kumar, 2013). The early idea of transformational leadership was conceived as a process in which leaders and followers raise one another to a higher level of morality and motivation. Later, it was established as a follower motivation and performance enhancer. It is defined in terms of leader's effect on followers: they feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect toward the leader, and they are motivated to do more than they are originally expected to do. It includes four behaviors: charisma (idealized influence), intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation. They create vision, mobilized commitment and institutionalized change.

Transformational leader is one who energizes others with vision and strategies on how to refocus and revitalize the larger organization so that change meets peoples enduring needs. The level of transformational leadership is three levels is different from each other. The upper management exhibits maximum transformational leadership trait followed by middle management level and then the junior management level (Pandey & Singh, 2011). Conflict refers to an interactive process manifesting incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance between two or more interacting individuals. Conflict exists for a variety of reasons; conflicting goals or desires or scarce resources in interdependent systems. Conflict also exists over what to do and how to do the activities. According to the friction model of conflict, it is assumed that interaction naturally leads to conflict. From this perspective, conflict is to be expected and should be managed constructively.

### *1.6. Transactional Leadership Style and Workplace Conflict*

Transactional leadership is a process between a leader and followers and occurs in groups, both large and small. It is a disciplined practice that can be learned through training and education, through self-awareness and self-management, and by managing relationships. Transactional has been described as a give and take process whereby leaders reward or punish followers to influence and motivate follower behavior. Also known as managerial leadership, transactional leaders do not look to change the future, but rather maintain the status quo and are particularly effective in crisis situations where instantaneous feedback is imperative to make real time decisions and mobilize a quick response.

In the context of Maslow's 1943 hierarchy of needs, transactional leaders address the basic levels of needs satisfaction and are particularly effective when addressing specific work tasks. Transactional leaders accept the existing culture of the organization and are action oriented.

### *1.7. Laissez-Faire Leadership and Conflict in the Workplace*

Laissez-faire leadership is classified as part of a broader concept of passive/avoidant leadership in which supervisors/managers are physically on the job but fail to carry out their duties-in other words. A supervisor who practices laissez-fare leadership may avoid making decisions or fail to give feedback to employees. This leadership has been found to have an influence on conflict at work, both directly and indirectly. A lack of adequate leadership can cause

frustration and stress within a workgroup, resulting in interpersonal tensions and escalated levels of conflict between workers.

According to Huo, Wang & Li (2018), it has also been reported that laissez-faire leadership is negatively related to group level safety environment. This is one of the indirect influences of passive/avoidant leadership. Additionally, if leaders ignore and fail to recognize and intervene in workplace infarction, it can convey the message that conflict in the workplace is acceptable. Chaudhry & Javed (2012) and Saleem (2015) identified the mechanisms linking laissez-faire leadership and bullying, and reported that experiencing laissez-faire leadership by one's immediate supervisor was associated with high levels of role conflict and role ambiguity, and with increased levels of conflict with coworkers. In their path analysis, these three work stressors mediated the association between laissez-faire leadership and conflict at work, and showed a direct effect of laissez-faire leadership on workplace conflict. Moreover, workers under laissez-faire leadership may feel the absence of adequate leadership as a rejection and expulsion (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2015).

It had been argued that the style of leadership in organizations do have a significant influence on the type and level of conflict that exist in such organizations. While some had argued a negligent influence, others have posited a deep moderating influence. One sector that conflict is critical to their performance is the civil service. In Nigeria, the civil service is manned by career civil servants. In the course of carrying out their duties, conflict is bound to arise. Conflict within the organization at both intrapersonal (Tsai, Tsai, & Wang, 2011), interpersonal (Huo, Wang, & Li, 2018), and within groups (Behfar, Mannix, & Trochim, 2011) often have unwanted consequences for all concerned. It is one of the reasons that every organization is concerned about conflict in the workplace.

