



Language Use in Conflict Management and Resolution in some Higher Learning Institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon

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Abstract: There has been an increasing denunciation/decry of the existence of conflicts, and the way in which these conflicts are managed and resolved in the higher education system of Anglophone Cameroon. Although the administration of the said system has some awareness of conflicts management and resolution strategies, it has been observed that the parties involved are lacking in the practice of these strategies. In addition, language, a decisive element in the management and resolution of conflicts in the workplace, is relegated to the background. This paper, therefore, proposes a sociolinguistic description and an examination of how language is used in conflict and conflict management and resolution in some workplaces in Cameroon higher education, using the Thomas-Kilmann conflict management model. Using questionnaire and focused group discussions, data were collected, analysed, and presented in frequency tables, charts, and cross-tabulations. The study found that conflicts are caused by poor use of language, leading to approximate human resource management, emotional contempt, interpersonal misunderstanding, disregard for timelines, and incomplete or erroneous understanding of tasks. Of the five conflict management styles (competing, accommodating, avoiding, collaborating and compromising), language use showing avoidance and/or concession was found to be the most common to members of the workplace. The study also found that proper training on communication and professionalism, mentoring, and coaching would reduce conflict. Therefore, a strong organizational culture will reduce conflict and improve workplace performance.

1. Introduction

Conflict is at the centre of most of the mishaps that lead to inefficiency, ineffectiveness and unproductiveness at the workplace (Ebong, 2014, pp. 24, 136). Most of the inefficiency, ineffectiveness and unproductiveness found at workplace are due to poor interaction. These hitches in interaction are inevitable because for every interaction, the interlocutors (be they individuals or groups) have different minds, IQs, behavioural patterns, beliefs, objectives, backgrounds etc. In most cases, these differences account for the conflicts that arise in the communication process.

Language and its use in communicating these differences are central to the conflict process: from its creation to its resolution. Scholars like Ngabonziza (2013, p. 7) have pointed out that “language analysis is a prominent tool in major approaches of conflict management ...” Others like Bercovitch (1983, p. 104); Kohlriseser (2007, p. 1); McConnon & McConnon (2008, pp. 25-31); and Spaho (2013, pp. 103-104) have pointed out that most of the issues that have either brought conflict or peace in different spheres of life, caused or resolved wars, and divided or united countries are as a result of communication. Therefore, how language is used to communicate ideas and actions can

either foster or hinder a conducive working atmosphere and this has intriguing outcomes on a group's objectives.

Although there exist basic conflict management and resolution skills and strategies, it is worth noting that over the years, researchers have found that these applicable principles differ in contexts. They can greatly be influenced by belief systems, psychological differences, cultural inclinations, social strata, infrastructure but to name a few. Taking into consideration the differences in context and culture, this study details conflict management and resolution endeavours that work for the Anglophone Cameroon context. The paper focus on conflict management and resolution at the workplace, and the mitigating role that language plays in its achievement. It answers the questions:

1. In what ways do conflicts manifest, and are managed and resolved in the Anglophone Cameroon administrative tertiary education system.
2. Do workers' use of language have an effect on conflict, conflict management and conflict resolution processes?

2. Trends in Conflict Management and Resolution

Ebong (2014, pp. 127-131) discusses the situational linguistic basis of every communicative event: the context, participants, setting, occasion, purpose of a discourse, register, style, and jargons. It was found that organisations use face-to-face, documented (memos, letters, communiques, etc.), telephone and electronic media of communication (internet, web sites, web pages, social media etc.) to distribute functions, duties, assignments, information and facilitate normal day-to-day functionality and interaction at the workplace. This sits in with Unnamed Author et al. (2017) agree with this when they opine that writing is a priority for most businesses because written communication is essential for the proper execution of business. Ensuring this entails writing clear, understandable, and professional messages. Presenting a message in a manner such that there is a correlation between what was inferred and what was intended is successfully communicating. It isn't just enough for communication to take place; it is needful for there to be good communication. According to Unnamed Author et al. (2017), communication is more than what is said; it is how the message is rendered and perceived irrespective of genre.

