

## CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN THE POLYTECHNIC, IBADAN, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Employee engagement plays a pivotal role in enhancing institutional effectiveness, staff productivity, and organizational growth in higher education institutions such as The Polytechnic, Ibadan. This study examined the effect of conflict management strategies on employee engagement at the Polytechnic, focusing on how assertiveness, cooperativeness, and conflict resolution styles influence perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and structured questionnaires were administered to 234 staff of the institution from a population of 600 at a 95% confidence level, using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. Descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the research hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that conflict management strategies were perceived as moderately effective in addressing workplace disagreements, promoting collaboration, and encouraging fairness among employees. The results of the inferential analysis showed a significant positive relationship between conflict management strategies and employee engagement ( $r = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), thereby leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies that the adoption of effective conflict management approaches enhances job satisfaction, strengthens organizational support, and improves employees' commitment to their roles, which in turn sustains engagement within the institution. The study concludes that effective conflict management is not merely a tool for resolving disputes but a strategic mechanism for fostering higher engagement among employees. It therefore recommends the institutionalization of participatory conflict resolution mechanisms, regular training for staff, and transparent communication channels to maintain a harmonious and productive work environment.*

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Employee Engagement, Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction, Polytechnic, Nigeria

### Introduction

Engagement is a broad concept that generally refers to the level of involvement, commitment, and emotional investment an individual demonstrates toward a task, role, or relationship within a particular context. It is widely defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Schaufeli, 2021). In educational settings, engagement is considered multidimensional, encompassing behavioural, emotional, and cognitive aspects that influence outcomes (Fredricks et al., 2004;

Bond et al., 2020). In organizational contexts, engagement reflects the extent to which employees are psychologically present and motivated to contribute to organizational success (Kahn, 1990; Knight et al., 2021). Regardless of the domain, engagement remains critical for achieving high levels of performance, satisfaction, and sustained involvement.

Employee engagement refers to the emotional commitment and involvement an employee has toward their organization and its goals, significantly influencing motivation and performance. According to Kahn (1990),

engagement involves the harnessing of employees' selves to their work roles, whereby individuals express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance. Contemporary studies reinforce this view, emphasizing that engagement drives productivity, innovation, and retention (Saks, 2022; Shuck et al., 2021). Saks (2006) further distinguishes between job engagement and organizational engagement, while recent evidence shows that engaged employees demonstrate higher levels of discretionary effort and resilience (Albrecht et al., 2021). Empirical findings also indicate that employee engagement is positively associated with productivity, customer satisfaction, and reduced turnover (Harter et al., 2002; Gallup, 2023). Engaged employees contribute to organizational competitiveness by acting as advocates for their institutions (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Breevaart & Bakker, 2022).

Employee engagement is a globally recognized construct reflecting the degree to which employees are emotionally and cognitively committed to their work and organization. It encompasses enthusiasm, dedication, and willingness to exceed basic job expectations, resulting in improved performance and innovation (Schaufeli, 2021; Albrecht et al., 2021). Globally, organizations increasingly prioritize engagement as a strategic tool for enhancing performance and sustainability (Gallup, 2023). However, engagement levels vary across regions due to cultural, economic, and managerial differences. While developed economies often report higher engagement levels, developing contexts continue to face challenges such as ineffective leadership, limited participation, and inadequate reward systems (Saks, 2022; Aboramadan et al., 2020). This disparity underscores the need for context-specific studies on employee engagement.

Employee engagement at The Polytechnic, Ibadan appears moderate but inconsistent, with observable gaps requiring empirical investigation. While some staff demonstrate

commitment, others exhibit signs of disengagement, including low morale, reduced productivity, and poor communication with management. These challenges may stem from limited career advancement opportunities, inadequate recognition, and insufficient involvement in decision-making processes. Similar trends have been reported in recent studies on higher education institutions in developing countries (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Oludeyi et al., 2023). Despite the importance of engagement in driving institutional effectiveness, there is limited empirical evidence specific to polytechnic settings, particularly The Polytechnic, Ibadan. This gap necessitates systematic investigation to identify determinants and outcomes of engagement for improved institutional performance.

The Social Exchange Theory (SET), proposed by Blau (1964), underpins employee engagement by suggesting that workplace relationships are based on reciprocal exchanges. When employees perceive fairness, support, and value from their organization, they reciprocate with positive attitudes and behaviours such as increased engagement. Recent studies affirm the relevance of SET in explaining engagement dynamics in modern organizations (Cropanzano et al., 2021; Saks, 2022). Key constructs linked to engagement include perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, which have been widely validated in contemporary research (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Caesens et al., 2020). These constructs serve as measurable indicators of employee engagement in organizational settings.

