



## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE**

IGBOKWE Philomena Ify

Department of Public Administration,  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife,  
Osun State, Nigeria.

*Email: ifynickigbokweio@oauife.edu.ng*

*Phone: 08034242211*

### **ABSTRACT**

Conflict is an incompatibility that cannot be simultaneously fulfilled. It is natural in organisational life. Conflict in an employment relationship has been an issue of continuing interest and debate. Dealing with conflicts in organisations has over the years been seen as the sole responsibility of the managers. Often, managers take a rigid stand on how to deal with conflict. It arises in organisations when an employee or employees perceive that his/their goals are threatened or hindered by another person's activities.

Most organisations have devoted a greater part of economic time and effort to settle conflict related issues, such situation has continued unabated, hence posing a negative to industrial and economic growth of an organisation. Incessant occurrence of organisational conflict could have an adverse effect on the organisation, although management scholars believe that conflict cannot be completely ruled out in any organisation.

Conflicts, if not properly managed, can ruin any organisation. Sometimes, managers are unaware of the negative impact that employees conflict has on the productivity and performance within the workplace. Unresolved conflict in the organisation generates many serious consequences involving high financial and human costs. Conflicts may lead to frustration, tension, low morale, missing timelines, lack of self-confidence, low trust level, communication problems, absenteeism and inaction. Mismanaged conflict affects productivity, employee's health and wellbeing, stress, and ultimately lead to lesser job satisfaction, humiliation and embarrassment.

The effect and consequences of unmanaged conflicts in the workplace on employees and the organisation are crucial.

**KEYWORDS:** Conflict, Organisation, Performance, Management, Employee.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Conflict is inevitable and it is an integral part of the work environment. Conflict is a clash of interest, an incompatibility, as of two things or more that cannot be simultaneously fulfilled. It can also be a state of human interaction, where there is disharmony; it emerges when parties compete over perceived or actual goals, values or interests, when parties confront each other with opposing actions and counter-actions and it is an indicator that something is changing, has changed or needs to change. Conflict is inevitable in every workplace. Organisations consists of many people. The attitudes, feelings, needs and perceptions differ from person to person. Individual differences may cause misunderstanding and conflicts between individuals and groups. Conflicts therefore, affect the organisation either positively or negatively. Thus, conflict management is required to resolve conflicts and maintain order and balance, else employee morale and organisational performance may suffer.

Organisational performance comprises the actual output or results of an organisation as measured against its intended outputs. It is related to factors such as, profitability, improved service delivery, customer satisfaction, market share growth, and improved productivity and sales. It can then be said that organisational performance is therefore affected by a multiplicity of individuals, group, task, technology, structure, managerial and environmental factors.

Individual incapability between this employee and its unions can adversely affect work output resulting in conflicting performances. Since organisations are made up of different people with different attitudes, beliefs and personality, conflicts become inevitable. Conflict is natural, general and a wide spread phenomenon that is synonymous with group activity and interaction, there is no organisation that can effectively carry out its day to day activities without encountering some form of conflict.

There are productive and destructive conflicts. Conflict management refers to attempt to control or regulate conflict through a number of measures. Conflict management strategies refer to the internal mechanisms used by the various authorities in resolving conflicts. A conflict is said to be positive when it is constructively discussed by the parties and amicable terms for settlement reached. Constructively managed conflict induces a positive performance, while poorly managed conflicts heats up the environment, to bring about displacement of the entire group, polarization and reduced productivity on job performance. Effective conflict management will lead to conducive working environment, promotion opportunities and movement directed towards non-violent reconciliation or basic clashing interest.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict has been observed to be in existence in all human organisations. It could be described as all forms of opposition, disagreement, friction between two or more parties, and it manifests in the forms of arguments, protests, demonstration, aggression and other destructive behaviors. Conflict by nature is a constant phenomenon in any human organisation. The endemic nature of conflict in human grouping has been traced to the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individual and/or groups in defined social and physical environment (Otite, 2015). Though conflict is generally perceived as something devastating, abnormal, dysfunctional and detestable, it could be a precursor of positive change, if constructively handled. Conflict remains the most permanent feature that makes humanity agree that growth and development are predicated on conflicts.

