

## Complexity of Organizational Conflict: An Exploration of Implications on Sustainable Growth in the Hospitality Industry in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

Unionisation and human rights at work places have brought about conflict within organisations and also between the employers and employees. In a bid by employees to exercise the rights and also to achieve both organizational and personal goals conflict tend to emerge. The performance of any hotel or lodge in Masvingo, Zimbabwe is dependent on the performance and satisfaction levels of employees. The co-operation of employees and their employers in executing their duties enhances the achievement of set goals. This study sought to investigate the impact of conflict between employers and employees on sustainable development and growth of the hospitality institutions in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. A descriptive survey method was used to carry out the study, with questionnaires and interviews being the main data collecting tools. The population of the study comprised five hundred and fifty employees including those in management. A simple random sampling method was used to select the two hundred participants who took part in the study. The study established five major causes of conflict in the hotel industry in Masvingo in Zimbabwe namely: goal incompatibility, poor decision making, poor communication systems and poorly structured reward systems. The following positive effects were identified: formulation of realistic policies, improves employee performance, motivates employees and signals problem areas. The negative effects raised were that conflict breeds aggressive behaviour, creates disorder and instability within hotels, promotes employee physical and mental withdrawal, erodes employee satisfaction and motivation. The approaches and systems of dealing with conflict in hotels were the participative approach, improved communication system, and well structured reward system, third party intervention, diffusion and avoidance. A number of recommendations were proffered to enhance the positive effects of conflict and to deal with conflict in a manner which benefits companies in Masvingo in Zimbabwe.

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**Keywords:** conflict, sustainable development, hospitality industry

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### INTRODUCTION

Conflict has become a common phenomenon in various organizations throughout Zimbabwe and the world at large (IPMZ 2004). It has become common knowledge among social scientists, psychologists, organizational behavior specialists and human resource management practitioners that conflict is inevitable and cannot be eradicated, yet it has the power to influence employees to behave in a particular manner. Owing to its impact to economic sustainable development, a number of researchers carried out several studies to unravel the intricacies and complexities of conflict in various industries. While it is appreciated that many researchers have made an effort to deal with conflict in general very little if any study was done to investigate the causes, effects and conflict mitigating strategies in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. Middleton (1990:137) says, "Conflict is an inevitable consequence of everyday

organizational life caused primarily by the complexities of its internal mechanism system". On the other hand Ezewu (1992) sees conflict as a situation whereby two or more people are divided by different interests and strive for opposing objectives. Palmer (1992) says that conflict refers to all kinds of opposition and antagonistic interactions based on security of power, resources, salary structures and conditions of service. On the other hand Mullins (2010) views conflict as any behavior intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals. For example usually the employer's interest is to increase the values of shares while on the other hand employees' interest are focused on good working conditions and salaries which are in direct conflict with that of their employers. The two groups share different opinions in the execution of their duties.

Conflict has both positive and adverse ramifications to organizational performance.

Between 2000 and 2014 the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe registered a significant number of workers strikes, job stayaways, work to rule and other forms of labour unrest which is a clear indication that there is conflict between employees and their employers in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. The researcher read and analysed several articles in newspapers (The Herald., 2010, The chronicle 2011, The Newsday 2011), magazines and hospitality institutions' annual reports where employees and employers demonstrated very high levels of disagreements over a number of issues which emanate from different cultural backgrounds, employee personality, salaries and wages, psychological contract and other conditions of service. With these impending problems at stake in the hospitality industry, the researcher found it necessary to investigate the extent to which conflict negatively impact on the organization and sustainable growth. The intention of this research is to reveal the impact of conflict between employers and employees in the hospitality industry with a view to making meaningful area specific conflict resolution strategies which in turn promotes sustainable economic development.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

There is compelling evidence that conflict is prevalent among employees in the hospitality industry in Masvingo urban. Conflict breeds serious ramifications to organizational performance and sustainable development hence it needs to be dealt with before it transforms itself into dysfunctional conflict. Most companies are at loggerheads with their employees over a number of issues. To make matters worse most companies rely on the traditional methods of resolving conflict, which were developed to resolve conflict in specific industries and countries but do not proffer adequate sting to effectively deal with conflict in Zimbabwe.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What are the causes of conflict between employees and employers in the hospitality industry?
- What are the positive and /or adverse effects of conflict between employees and employers in realising goals in the hospitality industry?
- How does conflict between employers and employees influence economic sustainable development?
- How can the hospitality industry employer-employee conflict be used productively in attaining hotel goals?