Conflict management strategies refer to the approaches used to handle workplace disagreements constructively. Common strategies include avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising, and collaborating, varying in levels of assertiveness and cooperativeness (Rahim, 2002; Olang, 2021). Effective conflict management enhances trust, teamwork, and organizational climate, thereby promoting employee engagement

(Ayoko et al., 2021; De Clercq et al., 2020). Conversely, poor conflict management practices—such as favouritism, avoidance, or authoritarian decisions—can result in resentment, reduced trust, and disengagement (Jehn, 1995; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008; Opute et al., 2020). Employees who perceive conflict as poorly managed are more likely to experience stress and withdrawal, which negatively affect engagement and productivity.

The Dual Concern Theory (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986) explains conflict management based on concern for self (assertiveness) and concern for others (cooperativeness). Contemporary studies continue to validate this framework in organizational conflict research (Lee, 2020; Olang, 2021). These dimensions determine conflict resolution styles such as collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising. The constructs of assertiveness, cooperativeness, and conflict resolution style remain central to assessing conflict management strategies and their influence on employee outcomes.

The foregoing discussion indicates that conflict management strategies significantly influence employee engagement, particularly when poorly handled. Ineffective conflict resolution can undermine trust, increase stress, and reduce organizational commitment. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the influence of conflict management strategies on employee engagement in The Polytechnic, Ibadan.

Employee engagement is essential to the effectiveness of The Polytechnic, Ibadan, as it directly influences staff motivation, productivity, and commitment to institutional goals. However, engagement can be undermined by ineffective conflict management practices. Poorly managed conflicts—characterized by favouritism, communication breakdowns, and lack of structured resolution mechanisms—can lead to workplace tension and disengagement.

Recent studies confirm that ineffective conflict management significantly reduces

employee commitment and performance (Opute et al., 2020; Ayoko et al., 2021). For instance, unresolved workplace conflicts have been linked to emotional exhaustion, reduced collaboration, and declining organizational trust (De Clercq et al., 2020). In higher education institutions, these challenges are further compounded by bureaucratic structures and limited participatory decision-making (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Oludeyi et al., 2023).

At The Polytechnic, Ibadan, informal observations suggest increasing incidents of unresolved disputes and staff dissatisfaction, which may negatively affect engagement levels. Despite this, there is limited empirical evidence examining the relationship between conflict management strategies and employee engagement in polytechnic settings. This gap necessitates an empirical investigation to provide context-specific insights and recommendations for improving staff engagement and institutional performance.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this study is to examine the effect of conflict management strategies on employee engagement in The Polytechnic, Ibadan. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. determine the level of employee engagement in The Polytechnic, Ibadan.
2. identify the conflict management strategies used in The Polytechnic, Ibadan.
3. examine the effect of conflict management strategies on employee engagement in The Polytechnic, Ibadan.

### **Research Question**

1. What is the level of employee engagement in The Polytechnic, Ibadan?
2. What are the conflict management strategies used in The Polytechnic, Ibadan?

### **Research Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub>1. There is no significant effect of conflict management strategies on employee engagement in The Polytechnic, Ibadan.

### **Literature Review**

Employee engagement is widely recognized as a critical driver of organizational effectiveness in higher education and is defined as a positive, work-related state characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli, 2017; Schaufeli, 2021). Recent empirical studies in Nigerian and comparable higher-education contexts identify leadership practices, organizational culture, institutional policies, job characteristics, recognition systems, and supportive work environments as key determinants of engagement (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Ismail et al., 2024; Oludeyi et al., 2023; Albrecht et al., 2021). These factors collectively influence employees' psychological attachment to their work and institutions.

The literature further emphasizes Perceived Organizational Support, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment as central dimensions of employee engagement. While these constructs were originally conceptualized by Eisenberger et al. (1986), Locke (1976), and Meyer and Allen (1991), recent studies have reinforced their continued relevance in explaining employee behaviour and performance outcomes (Caesens et al., 2020; Saks, 2022; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Evidence suggests that supportive organizational policies, fair treatment, meaningful job design, and opportunities for professional development enhance reciprocity, reduce turnover intentions, and improve overall staff performance in higher education institutions.