The perception about conflict has undergone a series of metamorphosis since the issue of organisational conflict came into the limelight. According to Pike (2009), the various perspectives of conflict have led managers to address it in different ways, which play a significant role in maintaining a conducive organisational environment, as those perspectives could lead to the formation of either positive or negative workplace climate. Over the years, however, three prominent views have stood out: The Traditional, Behavioral (or contemporary) and the Interactionist views. The proponents of the traditional view see conflict as bad because they have a negative impact on the organisation, and lead to a low level of productivity, and as such should be avoided. They associated conflict with violence, destruction, and irrationality. This view is still widely held, especially in the labour union movement (Verma, 1998).

Pike identified Fayol and Weber as major proponents of the traditional view, as they tacitly believed that conflict is determined by organisational effectiveness and, therefore, should be eliminated. The behavior or contemporary view on the other hand, sees conflict as a natural occurrence in an organisation which may have either a positive or a negative effect, depending on how it is handled. It is also known as the Human Relations view, this view accepts conflict and believe that it improves group performance. They also are of the opinion that, because of the benefits that can be derived from it, focus should be on managing it effectively rather than suppressing or eliminating it. Another proponent of this view also identified by Pike is Follett, whom he said noted the value of constructive conflict in an organisation by saying that progress in an organisation can often be measured by merely watching the nature of the conflict therein, Mary Parker Follett, therefore, recommended problem-solving methods for managing conflict as she believed that other methods, such as suppression, avoidance, dominance and compromise are not effective enough in managing organisational conflict. The interactionists believe that conflict is necessary for an organisation to perform effectively, they however, recognized that not all conflicts are good. They encourage constructive conflict, as they believe it can lead to a better performance in an organisation. An analogy given by Leffel *et al* (2012), who likened conflict to an organism in the animal world, finding itself in a hostile environment; it needed adaptive abilities to survive, hence, had to develop new adaptive skills, meaning that, it either changes or dies. They, therefore, posited that adaptation, accommodation, and flexibility constitute foundation for future development and change. So, response to conflict, like the previously mentioned organism, could lead to a problem solving orientation. While a refusal to adapt, could result in stagnation and non-productivity, even in extreme case, extinction.

### 3. TYPES OF CONFLICT

There are different types of conflicts, identified by different names; negative or positive, destructive or constructive, dysfunctional and functional. Conflict is usually seen as being dysfunctional, but some writers have posited that it can be useful as it may cause an issue to be presented in different perspectives, thereby having both positive and negative values. The positive aspect can encourage employees' creativity and capability to handle interpersonal differences, whereas the negative aspects can lead to resistance to change, create distrust and other unpalatable conditions for the organisation.

Managers should understand how to identify, analyse and evaluate both the positive and negative values of conflict, and their effect on performance. Effective leadership is required to effectively manage conflict. Leadership and conflict management are inseparable, because any conflict that is not managed appropriately can degenerate into dysfunctional conflict. Conversely, there are precise triggers of dysfunctional conflict which include dysfunctional terms, stress, systems problems, favouritism, warring egos, heavy workload, unclear job requirements, a culture that is disabling and disempowering, stifling bureaucracy and abhorrent people. Jerrell *et al* (2014). To avoid increases in negative key performance indicators and decreases in positive key performance indicators, dysfunctional conflict must be resolved expeditiously. Therefore, understanding functional and dysfunctional conflict and how to manage or resolve it should be an integral part of an organisation. Such understanding is essential to the individual wellbeing and success as well as the long-term success of the organisation.

Poorly handled conflicts can escalate into uncontrollable heights, thereby destroying the mission and goals of an organisation. Some counter-productive conflicts occur in organisations, which make organisations consider the amount of time, effort and money invested in such conflicts, and whether the conflicts are being appropriately handled the way they should. If any of such organisations does not have a formal machinery for handling conflict, the management should consider the importance of having one of such formal machinery, which would likely improve the organization's effectiveness and productivity. If conflicts arise and are not handled appropriately, they can cause delay of work, lack of interest and action, and in extreme cases, can lead to complete disorder within the organisation. Unmanaged conflict could also result in employees becoming unwilling to participate or withdraw from participating in other group activities or assist with team work in the organisation, which may lead to chaos.

