



# **Relationship between Conflict Resolution and Project Performance: A Review**

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

## **Article Information**

### **Open Peer Review History:**

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://prh.globalpresshub.com/review-history/1692>

**Systematic Review Article**

**Received: 15/08/2024**

**Accepted: 19/10/2024**

**Published: 08/11/2024**

## **ABSTRACT**

Project performance captures the degree of progress or success of a project. It is an evaluation of how well a project is managed, executed, and the extent by which it achieves its designated goals. Conflict involving the project team as well as external stakeholders can be detrimental to project performance. The study conducted systematic review literature on conflict resolution and project performance relationship. Some theories, techniques and strategies have been used to better understand and resolve the conflicts as conflict resolution strategies, contingency theory, stakeholder theory and goal dependency theory which were used in this study to provide theoretical background. In line with the review of literature, underlying relationships exists between conflict resolution and project performance. It was therefore concluded that conflict resolution is crucial for

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**Cite as:** John, Jabez, Allan Kabiru Ngugi, and Jackline Chepkoech Bett. 2024. "Relationship Between Conflict Resolution and Project Performance: A Review". *Asian Basic and Applied Research Journal* 6 (1):152-60. <https://jofresearch.com/index.php/ABAARJ/article/view/149>.

project performance. The study recommended that organizations should put in place appropriate procedures for handling disputes among team members. Management of organizations can clarify the issues causing conflict, bring the affected parties together and discuss, identify lasting solutions while also monitoring and following up on the underlying issue.

*Keywords: Conflict resolution; contingency theory; project performance and stakeholder theory.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All stakeholders participating in a project, including shareholders, contractors, technicians, and experts in whatever sector strive towards achieving success. The presence of several stakeholders notably increases the likelihood of conflict emanating from the divergent views [1]. A stakeholder management process takes into consideration a number of variables that may impact and define the final performance level. Effective conflict resolution techniques highlight organizational decision-making flaws, which may inspire the organization to make adjustments and look for constructive answers [2]. When an organization deals with several people to provide operations in accordance with clients, conflict is a regular factor. Workplace conflicts can arise in regard to interpersonal interactions and task-oriented issues. Unhealthy relationships can arise in the workplace both between individuals who associate for practical reasons and between individuals who engage socially [3]. Also, negative associations among employees are a result of unpleasant interpersonal conflict experiences. Employees must work together harmoniously to achieve organizational goals related to certain projects in teams, and each person must engage in emotional, mental, and physical challenges to manage conflicts with other members of the organization [4]. Since the idea of interpersonal conflict affects how well a team projects at work, it is important to look at the subject matter of conflict and conflict resolution.

Conflict can be defined as an interpersonal condition where the objectives or behaviors of one person are somewhat at odds with those of another person or persons. Variations in aims, opinions, and interconnectedness are necessary for conflict to arise. When there are unbridgeable distinctions amongst participants or when their priorities, principles, influence, viewpoints, and aims are contradictory, conflicts result. Each party in a conflict tries to harm, incapacitate, obstruct, influence, or control the actions of the opposing party [5]. A conflict arises when two or more interdependent parties interact and believe

that their aims are irreconcilable and that one another is interfering with their efforts to achieve those targets. It is the idea that different parties have different interests or that their current goals are not achievable at the same time [6]. Both violent and non-violent conflicts have the potential to be harmful, to halt or terminate support for a project, or to lead to botched progress. Conflicts may cause damage to property, deterioration of social interactions, disruption of business operations, and disruption to commercial operation. Alternatively, the awareness of an oncoming conflict can spur development and change [7].

A number of projects have been affected by conflict situations. Example is the Dar es Salaam Maritime Gateway Project experienced a number of internal issues that had a negative impact on the project's efficiency. Labor payments, unfavorable working circumstances, socioeconomic status, communication difficulties, abrasion, and disagreements based on divergent points of view, viewpoints, and interest were the primary reasons of the dispute [8]. Also Commenting on the need for an effective conflict management strategy, the National Energy Policy of Kenya commented that the uncovering of multiple mineral assets in the territory has resulted in high fantasies, disagreements and conflicts among neighborhoods in which the aforementioned assets were found, especially those connected with energy fields like thermal, fossil fuels, and lignite [9]. Moreover, potential conflicts and civil unrest resulting from the utilization of the aforementioned assets may result in expensive interruptions to projects and operations and in certain instances, these scenarios may result in the elimination of personas and livelihoods across the community's personnel or contractors, resulting in significant developmental set-backs are more significant implications of this [10].