- What conflict resolutions strategies can be employed to deal with conflict between employers and employees in the hospitality industry?

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to unravel the causes and effects of conflict between employers and employees and establish the extent to which conflict influences sustainable organizational growth in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To establish the causes of conflict between employees and employers in the hospitality industry?
- To examine the extent to which conflict affects organizations in realizing goals in the hospitality industry?
- How does conflict between employers and employees influence economic sustainable development?
- What conflict resolutions strategies can be employed to deal with conflict between employers and employees in the hospitality industry?

### **SCOPE OF STUDY**

This study was delimited to Masvingo Urban which is home to several hospitality industry institutions owned by both individuals and private companies. Masvingo city is the oldest urban dwelling in Zimbabwe and it is equi-distant to the major cities in Zimbabwe that is; Bulawayo, Harare, Mutare and Beitbridge. It is along one of the busiest roads in Southern Africa, that is the Cape to Cairo high way which passes through the Beitbridge border post. Because of its strategic position it has become a business hub for the hotel industry in Zimbabwe. This study only focused on hotels, lodges and guest houses in Masvingo urban. The study was a cross section based on data collected from several hospitality industry institutions in Masvingo.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this study the descriptive survey method was employed. The researcher chose to use the descriptive survey design due to its suitability in soliciting original data for purposes of describing a large population. It achieves this by using observations, questionnaires and interviews. The researcher used the questionnaires in collecting data from workers at both operational and managerial levels from the various lodges in Masvingo. The questionnaire comprised of a 5 likert scale questions. The researcher opted to use a questionnaire because it can collect large quantities of data from

considerable numbers of people over a relatively short period of time. The other reason why the researcher opted for a questionnaire is that it gives respondents the opportunity to answer questions on their own without any disturbances and interference from the researcher. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents through their managers and supervisors. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire within three days. The fact that respondents were not rushed to respond to the questions provides an assurance that the gathered data was valid and reliable, thus original and absolute data is solicited. The other instrument which was employed was an interview. The interview was administered on managers and supervisors. Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' offices or places of work. The researcher opted to use interview because it accorded him room to exhibit flexibility to repeat or rephrase questions so that the respondent could understand what each question required them to do. To add more advantages, some people can not accurately put down their responses about a complex and emotionally charged topic on paper, so in this case an interview becomes the most suitable instrument to gather such data. In conducting the interviews the researcher refrained from providing opinions and alternatives to the questions he passed to the interviewees. He also avoided expressions of approval or disapproval as the respondents gave out answers to the asked questions.

### POPULATION

The population for this study comprises 550 people. The population was made up of all employees in the hospitality industry in Masvingo urban who consisted of all the operational staff right to the management staff. The population holds qualifications, which ranges from a certificate right to masters degrees. The population was also made of people from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

### SAMPLE AND SAMPLING

Two hundred participants were randomly selected to participate in the study. Simple random sampling approach was employed to select the participants. All the members of the study population were asked to pick a 'yes or no' strip of paper which the researcher had prepared and put in a container. The strips of papers were continuously shuffled so as to give all the members an equal opportunity to be selected. Those who picked the 'yes' strips formed the sample of the study.

## RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by Gender

| GENDER  | FREQUENCY | PERCENTAGE (%) |
|---------|-----------|----------------|
| Males   | 40        | 20             |
| Females | 160       | 80             |
| TOTALS  | 100       | 100            |

The table shows the distribution of respondents by gender. The results indicated that 80% of the respondents were female while 20% were male. Female respondents out-numbered their male counterparts by 60% probably because most professions in the hospitality industry such as house keepers, waiters, bar attendants are regarded as professions for females.

Table 2: Table showing Respondents by Professional Qualifications

| Qualifications | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Degree         | 120       | 60             |
| Diploma        | 70        | 35             |
| Certificate    | 10        | 5              |
| Totals         | 200       | 100            |

The table shows the respondents' qualifications. 60% of the respondents indicated that they were holders of degree. 35% were holders of diplomas and 5% had certificates in tourism and hospitality. The results show that all the respondents were professionals holding different levels of qualifications in the hospitality industry. This implies that most institutions in Masvingo comprise of qualified personnel which is a good antecedent to the economic development of the organization and the delivery of quality service to clients.

