

**PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF GROUP CONFLICT ON PERFORMANCE OF
ATHLETES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTH-EASTERN PARTS OF
NIGERIA**

BY

**AMAEFULE, KATHELEEN CHIMEZIEM.,¹
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN KINETICS AND HEALTH EDUCATION, OLABISI
ONABANJO UNIVERSITY, AGO-IWOYE, OGUN STATE.**

PROF. CHOM, E. J.²

**DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION, FACULTY OF
EDUCATION, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA.**

and

PROF. KABIDO, A. I.³

**DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION, FACULTY OF
EDUCATION, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA.**

ABSTRACT

This paper examined the perceived influence of group conflict on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. In conducting this research, relevant literatures were consulted from textbooks, journals, magazines, and retrievals from the internet. Expost-facto research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of six hundred athletes (600) from four (4) selected tertiary institutions (federal universities) in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, out of which two hundred and thirty-four respondents (234) were drawn for the study. A self-developed questionnaire was adopted for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select subjects for the study. The data collected were analyzed using one sample t-test of independence. The decision to accept and reject the null hypothesis was set at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The findings from the study revealed that group conflict had significant positive influence on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Based on the findings from the study, it was recommended that Coaches or athletic trainers should view conflict from its functional perspective and stop avoiding it in totality as it has the potential of improving athletes' performance. Also, when conflict arises in an athletic team, coaches should be fair enough to allow the parties involved to air their views and opinions to avoid dysfunctional conflicts.

Key words: Group conflict, Athletes, Performance

INTRODUCTION

The definition of the term ‘conflict’ has been approached from various perspectives by researchers in various disciplines and there has been transitions by different schools of thoughts in an attempt to come out with a consensus regarding what conflict is and how significant it can be in any organization. One school of thought (traditional view), argued that conflict must be avoided—that it indicates a malfunctioning within the group (Slocum & Hellriegel, 2011). Conflict was viewed negatively, and it was used synonymously with such term as *violence, destruction, and irrationality* to reinforce its negative connotation. Conflict was also seen as a dysfunctional outcome, resulting from poor communication, a lack of openness and trust between people, and failure of managers to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of their employees. Another school of thought, the *human relations* view, argues that conflict is a natural and inevitable outcome in any group and that it need not be evil, but rather has the potential to be a positive force in determining group performance. Since conflict was inevitable, the human relations school advocated acceptance of conflict. Proponents rationalized its existence: It cannot be eliminated, and there are even times when conflict may benefit a group’s performance. The human relations view dominated conflict theory from the late 1940s through the mid-1970s (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). The third and most recent perspective proposes not only that conflict can be a positive force in a group but explicitly argues that some conflict are absolutely necessary for a group to perform effectively. This third school is labeled the *interactionist approach*. This approach encouraged conflict on the ground that a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, and cooperative group is prone to becoming static, apathetic, and non-responsive to the need from change and innovation (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 2003). The major contribution of the interactionist approach therefore, is in encouraging group leaders to maintain an ongoing minimum level of conflict enough to keep the group viable, self-critical, and creative. Given the interactionist view, it becomes evident to say that conflict is not all good and

neither is it all bad. Whether it is good or bad is dependent on the type of conflict. The interactionist view does not suppose that all conflicts are good, rather, some conflicts support the goals of the group and improve its performance: these are *functional* or constructive forms of conflict. In addition, there are conflicts that hinder group performance; those are *dysfunctional* or destructive forms of conflict. These two forms of conflicts were briefly explained.

Statement of the problem

Records on the performance of athletes from tertiary institutions in South-Eastern, Nigeria, in the Nigerian University Games Association (NUGA) competitions as indicated in Ladani (2008) have not been encouraging. For instance, from 2001 to 2007 NUGA competitions, these institutions have been far on the medal tables. University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), in 2001 had three (3) gold medals to put the institution's name at the 11th position, Michael Opara Federal University of Agriculture, Umudike in the same year, had two (2) bronze medals, with the 27th position, while others were not on the medal tables. In 2007 NUGA competitions, only Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) made it to the medal table with just one (1) gold medal at the 33rd position. Also, from observations and interactions with some of these athletes, the researcher noticed that there seems to be the problem of misunderstanding among team members on various issues. As a result, some athletes find it difficult to relate properly with teammates, while others in trying to make effort to contribute to the success of their teams end up getting discouraged by the reactions they get, either from their teammates or coaches and trainers. Could these problems emanating from the athletic team affect positively or negatively their performance? It is in the quest to find an answer to this question, that the researchers undertook this study titled 'perceived influence of group conflict on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern parts of Nigeria.

Research Hypothesis

It is hypothesized in this study that there is no significant influence of group conflict on the performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES.

Conflict can be a serious problem in an organization. It can be described as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about (Dunnette & Hough, 1992). In other words, it is an active disagreement, as between opposing opinions or needs. In relation to athletic group, it could be described as a situation in which an athlete perceives that another athlete has negatively affected, or is about to affect something that the first athlete cares about or active disagreement among athletes in a team regarding opinions or needs. As noted earlier, there are two forms of conflicts: *functional or constructive* conflict and *dysfunctional or destructive* conflict.