Building effective methods to reduce conflict's negative effects and improve an organization's useful capabilities can help manage conflict and improve performance [11]. In companies, managing the introduction of conflict is a very

visible activity that can be carried out in a variety of ways. Kamil Kozan, Ergin and Varoglu (2017) identified third party intervention strategies like investigative techniques (such as assertion), persuasion tactics, reducing conflict by reconstructing, and team instruction as key to conflict resolution. Lidetu (2018) further identified compromise strategy as a means of conflict resolution. Muriuki, Cheruiyot and Komen (2017) itemized communication and negotiations as methods that organizations can employ to tackle conflict within. This study is an attempt to look at the various conflict resolution strategies and how they impact the overall project performance of organizations through the review of several literatures.

## 2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

### 2.1 Contingency Theory

One of the earliest theories of contextual management was the contingency theory of management. Fred E. Fiedler put up one of the earliest ideas of contingencies in the 1960s. Fiedler is well-known for creating the "least preferred coworker," or LPC, instrument. Managers who complete this test are asked to rank their least liked associate according to a wide range of criteria. The results, when totalled, show whether the person is more task- or relationship-oriented [12]. Additional research has revealed that a task-oriented approach to management, which places the majority of the emphasis on the tasks at hand rather than the specific workers, works best at the extremes of the level of management and cohesiveness within the group. The relationship strategy is more effective in more mild situations since it is, as one might imagine, focused on the individual interaction with personnel [13].

According to contingency theories, effective management will vary depending on the circumstances. According to contingency theory, knowing what will result in a successful managerial conclusion overall depends on factors like the organizational framework, job description, manner of leadership, and involvement in governance [14]. Scholars have categorized contingency theory into two which are environmental and internal contingency. The fundamental focus of the surrounding contingency theories is the environment's general equilibrium. Change is happening quickly, which is causing a great deal of instability. Just alone seems to point to a focus

on adaptability. Internal contingencies relate to things like a corporation's size. Within the internal contingency setting, the corporation's personnel kinds also matter in this situation [15].

One of the deliberate tools used for managing conflicts within the framework of an organization is contingency theory. As observed by Derr [16] there are three notable peace-promoting closers that an intervener might draw upon to devise a strategy appropriate for resolving a dispute: cooperation, negotiation, and strategic manoeuvre. The individual and authoritative state determines how best to apply these tactics. Individuals must work together to identify their differences and then gradually address them until mutually agreeable solutions are reached.

### 2.2 Stakeholder Theory

The pioneering scholar of stakeholder theory, Freeman [17] developed a new tactical framework centered around the obligation principle since he believed that the preeminent paradigm up until that point was incompatible with fundamental principles. Based on Freeman's assertion of the theory, an organization is a web of interdependent relationships where the desires and aspirations of various stakeholders can be jeopardized in a variety of ways. Ensuring the satisfaction of these stakeholders is essential to preserving the ensemble's equilibrium [17].

According to Gilbert and Rasche [18] stakeholder theory explains how companies really consider stakeholder interests. The idea explains the people who are impacted by an organization's operations and how they affect the goals that the firm has for its business. Stakeholder theory has a long history across numerous fields. Stakeholders were divided into three categories by Fassin [19] true stakeholders, stakewatchers, and stakekeepers. According to Fassin, the company owes a duty and moral commitment to its true stakeholders, who have a meaningful investment in it and legitimate claims to power and influence. Stakewatchers serve as proxy or middlemen for actual stakeholders, safeguarding their interests without actually having a stake in the matter. They are made up of several associations that serve as watchdogs and defend the rights of consumers, the environment, and shareholders. Their influence originates from their representation of actual stakeholders' interests.