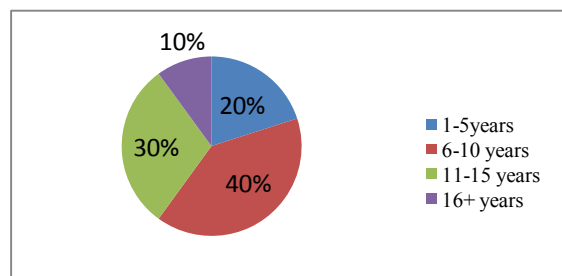


Figure 1; Pie Chart showing Respondents work experience

The pie chart above shows work experience of employees. 40% of the respondents fell in the experience range of 6 to 10 years. 30% fell in the range of 11-15 years. 20% of the respondents were in the work experience range of 1-5 years and 10 % of the respondents fell in the range of 16 years and above. One favourable factors to the growth, survival and sustainable economic development of hotels and lodges in Masvingo city is that it is made up of experienced employees.

### CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Table 3 Showing causes of Conflict

| Cause                                                                 | yes | No |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| 1 Goal incompatibility                                                | 60  | 40 |
| 2 Poor conditions of service, low salaries and inconsistent pay dates | 80  | 20 |
| 3 Poor and unilateral decision making and autocratic leadership       | 90  | 10 |
| 4 Ineffective and inefficient communication system                    | 65  | 35 |
| 5 Employees personalities and organizational culture                  | 75  | 25 |

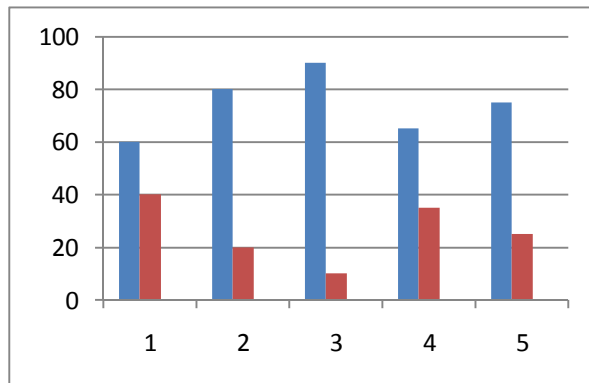


Figure 2: Bar Graph showing responses on causes of conflict

Key: Blue bar—yes

Red Bar---No

The findings from both interviews and questionnaires showed that conflict between workers and their employers in the hotel industry is complex and need to be dealt with in a professional manner. One of the findings of the study is that conflict is caused by goal incompatibility and unfavorable policies. The findings are in sync with Palmer (1992)'s observation that the attempt of one individual or group to further its interest thwarts another group's ability to attain its goals. Conflict is propelled by incompatible and competing goals. The findings also revealed that the reward system used in hotels is one of the major propellers of conflict between these two parties. Rewards in the hospitality industry create conflict in that senior managers get very high salaries while their counterparts get salaries that are far below the poverty datum line. The hotel top executive get exorbitantly high allowances and perks which account for over 60% of the wage bill. Poor communication within hotels was also found to be a major cause of conflict between workers and employers. Conflict arises because employees and employers have different and insufficient information about the system. The findings on the causes of conflict are in sync with the findings of other scholars such as Mullins (2010) and Bates (2004) who argue that conflict is caused by differences in perception, limited resources, departmentalization and specialization, the nature of work activities, role

conflict, inequitable treatment, violation of territory and individual characteristics. Performance expectations and organizational structures are some of the key factors that influence conflict. To sum it up one of the respondents remarked using the local language “*Hatina hembe dzokuzvidzivirira kubva muzvirere kana munjodzi dzepabasa*” (We do not have protective clothing so we are prone to diseases and other work hazards).

### EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

Table 4: showing Negative effects of conflict

| Negative effects of conflict                              | Yes % | No % |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|
| 1 Creates disorder and instability                        | 85    | 15   |
| 2 Physical and psychological withdrawal                   | 90    | 10   |
| 3 Breeds aggressive behavior among employees              | 95    | 5    |
| 4 Erodes employee loyalty, trust and commitment to work   | 65    | 35   |
| 5 Reduces employees' level of satisfaction and motivation | 96    | 4    |