It was found that there is usually a clash between organisational culture and ethnicised culture as elderly subordinates will expect a degree of respect from younger bosses even in correcting or rebuking. "Issues like voice level, turn taking, interference have slight differences in accordance with the different cultural backgrounds of workers and sometimes, when used inappropriately, generate conflict and the extent to which personnel communication and relationships negatively affects group functionality and performance is high" (Ebong, 2014, p. 130). All the above as suggested by the data and findings of the study led to the recommendation that "conflicts should be well managed to avoid frequent breakdowns in communication and effective management should start with leadership" (Ebong, 2014, p. 132). It is on the basis of this recommendation that this current study takes its stance in investigating the dynamics and implementation of conflict management and resolution measures.

Opara (2016, p. 11) explores the hitches in the use of English language as a tool for intercultural conflict resolution, and stresses the need for other considerations of language use in national and transnational conflict resolution. She insists that working toward peace and stability by communicating and respecting different cultures and languages is imperative because members' cognitive processes are shaped by both culture and language therefore room should be made for other Englishes. She holds that words are linguistically, culturally and contextually bound, therefore restricting language use to English in global conflict resolution is problematic. Holmes, J.; Marra, M.; Newton, J.; Joe, A.; Riddiford, N.; & Vine, B. (2009, p. 3) reflect this trait in their work *Language in the Workplace Occasional Papers* were they illustrate that New Zealand is 'ethnicised' meaning Maori values and ways of doing things, ways of communicating, and code-switching prevail in the workplace setting, making it difficult for migrants to adequately access the professional milieu thereby instigating conflict. Using the case of Nigeria, Opara (2016, p. 13) shows the irrefutable connection between language and culture, portraying that varied considerations have to be

upheld since being bilingual or multilingual also means embodying a mixture of cultures. It was found that just as expressions from native English speakers will be foreign to Nigerians so too will Nigerian English expressions be foreign to native English Speakers; thus the need to familiarise with disputants if communication has to be effective and conflicts resolved. This corroborates Ebong (2014, p. 14) finding that project that successful communication occurs in an environment of shared background information with culture being one of the items. Some of such Nigerian English expressions include:

The study also found that Being respectful and obedient to elders is a strong cultural value for Nigerians, whether in their domestic or professional settings and are characteristic of communalism meanwhile English speaking countries have individualistic tendencies and care less for respect and more for professionalism as expressed primarily in their address forms (Opara, 2016, p. 13). Considering that the significance of words depends on the common context of the people who use them, valued placement between and among cultures is primordial in relationships and management of conflicts. This study gives the insensitive to why our current study upholds as one of its objectives cultural underpinning for workplace functionality and resolving conflicts. As much as this shows how lacking English as a Lingua Franca is to resolving global conflicts, so too is proposing and constructing context based paradigms to conflict resolution, with culture being one of its driving forces. This an additive measure this current study intends to bring forth as it takes into consideration the different facets of culture that are present at the workplace – workplace, personal and ethnic cultures.