In organizations like the civil service, there is a hierarchical arrangement of function and authority which gives rise to leadership and followership. It is the duty of the leadership to establish the organizational culture within the organization. According to Oaikhen & Monday (2016:86), 'Leadership is a dynamic process at work in a group where one individual over a particular period of time, and in a particular organizational context, influence the other group members to commit themselves freely to the achievement of group tasks or goals'.

Research about effect organizations suggested a significant relationship between organizational leadership and organizational and employee performances. On the case of the civil service, it is a complex organizational structure that require effective leadership. The increased measures of accountability associated with reaching organizational requirements mandated by the civil service commission and servicom in Nigeria holds leaders directly accountable for employee performance. Organizational leaders have evolved from early roles as bureaucratic supervisors and humanistic facilitators. Civil service leaders must do more than manage daily routines. The central role of leadership in the civil service is to diagnose organizational needs and decide the best to use available resources and talents to improve employee performances. However, in the courses of doing these, certain conflicts may arise. Therefore, it becomes necessary to assess the different leadership styles and how it affects workplace conflict in the civil service, especially in Delta state, Nigeria.

### *1.8. Purpose of the Study*

The main purpose of the study is to assess the influence of leadership styles on workplace conflict in the civil service of Delta state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to;

- Appraise the extent that transformational leadership style affect conflict in the workplace among civil servants in Delta state.
- Assess the extent that transactional leadership style affect conflict in the workplace among civil servants in Delta state.
- Appraise the extent that laissez-faire leadership style affect conflict in the workplace among civil servants in Delta state.

### *1.9. Research Questions*

The following questions were posed for the study:

- To what extent have transformational leadership style affected conflict in your workplace?
- To what extent have transactional leadership style affected conflict in your workplace?
- To what extent have laissez-faire leadership style affected conflict in your workplace?

### *1.10. Research Hypotheses*

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H1: Transformational leadership style do not increase levels of workplace conflict in Delta State Civil Service
- H2: Transactional leadership style do not significantly increase levels of workplace conflict in Delta State Civil Service.
- H3: Laissez-faire leadership style do not significantly reduce levels of workplace conflict in Delta State Civil Service.

## **2. Materials and Method**

This study employs a survey research design. The population of the study comprises of all the members of staff of Delta state ministry of health, Asaba. Since the population is small, the researcher decided to include all the 31 members of staff in the study. A structured questionnaire titled 'Comparative Effects of Leadership Styles on Workplace Conflict in the Civil Service Questionnaire' was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire contained 22 items divided into two

sections, sections A and B. Section A contain the demographic data of the respondents. Section B contains the substantive issues of the study. The three research questions were represented with five item statements each, and their responses were graded on a 5-point Likert scale with responses of strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1). The instrument was personally administered to the respondents by the researcher. The collected data were analyzed on SPSS v23. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze responses on the research questions, while t-test were used to test the hypotheses.

### 3. Results and Discussion

- Research Question1: To what extent have transformational leadership style affected conflicts in your workplace?

S/n	Item Statements	$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
1	My superior goes out of his/her way in discussing WHAT tasks to be done with subordinates, and this reduces disagreements over tasks.	4.4194	0.7648	Agreed
2	By always expressing optimism, my superior motivates us in carrying out our tasks and this helps in reducing disagreement over WHAT tasks is to be done	4.0323	0.8360	Agreed
3	My superior goes out his/her way in promoting the good of the group, and this reduces interpersonal conflict.	4.1935	0.7924	Agreed
4	By always expressing optimism, my superior motivates used in carrying out our tasks and this helps in reducing disagreement over HOW the tasks is to be done.	4.2903	0.7829	Agreed
5	By being considerate towards each person, my superior always listen to each person in discussing HOW tasks is to be done, and this helps to reduce conflict.	4.0968	1.0118	Agreed

*Table 1: Mean Response Scores of Civil Servants on the Effect of Transformational Leadership Style on Conflict in the Workplace*  
Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 1 contains items statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 which deals with transformational leadership and workplace conflict. The mean scores of the responses shows a high agreement that transformational leadership style reduces workplace conflict among civil servants. Some of the transformational leadership indicators as used in the study includes intellectual stimulation (4.4194), charisma (4.0323), selflessness (4.1935), inspirational motivation (4.2903), and individualized consideration (4.0968). All contributed to the development of as harmonious workplace.