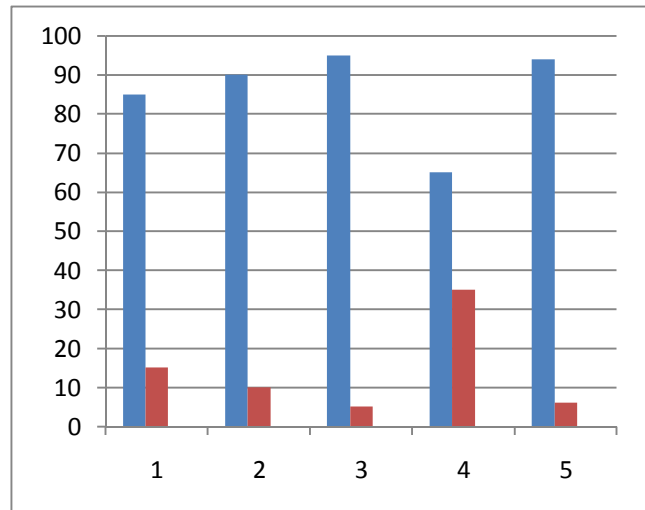


Figure 3: Bar Graph showing responses on negative effects of conflict

Key: Blue bar—yes

Red Bar---No

The findings on the impact of conflict were categorized into two groups, that is functional and dysfunctional. This is in line with (Mullins 2010, Palmer 1992) who are of the opinion that conflict is not always a bad thing, hence it should be viewed as a constructive force and in certain circumstances it can be welcomed or even encouraged. One of the effects of conflict revealed by the research is that it creates disorder and instability within hotels. Disorder and instability is created because workers at times decide to leave their hotels in search of greener pastures. If hotels lose staff they become short staffed and remain with incompetent and inexperienced personnel. Such a scenario forces hotels to recruit new members of staff thus bringing inexperienced personnel. Conflict also breeds aggressive behaviour among employees which include among others collective job

actions and pilferage. Workers in the hotel industry embark on strikes because of persistent misunderstandings with their employers. Strikes leave hotel clients unattended or being attended to by a make shift staff which may result in an increase in the number of complaints by clients. Because of conflict between workers and employers, the two parties have lost trust and confidence in each other. This has basically lowered standards and stifled development within the hotel industry. The other major negative effect of conflict between workers and employers is the erosion of job satisfaction and employee motivation. Conflict makes employees become de-motivated and dissatisfied by their work. In general the findings gel very well with Mullins (2010) and Bates (2004)' s ideas that conflict can make employees feel defeated and demeaned, development of climate of mistrust and suspicion, individuals and groups concentrating on their narrow interests and an increase in employee turnover.

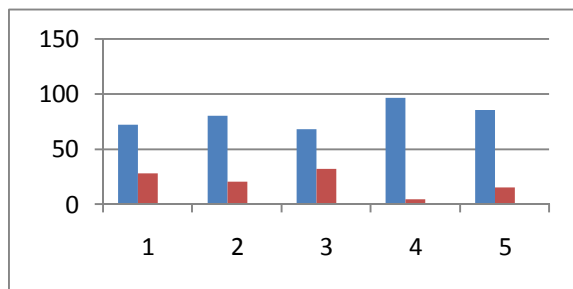


Figure 4: Showing responses on positive effect of conflict

On the positive effect of conflict the study revealed that conflict propels the formulation of favourable policies within hotels. Realistic policies and procedures of doing work can ignite the achievement of both hotel and employees' goals since both parties will be working towards a common purpose. It was also found that conflict can also make the two parties unite and direct their efforts towards achieving set goals. The two parties unite because they would have amicably resolved their differences and therefore pull in one direction. Their motivation and job satisfaction which would have been lost by their differences would be restored and therefore work with the zeal to achieve set goals and provide their clients with the best service. The other positive impact of conflict found by the research was that conflict can help to point out problem areas and signal the need for change within the company. The results collaborates well with Mullins (2010) who observed that conflict propels better ideas, long standing problems are brought to surface and resolved, breeds creativity among employees and creates good industrial relations.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

Table 6: Showing strategies of conflict transformation

| Strategy                                    | Yes % | No % |
|---------------------------------------------|-------|------|
| 1 Participative discussion                  | 51    | 49   |
| 2 Threats and force                         | 80    | 20   |
| 3 Avoidance                                 | 91    | 9    |
| 4 Third part intervention                   | 63    | 37   |
| 5 Use of open door policy, suggestion boxes | 55    | 45   |
| 6 Effective communication system            | 76    | 24   |