Losenje (2018, p. 2) researching on indigenous language use in conflict resolution demonstrates how proverbial usage in the Mokpe indigenous language serves as an instrument for conflict prevention and resolution; not leaving out how the translator as a mediator sets the stage for the above. Just like Opara (2016), he insists on the necessity of cultural considerations in the prevention and/or resolution of conflicts as he points that “the indigenous language is the most effective engine for capturing a people’s thought pattern and culture” and as earlier mentioned in this work an individual’s or group’s thought pattern or belief system greatly instructs perceptions of and responses to conflict. Using a corpus based approach, one hundred Mokpe proverbs relating to conflict resolution in the traditional council and customary court settings were studied and analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) (Losenje, 2018, pp. 112 -124). The conflict situations that necessitate conflict prevention and resolution in this community range from greed and covetousness, laziness, gossip, disrespect, and boastfulness, to more intense issues like marital intolerance, witchcraft, trespassing, wrongful claiming of land property etc. The study found that proverbs are important and necessary for the conflict resolution, conflict transformation and conflict prevention. It was discovered that Mopke “proverbs that have to do with conflict resolution generally preach forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing ...marital tolerance, restorative justice, restoration of broken relationships, mutual collaboration, peaceful co-existence etc.” (Losenje, 2018, p. 246). He also found that these proverbs foster conflict transformation as they project the ‘necessity for hard work and industry’ advising indigenes that this will provide little or no time for conflict rather, more time to harness skill and pour in resources that will engage the community in positive transformation. As regards conflict prevention, the study situates proverbs that advocate the “need to avoid gossips, ...strife, as well as warning against avoidable attitudes that are likely to provoke conflict...” The study posits that the role of the cultural mediator is highly sensitive as he ensures the proper replication and rendition of the message from the source language to the target language; in this case, Mopke and English respectively. Unlike this study which situates conflict resolution within the confines of the judiciary system, this current study investigates conflict resolution within the ranks of corporate sphere and institutional discourse. Just like Losenje (2018), this current study focuses on the importance of language use in the resolution processes, the difference sets in with the language type and the linguistic elements involved: he focused on indigenous language use with proverbial usage as the tool for conflict resolution meanwhile this current study uses the English language.

In discussing sex-class linked framing of talk at work Tannen (1994 , pp. 195-221) describes ways of speaking distinguishes sex-class linked from sex linked communication – “that is, discourse that is

linked with the class of women or class of men rather than necessarily individual members of that class.” She states that the effect of hierarchical relations on communication was the focus of her research and the findings made it clear that gender differences and their incidence on language which were greatly focused on culture or ethnicity have moved from that to incorporate aspects of class, social status, educational qualification etc. In this section of the book, she analysed examples of office interaction that show framing as a way of balancing status and connection. The study found that “patterns associated with gender are pervasive in the interactions and reflected on a range of levels including vocabulary, topic, intonational contours, and the whole array of alignments...” In this 3-year study of how women and men talk at the workplace, Tannen (1994 , p. 212) found that “higher social status is associated with display and lower status with spectatorship” seen in instances where female workers exclude the lower status workers from their conversation by changing the topic or making the lower status workers the topic of discussion while the male interactants include the lower status depending on the topic. This has dire consequences for how conflict situations in the workplace can either rise or be prevented. How gender manifest in an organisation’s culture or climate will either prevent or create conflict. Although this has obtained for years, a recent study shows the shift from gender discrimination between and among groups to a rising need and expression of gender neutrality in the work place. Ebong (2014, p. 127) found that although gender differences play a role on workplace functionality and the display of linguistic dominance and politeness, it is only to a lesser extent. While men hold more hierarchical positions that women do, professionalism, workplace ethics and culture are obviously respected to a greater extent, making the differences in female and male workplace interaction inconsequential. It can be agreed that the degree of gender neutrality expressed at the workplace is encouraging enough for functionality and performance. This current study comes in to not only discuss these gender differences or rise in gender neutrality but also propose a more stable gender neutral ground implemented through workplace culture as these account for most of the disputes that arise between male and female workplace members.

