Effect of Interpersonal Conflict among Extension Staff in Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) In Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The study was conducted to ascertain the effects of interpersonal conflict among Extension staff in Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically the study identified the forms of interpersonal conflict among the ADP Extension staff, and ascertained the effects of interpersonal conflict on members of Rivers State ADP Extension staff. A proportionate sampling technique was used to select 149 ADP Extension staff. However, only 135 questionnaires were retrieved from the field. Variables were analyzed and presented using frequency, percentage and mean scores. The result showed that communication conflict and relationship conflict (88.10%) ranked highest forms of conflict in the ADP. The most occurring conflicts were communication conflicts ($\bar{X}$=3.89), task conflict ($\bar{X}$=3.77) and power conflict ($\bar{X}$=3.70). The respondents agreed that interpersonal conflict improves future communication among staff ($\bar{X}$=3.93), boosts staff morale ($\bar{X}$=3.93) and improves trust ($\bar{X}$=3.87). However, they also agreed to these negative effects of interpersonal conflict; apathy ($\bar{X}$=3.93), distraction ($\bar{X}$=3.76) and low morale ($\bar{X}$=3.75). The study concluded that interpersonal conflict improves future communication, boosts staff morale and improves trust. On the contrary; interpersonal conflict leads to apathy, distraction and low morale. It was recommended that government and employers should make Conflict management and resolution as part of compulsory Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for staff of the ADP. This will effectively utilize positive effects of interpersonal conflict while minimizing the negative effects for a more productive organization.

KEYWORDS: Interpersonal conflict, organization

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural development projects are crucial for addressing global challenges such as food insecurity, poverty, and environmental degradation (IPCC, 2019, FAO, 2020, World Bank, 2020). These projects involve various stakeholders, including governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local communities, working together to achieve common goals. However, the success of these projects heavily relies on the effective collaboration and teamwork among staff members, including agricultural extension agents, researchers, and project managers (Bond-Barnard,et al, 2018).

In Nigeria, the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) remains the pivot that controls agricultural activities. The ADP in Nigeria was established in 1975 to improve agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. The specific objectives of the programme includes to increase food production and availability, improve rural incomes and employment, enhance agricultural productivity and efficiency and promote rural development and poverty reduction (Federal Government of Nigeria 1975; World Bank, 1976). The programme has several components like crop production and livestock development, agricultural extension and advisory services, rural infrastructure development (roads, storage facilities, etc.) and agricultural credit and marketing support (ADP 1980; Central Bank of Nigeria 1985). The ADP was implemented in phases, starting with the First Phase (1975-1980) (ADP, 1980). Initially, it focused on selected States, later expanded to all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1990). The ADP has continued to play a crucial role in Nigeria's agricultural development (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2020). The focus as at when it was established has been on priority areas, such as food security, job creation, and rural development and collaborates with international partners and private

sector organizations (ADP, 2020, World Bank, 2020). The ADP as a public organization with members of staff from different backgrounds are exposed to interpersonal conflicts that characterize public organizations.

Interpersonal conflict refers to the disagreements, contradictions, and inconsistencies that arise between individuals or groups with different values, beliefs, goals, or interests (Violeta, 2023). These conflicts can occur in various settings, including personal relationships, workplaces, communities, and organizations (Amele, 2019. Interpersonal conflict among staff of Agricultural Development Programmes can have severe consequences, such as decreased collaboration and teamwork, leading to reduced productivity and efficiency, low morale and poor job satisfaction. These result in high staff turnover rates (increased stress and burnout, affecting staff well-being and overall health, poor communication and decision-making, leading to project delays and inefficiencies and decreased project impact and success, ultimately affecting the beneficiaries of the project (Fathulla & Ahmad,2022, Asfahani, 2022, Violeta, 2023, FAO, 2020). The above suggests that interpersonal conflict could have both positive and negative effects. However, the positive and negative effects have not been empirically established among members of Extension staff of the ADP. Hence, this study was targeted to provide an empirical evidence on the effects of interpersonal conflict among Extension staff in the Rivers State ADP. The study specifically;