- Research Question2: To what extent has transactional leadership style affected conflict in your workplace?

S/N	Item Statements	$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
6	In allocation of tasks, my supervisors always made clear the rewards attached, and this helps in reducing disagreements over what should be done.	4.3226	0.9087	Agreed
7	My superior focuses attention on our mistakes when we applied wrong approach in handling tasks, and helps to correct it.	4.2903	0.8639	Agreed
8	My superior always took exception when we didn't follow the method, he outlined in carrying out tasks, often leading to disagreement.	4.0323	0.9827	Agreed
9	My superior always insist that the spirit of cordiality exist among workers.	4.3226	0.9447	Agreed
10	In allocating tasks, my superior, makes clear who is responsible for achieving a goal, and this helps to reduce personal conflict.	4.3871	0.8437	Agreed

*Table 2: Mean Response Scores of Civil Servants on the Effect of Transactional Leadership Style on Conflict in the Workplace*  
Source: Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 contains item statements 6,7,8,9, and 10. These shows their mean scores of the study participant's responses towards the relationship between transactional leadership and workplace conflict. The mean scores of the responses which ranged from 4.0323 to 4.3671 indicated that the study participants agreed that transactional leadership do influence the level of conflict in the workplace. The import of the response is that the civil servants agreed that active manahgemenr-0by-exception where the management monitors workers for failures leads to disagreements. Also, the workers agreed that attaching reward to performance helps reduce conflict among them.

- Research Question3: To what extent has laissez-faire leadership style affected conflict in your workplace?

S/n	Item Statements	$\bar{X}$	S.D	Remark
11	My superiors avoid making decisions about tasks that should be done, and this often generates conflict in the workplace.	4.5161	0.7244	Agreed
12	My superior waits for things to go wrong before taking action in deciding what should be done and this often leads to disagreements.	4.2903	0.9728	Agreed
13	My superior is not at all concerned on how we carry out our tasks, which often creates disharmony among us.	4.4194	0.6204	Agreed
14	My superior delays responding to questions and guidance during task processes leading to low-level conflict among us.	4.2258	1.1168	Agreed
15	My superior avoids getting involved in settling disputes among us, therefore increasing personal conflicts among the group.	4.3326	0.8322	Agreed

*Table 3: Mean Response Scores of Civil Servants on the Effect of Laissez-Faire Leadership Style on Conflict in the Workplace  
Source: Field Survey, 2020*

Table 3 contains item statements 11,12,13,14, and 15 on laissez-faire leadership style and workplace conflict among civil servants. The mean scores of the respondents indicate a high acceptance that laissez-faire leadership style does have a significant influence on conflict in the workplace. This is evidenced by the high mean scores ranging from 4.2258 to 4.5161. This means that the respondents agreed that to a very large extent that avoiding responsibilities, delay in decision-making, poor coordination skills generate conflict in the workplace.

### 3.1. Hypotheses Testing

#### 3.1.1. Hypothesis One

- $H_{01}$ : Transformational leadership style do not increase levels of workplace conflict in Delta State Civil Service.

Respondents	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	$T_{cal}$	$T_{crit}$	Decision
Male staff	11	3.5273	0.6730	29	0.2873	2.04	Accept $H_0$
Female staff	20	4.1000	0.8701				

*Table 4  
Source: Field Survey, 2020*

Since the calculated t-cal (0.2873) is less than the critical t-crit (2.04), the null hypothesis was retained which stated that there is no significant difference between the mean responses scores of male and female civil servants that laissez-faire leadership style do not significantly reduce levels of workplace conflict in the civil service.