Functional or constructive conflict

How might conflict act as a force to increase group performance? According to De Dreu and Van de Vliert (2003), it is hard to visualize a situation in which open or violent aggression could be functional. However, conflict is constructive when it improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation, encourages interest and curiosity among group members, provides the medium through which problems can be aired and tensions released, and fosters an environment of self-evaluation and change. This suggests that conflict can improve the quality of decision making by allowing all points, particularly the ones that are unusual or held by a minority, to be weighted in important decisions (De Dreu and Van de Vliert, 2003). Conflict is an antidote for groupthink. It does not allow the group to passively “rubber-stamp” decisions that may be based on weak assumptions, inadequate consideration of relevant alternatives or other debilities. Conflict challenges the status quo and therefore furthers the creation of new ideas, promotes reassessment of

group goals and activities and increases the probability that the group will respond to change. There is evidence indicating that conflict can also be positively related to productivity. For instance, it was demonstrated that, among established groups, performance tended to improve more when there was conflict among members than when there was fairly close agreement. The investigators observed that when groups analyzed decisions that had been made by the individual members of that group, the average improvement among the high-conflict groups was 73 percent greater than was that of those groups characterized by low- conflict conditions.

Dysfunctional or destructive conflict

The destructive consequences of conflict on a group or organization's performance are generally well known (Wall Jr, & Calister, 1995). A reasonable summary might state: Uncontrolled opposition breeds discontent, which acts to dissolve common ties, and eventually leads to the destruction of the group. There is a substantial body of literature to document how conflict – the dysfunctional varieties – can reduce group effectiveness (Wall Jr & Calister, 1995). Among the more undesirable consequences are a retarding of communication, reduction in group cohesiveness, and subordination of group goals to the primacy of infighting between members. At the extreme, conflict can bring group functioning to a halt and potentially threaten the group's survival.

Reasons for Conflict

There are many reasons for conflicts among groups and its members. Some of them are related to;

- Communication problems. The dissimilarity in the ideas and opinions of individuals result in a conflict. One needs to adjust with each other to some extent to avoid conflicts and better relations. Conflicts and fights must be prevented to avoid its adverse consequences like stress, anxiety and unnecessary tensions. Poor communication always results in misunderstandings and eventually conflicts. Communication has to be clear and precise to avoid conflicts. The

thoughts must be carefully put into sensible and relevant words for the others to understand well. Never use words which might hurt the sentiments of others and avoid using derogatory sentences. Do not use too complicated terminologies as the other person might not understand it well.

- Differences in interests and goals. Sometimes we have differences in goals and interests and this may result to conflict. To avoid this, the goals and interests of any given team or group must be clearly defined and understood by members at any given point in time.

- Different perceptions, attitudes. Individuals see the world through their own lens, and differences in perceptions of events can cause conflict, particularly where one person knows something that the other person does not know, but does not realize this. If team members regularly engage in "turf wars" or gossip, they might have a problem with conflicting perceptions. Additionally, negative performance reviews can also result from this type of conflict. Make an effort to eliminate this conflict by communicating openly with your team, even when you have to share bad news. The more information you share with your people, the less likely it is that they will come up with their own interpretations of events.

- Lack of clarity about responsibilities. Conflict can also arise where there are no clear roles or responsibilities of members in a group. Sometimes we have to perform a task that is outside our normal role or responsibilities. If this causes us to step into someone else's "territory," then conflict and power struggles can occur. Conflicting roles are similar to conflicting perceptions. One team member may view a task as his or her responsibility or territory. But when someone else comes in to take over that task, conflict occurs. If as a coach, you suspect that team

members are experiencing conflict over their roles, explain why you have assigned tasks or projects to each person. Your explanation could go a long way toward remedying the pressure. Summarily put, conflict can either make or mar the performance of a team, it all depends on how it is handled by the team leader or the coach.

METHODOLOGY

The ex-post-facto research design was adopted for this study. This method was found appropriate, because the information required on the perceived influence of group conflict on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern parts of Nigeria exists among them (Nworgu, 1999). The population of this study comprised six hundred (600) athletes (both males and females), which is the total number of athletes available on record in the four federal universities in the South-Eastern parts of Nigeria. Note that Federal University Ndufu-Aliki, Ikwo, Ebonyi State, was not included in this study because it was established in 2011 and had not featured in any NUGA competition when this research was conducted. See table below.

S/N	Names of institution	Number of athletes on records
1.	Federal University of Technology , Owerri	147
2	Michael Opara University of Agriculture, Umudike	145
3	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.	153
4	University of Nigeria, Nsukka.	155
Total		600

Source: Sports units of each of the institutions under study (2012).