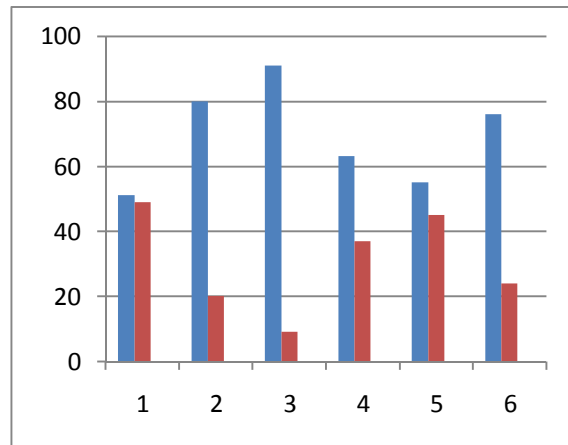


Figure 5: Showing responses on conflict transformation

It was found that the participative approach is one of the key strategies used to resolve conflict in the hotel industry. The two parties come together and negotiate with the view to reaching an amicable solution. The other conflict resolution strategy is whereby one party threatens the other party if their demands are not met. The idea of withdrawing labour is in line with the provision the Labour Act Chapter 28 section 104 which gives employees the opportunity to embark on a collective job action. Employees can discontinue their relationship with their employer through embarking on strikes and resignations. The research also revealed that conflict within the hotel industry can be resolved by engaging third parties such as an arbitrator, mediator, fact finder or law enforcement agents to help the conflicting parties find a common ground. The outsider helps two parties to find an amicable solution to the identified differences. The open door policy is also a very useful strategy to conflict transformation. Diffusion and avoidance were also found to be useful though to a lesser extent.

## CONCLUSION

One of the objectives of the research was to identify the causes of conflict between workers and their employers in the hotel industry. From the findings gathered it has been concluded that conflict between employers and employees in the hotel industry is caused by goal incompatibility and unrealistic policies and procedures.

Hotels set policies and rules which in most instances employees feel are not favourable. These policies are viewed by workers as a means to suppress them and as a way of barring them from exercising their contractual rights.

It has also been concluded that hotels reward system is one of the major causes of conflict between employers and employees in the hotel industry. Poor communication system within hotels is also one of the major causes of conflict between employers and employees. The communication models in use are not effective and as a result the other party may be starved of important information, hence conflict with the other party is fuelled. The line of communication within hotels is very long in such a way that decisions take long to be passed. This causes conflict in that workers will be trying to push their employers to quickly address issues affecting the hotel industry.

The other objective of this study was to establish the impact of conflict on the achievement of hotel goals and economic sustainable development. From the findings it has been concluded that conflict breeds both negative and positive effects, which directly or indirectly influence economic sustainable development, growth and survival of hospitality industry organisations. From the study the researcher concluded that conflict creates disorder and instability within the company. It has also been concluded that conflict breeds aggressive behaviour among employees. Employees may resort to collective job actions such as strikes and stay aways as a way of trying to force their employer to solve their problems. It was also concluded that if conflict is properly handled it can yield positive effects to both hotels and employees. Realistic policies and procedures can be formulated thereby paving way for the realisation of goals. If conflict is properly managed employees can be kept motivated and satisfied at their work places and therefore do everything possible to make sure that work is done properly. It was further concluded that conflict is a good signal and pointer of some problem areas.

On conflict transformation it was concluded that hotels should use the participative approach as their major conflict resolution strategy. Employees should be represented by their workers associations while employers would be represented by few members chosen from management. This approach makes conflict bear positive effects to sustainable development. Hotels can also make laws and policies which help reduce the impact of conflict. The researcher also concluded that though there are a variety of techniques and strategies that can be employed to resolve conflict the participative approach is the most suitable one. There

are, however, some instances where the method may not apply and there is need to employ other methods such as force and seeking the intervention of an outsider such as a labour court.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings made, the following recommendations were made to make conflict yield positive effects.

- Hotel executives and managers should involve employees in the formulation of hotel policies, rules and regulations. This will help employees to rally behind the set policies and regulations and therefore enhance the realisation of set goals.
- It is also recommended that the two parties should make collective decisions especially on issues that directly or indirectly affect employees.
- The hotel industry should revise its reward system and come up with a system which is acceptable by workers. There is need to reduce salary differentials between managers and employees. It is also recommended that a standard salary scale and conditions of service be used for the whole industry, which can help reduce the rate of labour turnover.
- It is also recommended that third party intervention should be employed as soon as possible so as to avoid dysfunctional conflict. For example if employees strike and stay aways persist an outsider should be quickly engaged to resolve the conflict.
- The two parties should give each other enough time to resolve their problems before embarking on job stay aways and strikes. However employers should not take advantage of the long period and delay to resolve the identified problems.
- Negotiations between the two parties should also be done in good faith. Both parties need to demonstrate their commitment to fulfill their obligations in the agreements reached.

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