The Forética Report Forética [20] outlines the stages involved in creating a management model

of stakeholders within any organization and standardizes the deployment of interaction methods with stakeholders. The resolution of conflict among stakeholders which also includes personnel of a project involves developing good dialogue mechanisms that help to address the concerns of stakeholders to ensure optimal performance [21]. As observed conflicting interests cannot be completely satisfied as resources grow scarce. When presented with such scenarios, stakeholders will decide how best to act in order to further their own goals. Trade-offs and conflicts of interest are inevitable in stakeholder negotiations [22]. On a continuum, dispute resolution techniques can be divided into three classes: collaborative decision-making, which includes negotiation, and mediation. third-party decision-making which involves; adjudication, arbitration, and autocratic decision-making. Separate action which has to do with withdrawal, struggle, and tacit cooperation [23].

### 2.3 Goal Interdependence Theory

Deutsch [24] laid the foundation for the theory from the gestalt psychology and Lewin's field theory. According to the two ideas, humans form coherent and meaningful perceptions of the world as integrated wholes rather than as a collection of individual components or attributes which form the underlying essence of interdependence. The theory is based on the idea that the aims of the players are structured in a way that dictates the pattern in which they have interactions, which in turn dictates the situation's consequences [25]. Based on the goal interdependence theory, a person's probability of experiencing conflict at work as well their subsequent conduct is both influenced by the manner in which goal interdependence is constructed, specifically in the context of cooperative and competitive interdependence [26,27].

According to Rusbult and Van Lange [28] goal interdependence theory through a thorough examination of situation framework, pinpoints the salient features of interpersonal interactions and explains how structure affects our comprehension of both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. Rusbult and Van Lange further stated that situation structure is very relevant because it represents the interpersonal reality that drives motivations, directs thought as well as centers interaction. Wu, Ferris, Kwan, Chiang, Snape and Liang [29] further focused on goal interdependence theory, which was

especially concerned with the effects of different kinds of goal interdependence and argued that an individual's social skill may have an impact on how much a goal interdependent type causes relationship conflict and, ultimately, exclusion. Interpersonal perception, the ability to modify conduct in response to shifting circumstances, and the ability to successfully influence and manage other people's reactions are all good indicators of social skill [30].

Specifically, the frameworks of interdependence theory contend that individual differences combine with the characteristics of an interdependent situation that is, whether one's goals are typically either complimentary or antagonistic to those of another person or group to shape [31]. This position that the theory holds can be related to the process of executing a project whereby different individuals with individual traits come together to achieve one goal in an interdependent situation. The chances of conflict to arise in the kind of situation is very high especially when in the process of achieving once objectives conflicts with that of others in the same group. Hence there is need to align the goals of all involved in a complimentary manner to the overall goal of the project. This theory is thus very important to conflict resolution strategies.

### 2.4 Empirical Review

Kagwiria [11] examined the impact of dispute resolution techniques in work environment on Kenya's telecom sector performance. Research concepts included resource-based perspective theory, goal interdependence theory, expectation theory, and contingency theory. The investigation method used was descriptive. In the Nairobi Region, Safaricom Kenya Limited and Airtel Kenya Limited were the chosen target populations. There were 130 responders in all, made up of 120 support employees and 10 HRM supervisors. Both cluster sampling and the basic random sampling technique were applied. Support personnel received questionnaires to collect data for the study. Descriptive statistics like percentages, frequencies, mean, and standard deviation were used to examine quantitative data. Regression analysis was performed on each variable to examine the link between them and the degree of influence they had. The results of the research showed that organizational performance and external intervention, interaction, bargaining, and compromise strategies all had a positive and

substantial relationship. The study indicates that in order to reclaim sunk costs, boost satisfaction with the dispute resolution process and its results, and refocus on the substantive concerns, third-party involvement may be the only way to bring negotiations back on course. Communication methodology outlines how to handle the various forms of correspondence that are dispersed throughout the company. By using a negotiation strategy, organizations can improve interactions between representatives and keep a strategic distance from conflicts. The ability to plan well helps organizations reach agreements, reach goals, get along better with their staff, and ultimately become more useful and productive at work. The use of a compromise strategy aids companies in quickly resolving disputes, which is crucial when there is a need to prevent a simmering conflict from getting worse or when a protracted disagreement could potentially ruin a delicate project.