### 4. FUNCTIONAL CONFLICTS

Functional conflict stimulates problem solving, innovation and creativity and has a positive impact on an organisation and its employees. Conflict can be considered functional when its results are positive and when the people with divergent views intend their disagreement to have positive results. It is considered functional when an individual's ideas, information, opinions, among others, are incompatible with those of another and both parties seek to reach an agreement. It supports the goals of an organisation and improves its performance by encouraging greater work effort among the employees. Flanagan and Runde (2009) emphasized that "disagreements may signal the emergence of innovative, novel concepts as yet unrealized" while Guttman (2009) indicated that the functionality of conflict depends on the extent to which (and how rapidly) individuals and teams move through the four stages of development which he described as "testing, infighting, getting organized and high performance".

The alignment of key factors is essential, the key factors according to Guttman (2009) include "business relationship/mutual expectations, protocols/roles of engagement, individual roles/accountabilities, and goals/business priorities/focus". If managed appropriately therefore, functional conflict could lead to organisational innovation, increase in performance and productivity. Furthermore, it gives employees chances not only to identify the problems, but also to see the opportunities that may arise from such problems, because when individuals engage in such conflicts, they are to learn more about themselves and others, thereby improving on their relationship. Bankovskaya (2012) opine that conflict is needed if it does the following:

- Helps to raise and address problems;
- Energizes work to be done on the most appropriate issues;
- Helps motivate people to participate; and
- Helps people learn how to recognize and benefit from their differences.

For De Drev and Beersma (2005), they argued that, at a low level, conflict actually causes poor performance within the organisation as it leads to inactivity, avoidance and neglect of information. Whereas, at a high level, conflict does not only cause a decline in organisational performance, it reduces the capacity to process and evaluate information. While at the optimum or moderate level, conflict leads to effective decision making, high

performance and the conflicting parties are able to seek and integrate useful information that could lead to a strong impulse, thereby improving the situation causing the conflict.

## 5. DYSFUNCTIONAL CONFLICTS

When conflict is destructive with negative results such that it prevents a group from achieving its goals, it is classified as dysfunctional. This type of conflict is characterized by competing employees interests which override the organisations main objective and the results is usually decreased productivity, strained relationships and lower employee motivation, negative impacts on individual wellbeing and wasted time.

Functional and dysfunctional conflicts do not necessarily exist separately from each other as the differences are not in their sources but in the manner in which they are expressed. Organisations may have varying degrees of functional and dysfunctional conflicts, it is imperative that managers understand not only the difference, but also the theories that apply to their effective management.

### Sources of Conflict

Sources of conflict can either be personal or organisational as some conflicts are related to individuals having incompatible goals while others are related to the way an organisation is structured or managed. Personal conflict can be traced to differences in individual's value, perceptions or culture, while organisational sources can be traced to the following:

**Goal Incompatibility:** This is the source of many conflicts, because many departments within the organisation focus on different tasks and functions.

**Uncertainty:** Many are forced to adapt to rapidly shifting environmental constraints, due to frequent changes in the work environment, leading to uncertainty which makes it difficult for managers to have clear direction, and are, therefore, under pressure, which invariably leads to conflict, as departments and employees within the organisation deal with changing goals.

**Resource Scarcity:** Competition over scarce resources by employees and departments within the organisation can result to conflict, as they try to get hold of the limited resources to meet their goals.

**Reward System:** Reward is something of value given in return for an act, this encourages employees to do their best, but it also brings about rivalry and competition among groups and individuals, thereby creating conflict.

**Interdependence:** It is when employees depend on one another to get their work done. Conflict arises when the interdependence is high, as each person's goals, values and ways of doing things are different. of course, there are other sources/causes of conflict, things like, shared resources, differences in goals and objectives, differences in perceptions and values, disagreements in the role requirements, nature of work activities, individual approaches and the stage of development within the organisation. Beyond the organisation, other causes can be traced to political instability in the nation, which invariably affects the economy, poor financial base, incessant demand for increase in wages, fringe benefits, irregular payment of salaries, leadership problem and lack of proper communication about issues and the absence of effective organisational framework to handle worker's grievances.