#### 3.1.2. Hypothesis Two

- $H_{02}$ : Transactional leadership style do not significantly increase levels of workplace conflict in Delta State Civil Service.

Respondents	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	$T_{cal}$	$T_{crit}$	Decision
Male staff	11	4.2363	1.0537	29	0.6998	2.04	Accept $H_0$
Female staff	20	4.2900	0.8149				

*Table 5  
Source: Field Survey, 2020*

Since the calculated t-cal (0.6998) is less than the critical t-crit (2.04), the null hypothesis was retained which stated that there is no significant difference between the mean responses scores of male and female civil servants that transactional leadership style do not significantly increase levels of workplace conflict in the civil service.

#### 3.1.3. Hypothesis Three

- $H_{03}$ : Laissez-faire leadership style do not significantly reduce levels of workplace conflict in Delta State Civil Service.

Respondents	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	$T_{cal}$	$T_{crit}$	Decision
Male staff	11	3.3636	0.8966	29	-0.9741	2.04	Accept $H_0$
Female staff	20	4.4500	0.7922				

*Table 6  
Source: Field Survey, 2020*

The calculated t-cal (-0.9741) is lower than the critical t-crit (2.04), therefore, the null hypothesis was retained which stated that there is no significant difference between the mean responses scores of male and female civil servants that laissez-faire leadership style do not significantly reduce levels of workplace conflict in the civil service.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated two aspects of Nigeria public sector management; leadership styles and workplace conflict. The findings of the study have highlighted some issues that are critical for organizations (Nkomo, 2011; Ishaq, 2013; Agbodike, Osakwe, Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2015).

Organizational climate is a critical factor in the way that an organization function. This is the sum factors within the organization that influences the activities of both the organization and its members. One of the determinants of organizational climate is workplace conflict. Conflicts within the organization determine output, productivity, relationships, synergy, and also congruence. That is why a lot of research is devoted to the understanding and management of conflicts in the workplace. One of the influencing factors on conflict is leadership styles within organizations (Cetina&Kinikb, 2015). The Nigeria civil service is not immune to these issues. For the civil servants in this study, the findings revealed specific information that is pertinent in understanding the relationship between the different leadership styles on workplace conflict.

This study validates a series of hypotheses on the effects of leadership styles on workplace conflict. The result of this empirical study found that transformational leadership style does not increase workplace conflict. This stems from the nature of transformational leadership attributes which seeks to show the 'humane' nature towards followers (Doody&Doody, 2012). The goal of transformational leadership is to optimize the capability of the followers and bring out the best from them by creating a conducive leadership atmosphere around them.

The study concurred with the findings of Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey (2013) that transformational leadership reduces conflict and enhances organizational climate. This should not be surprising as transformational leaders often seek to enhance harmony by encouraging and motivating followers (employees) and offering inspiration to them to achieve their best.

The study also validated the viewpoint that transactional leadership style, though not all 'humane' in nature, reflects the exchange mechanism between organizations and its members (Ariani, 2012). Inasmuch as the members are able to measure up clearly stated and measurable performance indicators, then there will be no problem. Transactional leadership style is primarily concerned about the achievement of organizational goals.

Lastly, the study also validated the opinion that laissez-faire leadership style increases conflict in the workplace (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Laissez-faire leaders are often passive in nature, avoiding making decisions, and often slow in taking critical and timely action. All these conglomerates together to make them unideal for running organizations where the slightest level of conflict can prove too costly to the organization.

#### 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that there should be a concerted effort on the part of organizations and managers to entrench appropriate leadership styles within the workplace. While transformational leadership had been adjudged the best, it should be noted that different times and circumstances may necessitates the adoption of more than one form of leadership style. The important thing is that the employees are able to thrive within the organization, both in terms of work processes but also in terms of their human interrelationships. By engendering an atmosphere of openness, pro-activeness, impartiality and putting the interests and welfare of the employees at the forefront of organizational activity, conflict will reduce within the organization.

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