The research by Akhtar, Khan, Akhtar, Shafiq and Tanveer [32] examined financial institutions in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, in order to identify the primary causes of conflict and investigate the association between conflict management techniques and organizational performance. Information from a randomly selected group of one hundred participants were gathered using a questionnaire that was administered and edition 16 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the results. Regression analysis was done to examine the connection between dispute resolution methods and corporate efficiency. The investigation indicates that interaction and expression patterns between executives and staff members are important factors contributing to conflict. Performance of organizations and methods of conflict resolution were found to be positively and statistically significantly correlated.

Wang and Wu [33] examined the particulars of dispute resolution inside a project team, A scenario investigation, a question-and-answer inquiry, an evaluation of project documents, and an analysis of the literature were used in the study to build the case. After that, an empirical framework for system conflict resolution was developed by applying content assessment and the analysis of social networks to the multi-source dataset. The results identify distinct program conflicts, their origins, and their effects. They also propose alternate conflict resolution techniques and guiding principles. There are various tendencies in conflict detection, handling,

responses, and mitigation that are different from project dispute resolution.

Liu, Cui, Feng, Perera and Han [34] examined how dispute resolution techniques and national cultural differences (NCDs) combine to affect the success of foreign partnership arrangements in the engineering industry. A focus group questionnaire was used to gather data, and 143 valid replies were received. To assess the investigation's assumptions, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed. It was discovered that when country cultural disparities increased, the performance of foreign cooperation agreements decreased. Using a collaborative dispute resolution method helped to lessen the detrimental impact of NCDs on IQV performance, but using a competitive dispute handling strategy made it worse. The results may offer a different strategy for resolving cultural disputes in heterogeneous project management teams—that is, using the cooperative dispute resolution method as opposed to avoidance or confrontational techniques.

The objective of the research by Njeri and Ngufi [1] was to assess the impact of dispute resolution on the performance of performance of construction projects in Kiambu County-Kenya. Three frameworks served as the foundation for the investigation: Amabile and Kramer's progress theory, Tuckman's teamwork theory, and the Star Team Model. A descriptive research approach was used in the investigation because it reduces bias. The research project concentrated on finished initiatives from every single one of Kiambu County's twelve sub-counties. Thus, 473 constituted the designated population. The study discovered that disagreements are likely to arise at work and that these disagreements affect how well project goals are accomplished. The study also found that the conflict resolution techniques used in road building projects are significantly influenced by the leadership style of the project manager. Motivating their subordinates to solve problems instead than blaming others for their mistakes fosters a positive work atmosphere. However, leaders who employ dominance as a resolution tactic accomplish organizational goals more quickly than those who compromise with their subordinates in order to reach those goals.

Novieto and Kportufe [35] investigated the relationship between work-family conflict and performance among building specialists in an

emerging nation, as well as an intermediary and moderating impacts of project management self-efficacy. Simple sampling was used to give a representative poll (questionnaire) to 302 building professionals in the African nation of Ghana providing data for the research. Additionally, measurement and structural model evaluations were done within the framework of the partial least squares-based structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) process. The research findings revealed that work-family conflict has detrimental effect on performance of building specialist and project management self-efficacy plays a mediating and moderating role in the relationship.

The goal of the study by Zhang, Raza, Khalid, Parveen and Ramírez-Asís [3] was to examine the variables that influence the performance of projects in Thailand (the Phuket Sandbox). The data for the research came from Phuket, Thailand, and it employed a quantitative approach that was centered around a standardized questionnaire. The poll was given to the personnel on groups who were expected to oversee the administration of the Phuket tourist sandbox activities, including the organizations for healthcare facilities, lodging establishments, and immigration and the tourism industry. The research yielded 222 valid answers. The partial least square structural equation modeling method was used to test the suggested speculative model. The study's findings indicated that there was a substantial correlation between organizational trust and interpersonal conflict management and project performance.

Odeleye [36] investigated the impact of dispute resolution techniques on worker performance in a few chosen Lagos State commercial financial institutions. Four commercial banks—First Bank, UBA Bank, Eco Bank, and Wema Bank—made up the research's sample. The research made use of primary data. 200 strategically selected bank employees were asked to complete a standardized questionnaire in order to obtain the essential data. The methodology used in the investigation combined survey and descriptive methods. The required information was gathered using both primary and secondary data. The questionnaire served as the primary tool for data collection. The basic random sampling techniques were employed as the sample method. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to analyze the collected information using frequency tables and

test assumptions employing the Person Correlation Coefficient to determine the correlation between variables. The study's conclusions showed that the following strategies significantly affected employee performance: confronting strategy significantly affected employee productivity; forcing strategy significantly affected employee competency; smoothing strategy significantly affected employee creativity; and avoiding strategy significantly affected employee service delivery. According to the study, if conflict resolution techniques are applied constructively, they improve worker performance. The study made several recommendations, including that executives and employees make a commitment to cooperate cordially by developing strong strategies and maintaining appropriate policies as useful tools for constantly handling conflict in businesses.