Conflict management strategy is commonly framed through the Thomas–Kilmann model, which is based on the balance between assertiveness and cooperativeness and identifies five conflict-handling styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Contemporary research continues to validate this framework in organizational settings, emphasizing the importance of adaptive and context-specific conflict management approaches (Olang, 2021; Ayoko et al., 2021).

Recent studies, particularly within Nigerian and similar institutional contexts, highlight the effectiveness of collaborative and compromising strategies in transforming workplace disputes into opportunities for innovation, improved relationships, and enhanced organizational outcomes (Soyoye et al., 2023; Ogunode et al., 2024; Alamu & Ajayi, 2024; Ayeni & Ezirim, 2023). The literature identifies Assertiveness, Cooperativeness, and Conflict Resolution Style as key determinants of conflict management strategies. Balanced application of these dimensions promotes teamwork, trust, and morale, while poorly managed or avoidance-based approaches may lead to reduced employee engagement, increased stress, and organizational inefficiency (De Clercq et al., 2020; Opute et al., 2020).

Overall, the literature underscores the need for structured training, supportive policies, and institutional mechanisms that promote effective conflict resolution, particularly in polytechnic settings where hierarchical structures and administrative complexities may influence interpersonal dynamics and engagement levels.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Exchange Theory (SET)**

Social Exchange Theory (SET), developed by Blau (1964), explains workplace relationships as reciprocal exchanges in which employees respond positively, through engagement, loyalty, and effort, when they perceive

organizational support, fairness, and care. Within this framework, Perceived Organizational Support strengthens employees' willingness to reciprocate, Job Satisfaction reflects the positive emotions derived from fulfilling work experiences, and Organizational Commitment signifies the psychological attachment that grows from healthy exchange relationships. These three determinants collectively foster and sustain employee engagement in institutional settings. The relevance of SET to this study lies in its ability to clarify how supportive and fair organizational interactions at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, enhance engagement, and how poor conflict management can weaken reciprocity; thus, the theory benefits the study by providing a strong explanatory foundation for understanding why employees engage more actively when their social exchanges with the institution are positive and well-managed.

### **Dual Concern Theory**

The Dual Concern Theory, proposed by Pruitt and Rubin (1986), explains conflict management as a balance between concern for one's own interests (Assertiveness) and concern for others' interests (Cooperativeness), with the interaction of these two dimensions producing various Conflict Resolution Styles such as collaborating, competing, avoiding, accommodating, and compromising. These three determinants, Assertiveness, Cooperativeness, and Conflict Resolution Style, form the core measures of conflict management strategies in this study. The theory is relevant because it clarifies how

different approaches to conflict can either strengthen or weaken employee engagement at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, and its use ultimately benefits the study by providing a structured framework for assessing how balanced and effective conflict management strategies contribute to improved engagement.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine how conflict management strategies affect employee engagement among academic and non-academic staff of The Polytechnic, Ibadan. From a population of approximately 600 employees, a stratified sample of 234 respondents was selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table. Data were collected using a validated and reliable structured questionnaire measuring assertiveness, cooperativeness, conflict resolution style, perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, with reliability established through a pilot study using Cronbach's alpha. The instrument was administered with an introductory letter assuring confidentiality, and all 234 questionnaires were completed and returned, yielding a 100% response rate. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to answer research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation and regression analysis were employed to test the hypothesis using SPSS, providing empirical insight into how conflict management practices predict employee engagement within the institution.

### **Descriptive Statistics on the level of employee engagement**

<b>Statement</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Perceived Organizational Support</b>							
The Polytechnic values my contributions	9	26	59	79	61	2.33	1.17
The Polytechnic considers my goals	14	21	46	99	54	2.32	1.18
Help is available when I have a problem	11	30	49	94	50	2.39	1.20
The Polytechnic cares about my opinions	10	30	39	104	51	2.29	1.16

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Perceived Organizational Support</b>							
The Polytechnic cares about my satisfaction	8	19	47	100	60	2.20	1.14
<b>Average Mean = 2.31   SD ≈ 1.17</b>							

<b>Job Satisfaction</b>							
Satisfied with nature of work	10	25	58	88	53	2.34	1.15
Satisfied with career advancement	9	19	50	95	61	2.21	1.12
Satisfied with working conditions	9	19	50	95	61	2.21	1.12
Satisfied with recognition	11	24	56	82	61	2.36	1.16
Overall job satisfaction	8	20	55	98	53	2.25	1.13
<b>Average Mean = 2.27   SD ≈ 1.14</b>							