1. identified the forms of interpersonal conflict among the ADP Extension staff, and
2. ascertained the effects of interpersonal conflict on ADP Extension staff.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Rivers State, Nigeria. The state lies within latitude 4˚45'N and 6˚50'E and longitude 4.750˚N and 6.833˚'E. There is multiplicity of agencies delivering extension services to farmers in the state. However, ADP is the main government agency with the mandate for delivering extension services to farmers. Rivers State Agricultural Development Programme (RSADP) was founded in 1988 and its headquarter is located in Port Harcourt. The state has three (3) agricultural zones namely; Ahoada, Degema and Eleme zones. Each of the three zones has three (3) area offices, summing up to nine (9) area offices in the state. Also, there are twenty-four (24) blocks for agricultural extension service delivery in the state. The population of the study includes all extension staff of the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) in Rivers State. Presently, the total number of extension staff in Rivers State ADP is two hundred and twelve (212). The ADP Extension staff are divided into four (4) categories: headquarter, zonal, block extension and circles staff (village extension agents (VEAs). The population for the categories is: 90 staff (headquarters), 27 staff (zones), 24 staff (blocks), and 71 staff (circles). A proportionate sampling technique was used for the study. For each category of staff; 70% was selected. This gave a sample size of 149 respondents (Table 1). However, only 135 questionnaires were retrieved from the field. Data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire. To ascertain the forms of inter-personal conflict in the ADP; the respondents were given different forms of interpersonal conflict to choose either "yes" or "no" and values were assigned thus "yes=1" or "no=0" response. On the area of effects, a five-point Likert scale with values assigned as follows: strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1, with a mean of 3.0 was used to obtain information from the respondents. In order to obtain a cut-off point, 0.05 was added to the mean to get 3.05 and was used as the upper limit while 0.05 was deducted from the mean to get 2.95 which was used as the lower limit. Any response option with mean greater than or equal to 3.05 was regarded as an effect of interpersonal conflict. Variables were analyzed and presented using frequency, percentage and mean score.

Table 1: Sampling frame

Administrative delineation	No. of ADP staff	Proportion sample	Sample size
Headquarter	90	70%	63
Zones	27	70%	19
Blocks	24	70%	17
Circles	71	70%	50
Total	**212**		**149**

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of interpersonal conflict among Extension staff in the ADP

The result in Table 2 shows that communication conflict and relationship conflict (88.10%) ranked highest forms of conflict in the ADP. This implies that communication-related issues directly affect staff-to-staff relationships. This situation could lead to ineffectiveness of staff in discharging their duties. This suggests limited training of extension staff on principles of vertical and horizontal communication. It also points to limited skills and competency of extension staff on interpersonal skills which are fundamental in carrying out team

work, facilitation of programs and collaboration. These findings agree with Gallup (2020) that employees experience communication conflicts with colleagues.

Furthermore, Table 2 reveals that Task conflict (83.00%) ranked second highest form of conflict in the ADP. This shows that the duties assigned to members of the ADP eventually lead to conflict. This may be because of wrong decisions, poor job description, task inter-dependence, inappropriate delegation of duty, time constraints, ineffective communication and power tussles. When there are task-related conflicts; there is always low-productivity in the workplace. This agrees with the findings of Gallup (2020) wherein a good number of the respondents agreed that role and responsibility conflict exist among staff.

Table 2 also shows that more than half (76.30%) of the respondents agree that Ego and power conflicts exist in the ADP organisation. This implies that majority of those in authority and the egocentric members of staff often react in ways that lead to conflict in the ADP. Ego and power conflicts may also be as a result of authority relationships and jurisdictional ambiguities. These conflicts could be surfaced in bullying of junior colleagues and weak members of staff.

Again, Table 2 shows that less than half (46.70%) of the respondents agreed that Value conflict exists in the ADP. Value conflict happens as a result of varying moral beliefs or ideologies. The result shows that slightly less than half of the ADP's staff viewed this as a form of conflict in the ADP. This implies that the moral beliefs of the staff rarely differ and this depicts a better atmosphere for productivity in the workplace.

Also Table 2 depicts that 41.50% agreed that Fact conflict exist in the ADP. Fact conflict happens when two or more people are not in alliance over the truth of information. The result implies that Rivers State ADP extension staff rarely involve in this type of conflict. It also shows that they consult a credible source for the truth in addition to realistic evidences, leading to reduced Fact conflict in the ADP. Table 2 shows the least (34.80%) form of conflict in the ADP is policy conflict. This means that the rules and regulations of the organization are properly spelt out, well-known and adhered to by the staff of Rivers State ADP. It further shows that the staff understood the penalties of violating policies in the workplace.