Adeyemi and Aigbavboa [7] assessed how conflicts among construction professionals (CPs) affected the Nigerian construction industry's (NCI) performance. For the study, a quantitative methodology was applied. Surveys were distributed to a number of CPs in Nigeria's southwest region. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, and 135 were returned by participants. Descriptive and exploratory factor analysis were used to compute the data that were obtained from the participants. The findings demonstrated that disputes has an impact on the efficiency of professionals in construction and that good management aids in discovering problems, assists in resolving issues with professional organizations, boosts expert efficiency, and enhances interpersonal interaction.

The effect of conflict management techniques on worker performance was examined in the research by Shariq, Bint-e-Zain, Mirza, Akram and Saleem [37]. Conflict management techniques include competing, cooperating, refraining from, concessions, and appeasing. The information was gathered from Pakistani bank staff in Karachi. The method for gathering data has been a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. Regression analysis was done for the study because the conceptual structure has one dependent variable and several independent factors. The results of the research showed a strong correlation between staff productivity and accommodations. The investigation also discovered a strong positive correlation between worker efficiency and refraining. Additionally, the

study found a strong positive correlation between teamwork and worker performance. Similarly, the study discovered a strong positive correlation between employee performance and competition. In conclusion, the study found a strong positive correlation between workforce efficiency and compromise. The research recommended that the business establish appropriate procedures for handling disputes and incorporate conflict resolution techniques for its staff. Disagreements among employees should be settled quickly.

Lawani, Arias, Craig, Hare and Cameron [38] conducted a study on the connection that exist amongst emotional intelligence, preferred conflict management strategy alongside other demographic variables in the construction industry of the Dominican Republic. To achieve the objective of the research a sample of civil engineers in the ranks or position of management had their emotional intelligence (EIL) and CMS evaluated using the Rahim Organizational Conflict Inventory-II self-assessment questionnaire alongside an emotional intelligence evaluation. Following analysis, the collaboration and compromise style scores and the rated EIL were found to have significant positive association, meaning that participants with higher EIL scores fit better into the cooperation and concession conflict management styles. And although not statistically significant, compromise and collaborative strategies were also highly preferred by those with lower EIL. Gender, concession and cooperation styles, as well as job experience and collaboration style, all shown significant correlations. There is no discernible link between EIL and demographics.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The study was based on a literature review methodology. Specifically, systematic review methodology was applied in this study. As postulated by Snyder [39] a systematic review entails identifying, critically appraising, collecting and analysis data from relevant studies which fit the pre-specified inclusion criteria of answering stated research question and/or hypothesis. Notably, various views deduced from theoretical and empirical works were discussed with regards conflict resolution and project performance. This consequently provided evidence of relationships, hence guiding conclusion and policy recommendations [40,41].

### 4. CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the review of literature and research findings, it can be concluded that conflict resolution is crucial for project performance. It is therefore recommended that organizations should put in place appropriate procedures for handling disputes among team members. Management of organizations can clarify the issues causing conflict, bring the affected parties together and discuss, identify lasting solutions while also monitoring and following up on the underlying issue.

### 5. FINDINGS

In view of the review of literature, underlying relationships exists between conflict resolution and project performance. Variations in the objectives, opinions and views of each stakeholder can result to conflict. Hence, conflict maybe inevitable, however it need not be disastrous. Notably, the extent by which a conflict disrupts the development of a project is dependent upon the willingness of the project manager to learn and understand conflict and deal with it effectively. Conflict resolution increases the chances of achieving success of any project. Before the execution of projects, conflict may arise due to the varying interests of stakeholders. However, how these conflicts can be resolved amicably among the various stakeholders is very important.

### DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc) and text-to-image generators have been used during writing or editing of this manuscript.

### COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests or non-financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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