Hastings (2007) stated that workplace conflicts could be categorized by their causes and identified the following as some of the variety of issues that can give rise to them:

- Different work methods, where employees have the same goal but different approaches to achieving the goal;
- Different goals that are inconsistent with those of others;
- Differences in personalities, where people annoy one another because of who they are or how they act;
- Biases that people have against different groups of people;
- Issues, actions or comments that cause stress;
- Different viewpoints or perspectives on various issues that may relate to people's upbringing, gender, age or other such characteristics.
- Different levels of interpersonal skills and verbal and/or written communication capabilities;
- Competition for financial or other resources; and
- Unique subcultures that establish "Us vs. Them" situations.

## 6. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict management is the process of reducing the negative and destructive capacity through a number of measures and by working with and through parties involved in the conflict. Conflict management seen in the right perspective, correctly assumes that conflicts are long term process that often cannot be quickly resolved. The notion of "management" suggests that people can be directed or controlled as though, they are physical objects. In addition, it also indicates that the goal is the reduction or control of volatility more than dealing with

the real source of the problem. The term is sometimes used synonymously with the term, conflict regulation. By extension, it covers other areas of handling “conflicts positively at different levels, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive”.

Other terms equally included in the concept are, conflict limitation; containment and litigation, conflict prevention. Conflict prevention connotes containment of conflict through steps introduced to promote conditions in which collaborative and valued relationships control the behavior of conflict parties. The bottom line is that conflict management seeks to address the fact that conflict is inevitable, and that not all conflicts are resolvable.

## 7. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

**The obliging conflict management style:** This style of conflict management is associated with low concern for self and a high concern for others. It is used when an individual is willing to sacrifice his own wants for the other party. Here, the individual will often take a lose-win approach and forfeit his wants for those of the other party involved. This style is said to be appropriate when the issue at hand is more important than that of the other party. Though this may reduce the conflict, it is observed that there is no collective resources expended, as one of the parties' problems that led to the conflict still remains unsolved because one party merely gives in to the other, so that the conflict is managed. While this style may likely help parties to manage conflict, it has been recognized that if utilized consistently, it becomes less effective overtime.

**Integrating Conflict Management Style:** The integrating conflict management style is considered useful for efficiently dealing with complex problems in order to reach an acceptable outcome. This style is used by individuals with a high concern for themselves and others. The aim is to work together for a possible win-win outcome. Integrating is appropriate when one party alone cannot solve the problem when commitment is needed from others, for long range planning, and dealing with strategic issues pertaining to an organization's objective. If this style is frequently utilized in an organisation, it leads to a reduction in conflicts, which in turn leads to the preservation or creation of organisational resources. It can become effective when there is potential for joint gains for the parties, as the style produces greater understanding of the party's interest, thereby making it easier to reach an acceptable solution.

The integrating style has been noted to be ideal in managing conflict as it can enhance role clarity and empower team members within the organisation through open communication and knowledge sharing. Furthermore, communication openness is considered a major factor that promotes integrating style.

**Compromising Conflict management Style:** Compromising conflict management style attempts to resolve a conflict by identifying a solution that is partially satisfactory to both parties, but completely satisfactory to neither of the parties. It involves a give-and-take situation, whereby both parties give up something to reach a mutually acceptable decision. This strategy requires both sides to give up something in order to gain something better. It is usually used in situations where parties are fairly equal in status and neither side puts forward too many demands. A situation where this approach can be utilized in an organisation is, where a group of employees are angry that their work is made more difficult because of something that another group fails to do. Compromising conflict management style is considered effective when the issues involved in the conflict are moderately important. An individual that utilizes this approach, shows immediate concern for self and others.

**Dominating Conflict Management Style:** This is said to occur when an individual considers his or her own interests to the detriment of others. People who use the dominating conflict management style, have a high concern for themselves and a low concern for others, leading to a win-lose target. This style displays competing behaviors said to be associated with aggression and is sometimes appropriate when a quick decision is needed, when the issue is trivial but important and it is necessary to overcome an assertive subordinate, or the other party's decision could be costly. Research, however, has shown that, though those who focus on their interest ensure that the conflict is resolved, there is also a high probability that employing this approach will reduce the likelihood of arriving at a solution to the conflict.