Further analysis was carried out to ascertain the frequency of occurrence of the identified forms of conflict in the ADP. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Forms of interpersonal conflicts among extension staff in the ADP

Forms of conflict in ADP	Frequency	Percent
Communication conflict	119	88.10
Relationship conflict	119	88.10
Task conflict	112	83.00
Ego conflict	103	76.30
Power conflict	103	76.30
Value conflict	63	46.70
Fact conflict	56	41.50
Policy conflict	47	34.80

Frequency of occurrence of the forms of interpersonal conflict in the ADP

The result in Table 3 shows that out of the eight (8) different forms of conflict, five (5) were the most frequently occurring conflicts in the Rivers ADP. They included communication conflicts ($\bar{X}$=3.89), task conflict ($\bar{X}$=3.77), power conflict ($\bar{X}$=3.70), ego conflict ($\bar{X}$=3.70) and relationship conflict ($\bar{X}$=3.35). This result corroborates the findings of Legg (2020) and Indeed (2021) that these forms of conflict are inevitable in any organization and could lead to positive or negative outcomes. This is true because ineffective communication is one of the major causes of conflict. This could be horizontal or vertical on the organizational hierarchy and has huge negative impact on overall performance of an organization. Ineffective communication may be caused by wrong channels of communication, noise, untrained sender, religious inclination, among others. Task conflict could be seen in the assignment of roles and duties in a workplace. Junior members of staff usually carry out minor roles while the senior staff assume higher duties, but when the opposite is the case; it could result in task conflict. Also the allocation of resources and procedures as well as opinions and the interpretation of facts or actions related to organisational roles often result in clashes among staff and could lead to inefficiency in the achievement of set goals in the workplace. Ego conflict implies that the conflicts in the ADP center on power struggles and self-esteem

issues. Some members of staff could be exerting a controlling behaviour on others who they perceive weak while these weak members of staff also try to do the same in return to exercise the right to freedom. This will cause an unconducive environment for work if not check-mated.

On the contrary, Table 3 shows that three (3) out of the eight (8) forms of conflict were less frequent in occurrence. These include value conflict ($\bar{X}$=2.81), fact conflict ($\bar{X}$=2.70) and policy conflict ($\bar{X}$=2.46). This was expected because majority of the Extension staff in the Rivers ADP are people who share similar cultural values and are capable of verifying authenticity of information. They equally understand their duties, and organization's rules and regulations (Legg, 2020).

Table 3: Frequency of occurrence of the different forms of interpersonal conflict

Forms of conflict	Mean	S.D
Communication conflict	3.89*	0.90
Task conflict	3.77*	1.16
Power conflict	3.70*	1.28
Ego conflict	3.70*	1.19
Relationship conflict	3.35*	1.14
Value conflict	2.81	1.15
Fact conflict	2.70	1.13
Policy conflict	2.46	1.15

Cut-off ≥3.0

Positive effects of interpersonal conflict in the ADP
The result in Table 4 reveals that the respondents agreed that interpersonal conflict improves future communication among staff ($\bar{X}$=3.93). Effective communication is the bloodline of any organization. Interpersonal conflict could improve future communication among staff. This is true because when conflicts are properly resolved, the issues that led to the conflict will be removed and will eventually foster better communication and staff gain better belief in themselves and the organization. This result is in agreement with Gudykunst *et al.* (2020) who found that majority of the sample population agreed that conflicts leads to improved communication and understanding.

Other positive effects of interpersonal conflicts agreed upon by the respondents in Table 4 was that interpersonal conflicts boosts staff morale ($\bar{X}$=3.93), improves trust ($\bar{X}$=3.87), leads to respect of opinions ($\bar{X}$=3.81), increased effectiveness and efficiency of an organization ($\bar{X}$=3.76), encourages healthy competition among staff ($\bar{X}$=3.76), enhances stability/retention of personnel ($\bar{X}$=3.58). This aligns with previous empirical findings like Kim *et al*, (2020) who found out that the interpersonal conflicts enhances problem solving. On the other hand, Table 4 shows that the respondents do not fully agree that interpersonal conflicts inspires collaborative decision-making ($\bar{X}$=3.04), enhances learning ($\bar{X}$=3.01), goal congruence ($\bar{X}$=2.77), inspires creativity ($\bar{X}$=2.65), and good health ($\bar{X}$=2.64). These findings are in contrast to previous studies of Huang et al (2019) and Gudykunst, et al (2020) that found out that majority of their study respondents agreed that interpersonal conflicts leads to improved decision-making. Also Choi et al (2019) and Lee et al, (2020) concluded that interpersonal conflicts stimulates creativity and innovation

Table 4: Positive effects of interpersonal conflict among extension staff

Positive effects	Mean	S.D
Improves future communication	3.93*	1.31
Boosts staff morale	3.93*	1.27
Improves trust	3.87*	1.24
Respect of opinions	3.81*	1.25
Increases effectiveness and efficiency of organizations	3.76*	1.17
Encourages healthy competition	3.76*	1.15
Stability or retention of personnel	3.58*	1.14
Collaborative decision making	3.04	1.11