<b>Organizational Commitment</b>							
Strong sense of belonging	10	22	48	99	55	2.30	1.15
Willing to put in extra effort	6	27	55	98	48	2.29	1.12
Proud to be part of the institution	11	20	51	96	56	2.31	1.14
Feel emotionally attached	7	21	52	94	60	2.26	1.13
Intend to continue working	9	19	54	96	56	2.27	1.13
<b>Average Mean = 2.29   SD ≈ 1.13</b>							

**Overall Weighted Mean = 2.29 | SD ≈ 1.15**  
 Decision rule 1.00 – 1.49=Very Low, 1.50 – 2.49=Low, 2.50 – 3.49= High, 3.50 – 4.00=Very High

**Source:** Field Survey Data, 2025

The analysis reveals that employee engagement at The Polytechnic, Ibadan is relatively low, with an overall weighted mean of 2.29 and a standard deviation of 1.15. This suggests that, on average, staff feel moderately disengaged across key constructs of perceived organizational support, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The relatively low scores highlight areas for improvement, such as enhancing organizational support, job satisfaction, and fostering a stronger sense of commitment among employees.

**Descriptive Statistics on the conflict management strategies used in The Polytechnic, Ibadan?**

Statement	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Assertiveness</b>							
Maintain positive relationships	4	18	33	102	77	2.02	1.08
Show empathy in disputes	7	16	34	108	69	2.08	1.12
Willingly compromise	6	17	33	95	83	2.00	1.10
Collaborate for mutual benefit	7	17	29	103	78	2.03	1.11
Foster teamwork in conflict	6	16	32	104	76	2.03	1.10
<b>Average Mean = 2.03   SD ≈ 1.10</b>							

### Cooperativeness

Maintain positive relationships	4	18	33	102	77	2.02	1.08
Show empathy in disputes	7	16	34	108	69	2.08	1.12
Willingly compromise	6	17	33	95	83	2.00	1.10
Collaborate for mutual benefit	7	17	29	103	78	2.03	1.11
Foster teamwork in conflict	6	16	32	104	76	2.03	1.10

**Average Mean = 2.03 | SD ≈ 1.10**

### Conflict Resolution Style

Use collaborative approach	10	15	33	96	80	2.06	1.15
Adapt style based on situation	10	18	43	90	73	2.15	1.17
Use compromising strategies	10	15	36	94	79	2.08	1.16
Avoid conflict sometimes	9	22	42	93	68	2.20	1.18
Promote open communication	10	14	34	95	81	2.05	1.16

**Average Mean = 2.11 | SD ≈ 1.16**

**Weighted Mean = 2.06, SD ≈ 1.12**

Decision rule 1.00 – 1.49=Very Low, 1.50 – 2.49=Low, 2.50 – 3.49= High, 3.50 – 4.00=Very High

**Source:** Field Survey Data, 2025

The analysis indicates that conflict management strategies at The Polytechnic, Ibadan are relatively weak and ineffective, with a weighted mean of 2.06 and a standard deviation of 1.12. The results show that employees generally disagree with the presence of assertiveness, cooperativeness, and effective conflict resolution practices within the institution. This suggests that staff may not actively engage in constructive conflict handling behaviours such as collaboration, compromise, or open communication. The low ratings across all dimensions imply the existence of unresolved tensions, limited interpersonal trust, and inadequate institutional mechanisms for managing workplace conflicts. Consequently, there is a need for management to implement structured conflict management training,

promote open dialogue, and establish clear resolution frameworks to improve workplace relationships and enhance overall employee engagement.

### Test of Hypothesis

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Conflict management strategies do not significantly predict employee engagement among staff of The Polytechnic, Ibadan.

To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and simple linear regression analyses were conducted using SPSS. The analyses examined the relationship between Conflict Management Strategies (independent variable, aggregated mean score) and Employee Engagement (dependent variable, aggregated mean score) based on data collected from 234 respondents.

**Pearson Correlation Analysis**

Variables	Pearson (r)	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Conflict Management Strategies & Employee Engagement	0.518	0.000	234

The correlation coefficient (r = 0.518) indicates a moderate positive relationship between conflict management strategies and employee engagement. The relationship is statistically significant (p < 0.05), implying that improvements in conflict management practices are associated with higher levels of employee engagement.