(Ngabonziza, 2013, p. 34) uses the emblem of discourse analysis to bring to light the place of language in Rwandan conflict and its resolution. He analyses language use from three perspectives: language use as genesis of Rwandan conflict; language use as development of genocide ideology; and language use as conflict resolution and peace building. He clearly demonstrates how the semantic change of Rwandan terms such as ‘Umuhutu’ ‘Umututsi’ ‘Umutwa’ ‘ubwoko’ account for the creation of ethnic concepts that were the origin of all Rwandan conflicts and the Genocide. The choice of words the natives use when discussing certain concepts or referring to a set or class of people build anti- Tutsi concepts that are transmitted as agents of thoughts and ideas that fuel conflict. The intertwining of culture and language and their incidence on conflict and its resolution is evident in the findings that several words, negative expressions and sentences had been used as anti-Tutsi concepts that demonstrate the necessity to murder the whole group. This linguistic change towards and myths surrounding the Tutsis “have been a source of hatred, violence, massacres and genocide between Rwandans” (Ngabonziza, 2013, p. 36). Such conflict driven language can only birth violence and the outcome was witnessed in 1994. He projects that conflict resolution strategies, especially in developing countries, have been void of language use, an understanding of its importance will lessen the degree of conflict being spread abroad. “The use of language has played a role in restoring peace in Rwanda after the genocide. The Commission for Unity and Reconciliation in Rwanda has employed language to communicate and to counter the ideology of genocide. This can be seen in the solidarity camps, Ingando, that are organized for different groups of people such as students, youth, leaders, and teachers, and in the “Itorerory’ igihugu” program that aims to revive the Rwandan culture. Leaders have also used various terms to influence people’s attitudes. For example, Rucagu Boniface, the former governor of the northern provinces, achieved his goal of demobilizing the supporters of genocide by using slogans. A lexical analysis shows that terms such as unity, reconciliation, peace, work, integrity have been used at a rate of 85% in the speeches of H.E Paul Kagame in 2003.” (Ngabonziza, 2013, pp. 36-37). He advises that for there to be proper management of conflicts and development of the country, policy makers and researchers should take

into account that language studies are of great importance as a mitigating factor. It is on this premise that this current studies comes in to do same in the context of the workplace.

Conflict resolution is of increasing concern as it is an undeniable ingredient to human survival and communal and societal growth as reflected in the works of Losenje (2018); Opara (2016); Ebong (2014); Ngabonziza (2013) and Tannen (1994). However, none of these studies have investigated language use in conflict, conflict management and resolution in tertiary education institutions in Anglophone Cameroon. It is safe therefore to say that there is a load of data on conflict resolution that will guide the investigation of the concept in the Anglophone Cameroon context. Although of great importance, there is a paucity of this in the said context but because organisational discourse is universal to some extent, the studies reviewed above serve as suitable foundations for this current study to build on. From the foregoing review of related concepts, it can be concluded that language is a guiding force in understanding conflict, conflict management and conflict resolution especially in workplace situations. A lot has been said and done in the western world and some parts in Africa and Cameroon that guides the research design of this study. It will not only guide the proper use of data collection instruments, and constructive data collection, but will also serve as a significant mechanism for data analysis.

Statement of Problem

Conflict is the prominent cause of the increasing ratio of inefficiency, ineffectiveness and unproductiveness witnessed at the workplace (Ebong, 2014, p. 24, 136). Ebong (2014) even recommends that “conflicts should be well managed to avoid frequent breakdowns in communication, and effective management should start with the leadership”. Other stake holders such as Losenje (2018); Tsewah (2014) and Mbah (2009); have also decried the proliferation of conflicts and conflict management and resolution practices in the country. The Anglophone Cameroon tertiary administrative education system is not left out. This persistence however raises concerns as to whether the efforts put in place to ameliorate conflicts in this context are adequate.

In fact, one is tempted to assume that if conflicts at the workplace persist despite the organigrams and instruments put in place, then the deficiency of conflict management and resolution skills and strategies in the administrative sectors of tertiary education institutions in Anglophone Cameroon have a role to play. Because language is an essential tool in managing and resolving workplace-related conflicts, this paper details the use of language in conflict management and resolution and it's effectiveness

Methodology

To answer the research questions presented above, this study employed the mixed research methods – both qualitative and quantitative methods. The method used in collecting and analysing data is the explanatory sequential design. This is a three-phase mixed methods design that requires the collection and analysis of quantitative data on the one hand and the development of a qualitative phase to help explain or improve on the results on the other. In this case, the preferred qualitative strand used was the follow-up explanations variant.