Enhances learning	3.01	1.24
Goal congruence	2.77	1.12
Inspires creativity	2.65	1.14
Good health	2.64	0.91

Cut-off mark ≥3.05

Negative effects of interpersonal conflict among extension staff in the ADP

Table 5 shows that the respondents agreed that interpersonal conflict lead to apathy (X̄=3.93). Apathy could lead to job dissatisfaction, disobedience to rules and regulations; and consequently low productivity in the workplace. This result implies that staff usually lose enthusiasm in their various roles and subsequently in the organization as a result of a negative interpersonal conflict situation.

Table 5 further reveals that the ADP staff agree that distraction (X̄=3.76) is a negative effect of interpersonal conflict. Distractions of any kind either physically, emotionally or psychologically do not allow employees concentrate on their roles and responsibilities, and generally affects productivity in the workplace.

Furthermore, Table 5 shows that low-morale (X̄=3.75) was a major negative effect of interpersonal conflict. Low morale will imply low motivation to work and poor performance of employees; adversely affecting the effectiveness of the organization.

Other negative effects include insubordination (X̄=3.71), low organizational performance (X̄=3.70), ill-health (X̄=3.67), violence leading to injury or death (X̄ =3.63), negative emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, worry, depression, frustration and confusion (X̄ =3.52), loneliness/withdrawal (X̄ =3.51), fragmentation of staff (X̄ =3.33), decreased employee satisfaction (X̄ =3.30), distrust (X̄ =3.12) laziness and stress (X̄ = 3.10). The health of employees is affected. It can result to mental, emotional and physical health problems and death in an unmanaged prolonged case. For instance, crises in the work place could increase the blood pressure of staff that can eventually affect the general well-being of the staff.

This result corroborates with other findings on the negative effects of interpersonal conflicts. For example, Jung et al (2020) and Kim et al (2020) found that interpersonal conflict leads to stress and anxiety. Also, Huang et al (2019) and Gudykunst, et al (2020) found that it leads to decreased job satisfaction.

On the other hand, Table 5 shows that the following were not considered as negative effects of interpersonal conflict; absenteeism of staff (X̄=2.79), waste of time and other resources (X̄=2.84), strikes (X̄=2.75), clientele dissatisfaction (X̄=2.73), bad decisions (X̄=2.36), gossiping (X̄=2.87) and negative stereotypes (X̄=2.99). This falls in line with previous findings of Kim et al (2020) that less proportion of the sample population agreed that interpersonal conflicts leads to absenteeism of staff, waste of resources and strikes.

Table 5: Negative effects of interpersonal conflict among extension staff

Negative effects	Mean	S.D
Apathy	3.93*	1.31
Distraction	3.76*	1.17
Low morale	3.75*	1.16
Insubordination	3.71*	1.19
Low organizational performance	3.70*	1.19
Leads to ill-health	3.67*	1.08
Violence leading to injury or death	3.63*	1.08
Negative emotions such as fear, anger, hatred, worry, depression, frustration & confusion.	3.52*	1.2
Loneliness/withdrawal	3.51*	1.14
Fragmentation of staff	3.33*	1.18
Decreased employee satisfaction	3.30*	1.38
Distrust	3.12*	1.34
Laziness	3.10*	1.32
Stress	3.10*	1.37
Insecurity	3.08*	1.32
Employee turnover	3.04	1.16

Destruction of organisation's reputation	3.02	1.04
Negative stereotypes	2.99	1.37
Gossiping	2.87	1.14
Waste of time and other resources	2.84	1.11
Absenteeism of staff	2.79	1.32
Strikes	2.75	1.33
Clientele Dissatisfaction	2.73	1.12
Bad decisions	2.36	1.14

Cut-off mark ≥3.05

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concluded that the major forms of conflict in the ADP were communication, relationship, task and power conflicts. The three (3) most frequently occurring were the communication, task and power conflicts. The major positive effects of interpersonal conflict were that it improves future communication, boosts staff morale and improves trust, respect of opinions, increases effectiveness and efficiency of organizations, encourages healthy competition and retention of personnel. The negative effects were apathy, distraction, low morale, insubordination, low organizational performance, ill-health and violence leading to injury or death. Government and employers should make conflict management and resolution as part of compulsory Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for staff of the ADP to effectively utilize the positive effects of conflict while eliminating the negative effects.

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