**Regression Analysis**

**Model Summary**

Model R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.518	0.268	0.265
			0.490

**ANOVA**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	20.408	1	20.408	84.98	0.000
Residual	55.712	232	0.240		
Total	76.120	233			

**Coefficients**

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	1.919	0.244	—	7.861	0.000
Conflict Management Strategies	0.589	0.064	0.518	9.218	0.000

**Decision**

Since p < 0.05, the null hypothesis (H<sub>01</sub>) is rejected.

The regression analysis indicates that conflict management strategies significantly predict employee engagement among staff of The Polytechnic, Ibadan (R<sup>2</sup> = 0.268, F(1,232) = 84.98, p < 0.05). The positive regression coefficient (B = 0.589) suggests that an increase in effective conflict management practices leads to a corresponding increase in employee engagement. Specifically, conflict management strategies account for 26.8% of the variance in employee engagement, indicating a meaningful contribution to explaining engagement levels within the institution.

This finding implies that collaborative, adaptive, and well-structured conflict management approaches enhance employee

engagement by fostering trust, reducing workplace tension, and promoting a supportive organizational climate. Therefore, strengthening conflict management practices through staff training, open communication, and participatory decision-making can significantly improve engagement outcomes.

**Summary of Findings**

Based on data collected from 234 respondents, the findings of this study reveal that the level of employee engagement among staff of The Polytechnic, Ibadan is relatively low, with an overall weighted mean of approximately 2.29. The analysis across the three dimensions—Perceived Organizational Support, Job Satisfaction, and Organizational Commitment, indicates that employees

generally expressed dissatisfaction, particularly regarding organizational support and career advancement opportunities. This suggests that staff may feel undervalued and insufficiently supported, which could negatively affect their motivation and commitment. This finding aligns with recent studies which emphasize that inadequate organizational support and limited growth opportunities significantly reduce employee engagement in higher education institutions (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Saks, 2022; Albrecht et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the findings on conflict management strategies show a low level of effectiveness, with a weighted mean of approximately 2.06. The results indicate that employees generally do not perceive assertiveness, cooperativeness, and conflict resolution practices as adequately utilized within the institution. This implies that workplace conflicts may not be effectively managed, leading to strained relationships, reduced trust, and diminished collaboration. This outcome is consistent with contemporary research which shows that ineffective conflict management practices contribute to employee disengagement and reduced organizational performance (De Clercq et al., 2020; Opute et al., 2020; Ayoko et al., 2021).

Despite the low levels observed in both employee engagement and conflict management practices, the inferential analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between conflict management strategies and employee engagement ( $r = 0.518$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The regression analysis further indicated that conflict management strategies significantly predict employee engagement, accounting for 26.8% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.268$ ). This suggests that improvements in conflict management practices can lead to meaningful increases in employee engagement. This finding is supported by recent empirical studies which highlight that effective conflict resolution mechanisms enhance trust, improve workplace relationships, and foster higher levels of employee engagement (Saks, 2022; Ayoko et al., 2021).

Overall, the findings suggest that while employee engagement at The Polytechnic, Ibadan is currently low, it can be significantly improved through the adoption of effective and structured conflict management strategies. This underscores the importance of institutional policies and managerial practices that promote collaboration, fairness, and open communication in enhancing employee engagement and organizational effectiveness.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that conflict management strategies significantly influence employee engagement at The Polytechnic, Ibadan, with assertiveness, cooperativeness, and conflict resolution style as key predictors. Effective conflict resolution enhances job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived organizational support, translating into higher engagement. This highlights the need for HR practices to prioritize balanced conflict management through training and policies that foster a supportive, harmonious, and productive work environment.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that The Polytechnic, Ibadan, sustain and enhance employee engagement by implementing programs that boost job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and perceived organizational support. Administrators should adopt balanced conflict management strategies emphasizing assertiveness, cooperativeness, and effective resolution styles through regular training and workshops. Additionally, integrating conflict resolution mechanisms with engagement initiatives, such as establishing a conflict resolution committee, promoting participatory decision-making, and ensuring transparent dispute handling, can strengthen trust, cooperation, and overall staff engagement. Future studies should extend this research by examining conflict management strategies and employee engagement across multiple polytechnics or higher education institutions to enhance generalizability. Researchers may also adopt longitudinal or mixed-method

approaches to explore causal relationships and gain deeper insights into how conflict management practices evolve over time and influence employee engagement. Furthermore, additional variables such as leadership style, organizational culture, and emotional intelligence could be incorporated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employee engagement in educational settings.

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