**Avoiding Conflict Management Style:** This is when an individual withdraws from an issue or gives up personal goals and relationships involving conflict (McMahon, 1994). Workers who engage in conflict with a superior are most likely to respond in avoidance or obliging behavior. Short-term avoidance is considered effective in dealing with a conflict when both parties need time to reflect rationally on the issues causing the conflict. Friedman *et al* (2000), opined that people who use this style of conflict management are considered ill-equipped to deal with a conflict that needs attention, and because of the low concern they have for themselves and others, they are unlikely to be able to understand and address other people's problems. It will also be

difficult for them and the other party to the conflict, to find solutions to the conflict, as they will lack the basic information that is needed. At a more fundamental level, someone that has low concern for self and others, only shows a little desire to solve the problem leading to the conflict, because of a stronger desire to ignore the conflict rather than solve it. Those who utilize the avoiding conflict management style, are likely to experience more task conflicts.

Other appropriate uses of the avoiding conflict management style include instances where the issues leading to the conflict are considered trivial, more information needs to be gathered, a more basic issue exists, damage is imminent, and the costs are too great, accessible resources are inadequate, or the disadvantages include the risk of the conflict escalating, amongst others. Individuals that use this strategy generally have a low concern for themselves and others. Frequent use of this strategy to manage conflict can result in having a pile of unresolved issues, thereby making it more difficult to reconcile the parties involved.

In summary, conflict management strategy's goal is to minimize the potential negative impacts that can arise from disagreements and increase the odds of a positive outcome. Disagreements can be unpleasant, and not every dispute calls for the same response. If the right conflict management style is utilized, people will be better able to respond constructively whenever dispute arise.

### **Theoretical Insight**

Every society experience various levels of conflict. Conflict can occur between individuals, between social groups, and/or within social groups. Conflict theory is an important perspective for understanding how and why these disagreements occur. Conflict theory focuses on difference in power between individuals or social groups. It assumes that social interaction leads to conflict, and that conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships. However, conflict can be beneficial, especially when it spurs useful changes and resolution issues. The goals is not to completely prevent conflict, but to prevent conflict escalating to the point where members of the group are permanently harmed or feel that remaining in the group is against their self-interest.

**Conflict Theory:** This theory was developed by Mary Parker Follett in her 'Creative Experience', a paper she wrote in 1925. To her, conflict is not warfare, but is only an appearance of differences-differences in opinions, interests, not only between employers and employees, but also between managers, between directors or wherever differences appear. Conflict may move from more verbal or attitudinal disagreement to physical or even bloody confrontation. She opined that conflict could be bad or good or neither good nor bad depending on the situation. In Creative Experience, Follett presented her concept of integration. Her view was that conflict was addressed from three angles: domination, compromise, and integration. Of these, the best approach was integration. The rationale was that choosing domination led to the defeated group keeping conflict going. According to her, domination means, one party being victorious over the other party in conflict situations.

As regards compromise, if compromise is selected, the result is that neither side is completely satisfied. Again, in compromise style, each of the party gives up some of his or her concern in order to be able to accommodate the concern of the other, so as to reach a solution. But she argued that usually, people do not like the idea of giving up any of their concern, whereas integration leads to invention, innovation and a truly acceptable solution. In integrating style, parties have the desires to reach a solution which would be beneficial and desirable to all of them. She described the integrating style as the best (Riaz, Zulkifal & Jamal, 2012). The concept was based on seeking new ways for conflict resolution; however, the interpretation is that Follett is also concerned with challenge, both addressing it and promoting it.

Follett offers practical advice for dealing with conflict. In the first instance, it is necessary to view conflict as a positive force leading to innovation and growth. The process begins by identifying interests, seeking areas of commonality in those interest and integrating those interests for a creative and innovate outcome.

**Contingency Theory:** This is a behavioral theory developed by Fred Fiedler in 1964. The basic assumption of this theory is that there is no universal or one best way to manage an organisation, and that an organisational/leadership style that is effective in some situations may not be successful in others. It argued that a manager's effectiveness is based upon the interplay of task, or relation, motivation and the circumstance. Meaning that certain circumstances require different management approaches with a focus either on motivating for task completion or maintaining harmonious group relations. It can be summarized as an "it all depends" approach. The appropriate management actions and approaches depend on the situation. Managers with contingency view use a flexible approach, draw on a variety of theories and experiences and evaluate many options as they encounter and solve problems.