Because administrative functionality informs academic structures and efficiency which account for the quality of education offered to the students and the public, the central administrative organs of UB, HIMS Buea and SHIBAT Kumba were selected as the sample for this study. The choice for these institutions was on the basis that UB is a state university and the other two, private universities. The criteria used to choose them include the student population, annual graduate population, performance and infrastructure Cameroon Labour Code, Law No.92/007 of 14 August 1992 and MINESUP (2020). The third institution was considered for it meritorious results despite being created and accredited amidst the Anglophone crisis MINESUP (2020). If this institution is producing such results in the heart of the crisis situation, then it is possible that it has a degree of conflict management and resolution practices that are of interest to a study like this one. It was important to see how not just already established institutions manage conflicts but how young ones do too.

This study made use of the simple random sampling and purposive sampling. Respondents were randomly selected to respond to the questionnaire and participants were purposefully chosen for the focus group discussion based on the relevance of their responses, the results and the observations made in the process of administering the questionnaire. The questionnaire was randomly administered to support staff, academic staff and administrative staff. It evaluated language use, conflict, language use in conflict management and resolution and workplace culture by eliciting information regarding:

1. The words or expressions they use in addressing their boss/subordinates when they are dissatisfied/offended.
2. The communicative acts they carry out in the processes of managing/resolving conflicts? But to list a few.

A total of 61 subjects responded to the questionnaire and after quality control was done 11 were discarded and 51 were retained for the analysis, reason being that the different sections were inter-related. Thus, failing to provide certain responses obstruct the analysis like cross tabulation and the chi square test. The study further used follow-up explanations variant to explain quantitative result using focus group discussion. This was done to have better insight of the phenomena; correlate and support/discard the responses given through means of questionnaire; and gain relevant data that may have been missed out, using a recorder and note taking. The use of open-ended and follow-up questions gave participants room to throw more light not only on conflict and conflict management practices in their different institutions but also on the implication of language in these practices.

Data Analyses Procedures

The study used various analytical procedures. The first was the statistical analytical procedure. Data collected by means of questionnaire was entered with the aid of created variables which were given codes and code descriptions. Data were processed and analysed using Microsoft Excel and the SPSS package for data analysis. The study made use of frequencies, cross tabulations and the Chi-square test of relations and the data were presented on frequency tables and charts. The second analytical procedure employed was content analysis. The data collected using focus group discussion were transcribed, given codes and code descriptions and analysed thematically. The themes include prevailing conflicts, power/solidarity, language choices and their effects, gender, organisational culture and professionalism.

3. Findings and Discussion

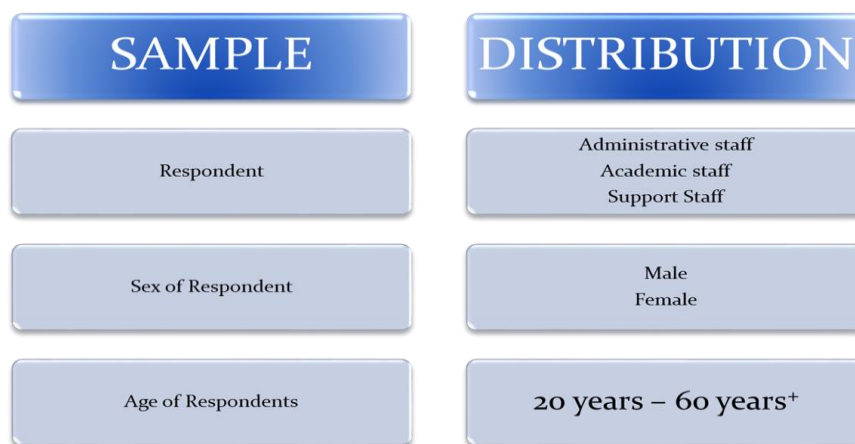
This part of the paper presents findings and discussions from questionnaire and focus group discussion simultaneously. Conflict creation and initiation; language use in conflict creation;

conflict management styles and preferences; effects of conflicts processes; and organisational culture and professionalism are some of the themes presented in this discussion.