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the athletes. This sample technique was adopted based on the characteristics of the respondents. In determining the required sample size, the

method by Morgan and Krejcie (1970), was adopted. According to this method, in a population of 600, the required sample size is 234. This sample size was spread across the institutions with each having 58 respondents and 60 respondents from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, with the highest population. See table below:

S/N	Names of institution	number of respondents
1	Federal University of Technology , Owerri	58
2	Michael Opara University of Agriculture, Umudike	58
3	Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.	58
4	University of Nigeria, Nsukka.	60
Total		234

A questionnaire divided into two sections, which was vetted by four (4) jurors to ensure its face and content validity was developed and adopted for the study. Section A consisted of items on the demographic characteristics of respondents while section B which was the main instrument sought answers on group conflict and athletes' performance. The five (5) point likert rating scale method (strongly agreed- 5, agreed- 4, undecided - 3, disagreed - 2 and strongly disagreed - 1) was used for soliciting responses from the respondents. In administering the instrument, a letter of introduction was obtained and sent to the sports centers of the tertiary institutions under study. This enabled the researcher gain access to the respondents (athletes), through their coaches and sports officers. Two hundred and thirty-four (234) athletes were sampled for this study, out of which 216 (92%), of them returned their instruments. This population (216 returned instrument), formed the data for which this analysis which was carried out, using the 20th version of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The hypothesis of this study was tested using one sample t-test statistic.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of group conflict on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern parts of Nigeria

One sample t-test on group conflict and athletes' performance

Variable. group conflict and athletes' performance	N	Mean	Std.dev	Std. Err	Df	t calcu lated	t- critical	Sig (p)
Aggregate mean score	216	3.0962	.321	0.6212	215	16.05	1.96	0.000
Fixed mean score	216	3.5000	0.000	0.000				

t (215)1.96, p<0.05

In the table above, the test of the hypothesis revealed that the calculated t value of 16.05 is greater than the critical t value of 1.96 while the calculated p value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. This implies that there is significant positive influence of group conflict on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in South-Eastern, Nigeria. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of group conflict on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in South-Eastern, Nigeria is hereby rejected.

Discussion

This study investigated the perceived influence of group conflict on performance of athletes in tertiary institutions in the South-Eastern parts on Nigeria. The analysis of respondents' opinion revealed that group conflict is inevitable and cannot negatively influence athletes' performance. The implication of this is that though conflict arises in their group, athletes do not see it as a factor that can negatively influence their performance. In other words, they do not see group conflict as a problem that can mar their performance. Rather, they believe that when they have differences in opinions or when there seems to be problems due to lack of clarity about their responsibilities, they

should be given the opportunity to make their own contributions as individual members of the team. This in turn will create room for better understanding among team members, bring in innovations and creativity needed for optimum performance. This explains why the test of this hypothesis was rejected. The result of this finding therefore indicates that group conflict should not be totally avoided as it has the potential to influence performance positively. This finding does not agree with the traditional relations view of conflict, which according to Slocum and Hellriegel (2011) stated that conflict must be avoided; that it indicates a malfunctioning within the group. However, this finding is in line with the human relations approach to conflict. This school of thought as stated by Jehn and Mannix (2001) posited that conflict is a natural and inevitable outcome in any group and that it need not be evil, but rather has the potential to be a positive force in determining group performance. In addition, this finding also agreed with the interactionist approach to conflict which proposes not only that conflict can be a positive force in a group but explicitly argues that some conflicts are absolutely necessary for a group to perform effectively. This approach encouraged conflict on the ground that a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, and cooperative group is prone to becoming static, apathetic, and non-responsive to the need from change and innovation than a conflicting group (De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 2003). The major contribution of the interactionist approach therefore, is in encouraging group leaders to maintain an ongoing minimum level of conflict enough to keep the group viable, self-critical, and creative.

Conclusion

Group conflict has a significant positive influence on performance of athletes in South-Eastern Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and its limitations, the researcher recommends that, Coaches or athletic trainers should view conflict from its functional perspective and stop avoiding it in totality as it has the potential of improving athletes' performance.

Also, when conflict arises in an athletic team, coaches should be fair enough to allow the parties involved to air their views and opinions to avoid dysfunctional conflicts.

Coaches should be able to build trust and confidence among team members in order to reduce communication problems which often bring about dysfunctional conflicts.

REFERENCES

- De Dreu, C. & Van de Vliert (2003). *Using Conflicts in Organizations*. London: Sage Publication. Retrieved, June 30, 2012, from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com>
- Dunnette, M. D. & Hough, L. M (1992). *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. (2nd edition). 3. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press. pp. 651-652
- Jehn, K. A., & Mannix, E. A. (2001). "The Dynamic Nature of Conflict: A Longitudinal Study". *Academy of Management Journal* 44(2): 232-251. Retrieved April 12, 2012, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/conflict>.
- Ladani, B. A. (2007). *History and Development of Physical Education and Sports in Nigeria*. Zaria. Faith Printers International. pp.117-159
- Morgan, T. A. and Krejcie, R.V (1970). *Method of Determining the Sample Size of a Population*. Retrieved August 19, 2012, from www.research-advisors.com
- Nworgu, B. G (1999). *Educational Research: Basic Issues and Methodology*. Ibadan Wilson Publishers Limited.
- Slocum, J. W. & Hellriegel, D. (2011). *Principles of Organizational Behaviour* (13th Ed.). China. Translation and Printing Services Limited. pp. 154-157
- Wall, J. A., Jr., and Calister, R. R. (1995). "Conflict and its Management", *Journal of Management*, 21 (3): 515-558.