In the contingency perspective, managers are faced with the task of determining which managerial approach is likely to be most effective in a given situation. It is recognition of the extreme importance of individual manager performance in any given situation and the contingency approach is highly dependent on the experience and judgment of the manager in a given organisational environment. Contingency theory is however made of six independent constructs (strategy, task, technology, organisational size, structure and culture) and two dependent constructs (efficiency and organisational performance).

**Dual Concern Theory:** Dual concern theory is based on the two dimensional model that consists of concern for self (high or low) and concern for others (high or low) and includes five conflict management strategies which are forcing, yielding, avoiding, problem-solving and compromising. Forcing is high concern for self and low concern for others. This style involves attitudes that include intimidating the other party, trying to convince and sometimes having a positional commitment in an issue. Individuals that use this style usually force their interest on others. Yielding indicates low concern for self and high concern for others. It gives more importance to the other person's interests over the person conceding thus accepting variances in the form of one sided concessions. Avoiding is low concern for self and others as well. This style also includes minimizing the importance of the conflict by attempting to suppress the opinions about the issues leading to the conflict. Problem-solving indicates high concern for self and others. It is a collaborating attitude that is more inclined towards a resolution that is acceptable to both parties' goals and aspirations. Lastly, compromising implies intermediate concern for self and for others and a willingness to search for middle ground (Wuwer and Navte, 2001). This theory, therefore, implies that conflict management is based on two circumstances: high or low concern for self and high or low concern for others.

**Managerial Grid Theory-**Blake and Mouton developed the managerial grid in the 1960s. It provided management theory with a map of leadership styles ranging from concern for production, to concern for people by bridging social psychology and management theory, they developed five main leadership styles: avoiding, accommodating, forcing, compromise and collaboration or problem solving. Each style reflects a manager's orientation to organisational relations and conflict management. The managerial grid provided a visual representation of not only leadership styles, but also the various degrees of and between the styles. They argued that the best managers balance a concern for production with a concern for people. Blake and Mouton concluded that the organisational "ideal" would be the integration of employees and production, through employee involvement in the production methods and managerial decisions.

In the year 1964, Blake and Mouton were the first to present a conceptual scheme for classifying the different styles for conflicts resolution. They presented a two dimensional grid of concern for people and concern for production, for classifying interpersonal conflict styles of managing conflict which were further divided into five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem-solving. These five modes of managing conflicts were described based on the attitudes of the managers. The theory is based on two dimensions which are concerns for production and concerns for people.

## 8. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of this study is to examine the effects of conflict management on organisational performance.

### Implications

This study will be beneficial to the public, because it would expand the knowledge on the importance of the management of conflict in everyday life. It will be useful to organisations both in the private and public sectors, in dealing with the identification of the causes of conflict and the management using conflict resolution mechanism. This study will also be of great value to academia and practitioners in the field of conflict resolution and management, public relations and public administration.

### Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Conflict is inevitable in organisations and has a bearing on performance. Conflict is generally perceived as something devastating, abnormal, dysfunctional and detestable, but it could also be a precursor of positive change if constructively handled. In order to survive in a conflict environment, it is necessary for the management to be proactive in research and development, so as to implement strategies that manage conflicts well, providing a good environment for performance.

Conflict management seen from the right perspective, correctly assumes that conflicts are long term processes that often cannot be quickly resolved. The notion of management indicates that the goal is the reduction or control of volatility more than dealing with the real source of the problem. Conflict management is the process

of reducing the negative and destructive capacity through a number of measures and by working with and through the parties involved in the conflict. The term also covers other areas of handling conflicts positively at different levels, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive.

Organisational performance is the result of an activity which has been achieved by an organisation related to its authority and responsibility in achieving the goal legally, not against the law, and conforming to the morale and ethics of the organisation. This can be measured financially or non-financially. The appropriate measure selected to assess organisational performance depend on the type of organisation to be evaluated, and the objectives to be achieved through that evaluation. However, improved organisational performance is dependent on the appropriate conflict management strategies. Applying the appropriate strategy will improve employee's performance, resulting to an improved organisational performance. On the other hand, the inability of the organisation to apply the appropriate conflict management strategies will lead to a decline in employee's performance, which will in turn, result in a decline in organisational performance.

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