3.1. Summary Demographic results

Of the 51 respondents to the questionnaire, the support staff consist 29.4%, the academic staff 25.5% and the administrative/academic staff 43.1%. The data shows that the male folk of our target population represents 54.9 % of the population while the female folk constitute 45.1%. Most of the staff (33.3%) fell within the age range 41-50, followed by the ranges 31-40 and 20-30 which makes up 25.5% and 23.5% of the population respectively.

Figure 1:



3.2. Conflict Creation and Initiation

It was found that, the workplace setting is characterised by four main areas of conflict. Conflicts were found to occur more in the area of tasks completion. Conflicts over incomplete or fallacious understanding of the assignment were at the top of the chart with 33.3% of the population acknowledging it high frequency and 39.2% confirming that conflicts over tasks responsibility and task completion within a unit also occurred to a greater extent. Since tasks are rightly distributed but face hitches with completion, the goal of the institution will not be met, considering the fact that time is a controlling factor in educational settings. This therefore affects productivity.

Table 1 Showing distribution of respondents by conflict situations and their frequency

	Rarely	Not Often	Often	Very Often	Total
Conflicts over supervisor always telling employee what to do	39 76.5	7 13.7	3 5.9	2 3.9	51 100.0
Conflicts over different interests/ ideas /viewpoints related to distribution of resources/tasks/ etc.	20 39.2	18 35.3	9 17.6	4 7.8	51 100.0
Conflicts over incomplete or fallacious understanding of the assignment	14 27.5	19 37.3	17 33.3	1 2.0	51 100.0
Conflicts over tasks responsibility and task completion within a unit	14 27.5	15 29.4	20 39.2	2 3.9	51 100.0

The study also reveals that conflicts manifest through interpersonal differences. A case in point was the issue of measures being put in place to restrict support staff (administrative assistants, secretaries, drivers, cleaners, drivers etc.) from furthering their education. This created conflict between the administrative body and the support staff. The victims attributed these changes to bias, greed, selfishness, a sense of monopoly of position holding and fear of competition while the administration projects that these changes were implemented because staff abused the opportunities given them. These interpersonal and group differences on the rationale for such a change is responsible for the conflict observed. It is clear that conflicts in higher institutions of learning are not only tasks related but also emotionally and psychologically related. The results show that workers’ mind set of the work situation vis-à-vis leave of absence has caused a good number of them to behave in ways that do not reflect their status as either subordinates or bosses.

Conflict Case: Restrictions in furthering studies

As pointed out earlier, there exist a conflict situation where support staff are restricted from obtaining formal education while in active service. As from 2020/2021 academic year, all staff who were schooling were given the choice to either quit their jobs completely and focus on their education or focus on work and forget about pursuing their educational goals.

What obtains within institutions in Cameroon is that individuals in the civil service who wants to foster their education is expected to file for a leave of absence and if granted, such individuals go to school. In time past, this institution has handled such situations with seemingly different

specifications. Staff are granted permission to go to school while continuing effective service with a strict consideration on time and its effects on work.

Participants in the focus group discussion projected that the staff population that is affected by this change from partial leave of absence to complete leave of absence blames this change on bias and greed. They stated that this change is a strategy to avoid competition and keep them from growing as some of them started from almost nothing and are now controlling influential positions especially ones that have financial advantages. They also attest that this change is driven by selfishness, a sense of monopoly of position holding and fear of competition as going to school doesn't stop them from working effectively, thus making these changes unfounded.

The administration on its part posits that such changes came into implementation because of the abuse staff gave to such opportunities. It sees this change as a measure to keep staff committed to their job, and make sure ample time is given for the completion of tasks and group objectives thereby fostering productivity. Threatening staff with their job is different from giving them the needed leave of absence as prescribed by the constitution. The Cameroon labour law code rather stipulates momentary leave of absence, that is every worker is entitled to a one-month annual leave. Other instances may be maternity leave, sick leave or education leave which varies according to organisation Cameroon Labour Code, Law No.92/007 of 14 August 1992. As earlier mentioned, the former will necessitate complete absence for a period of time. This however does not mean that they will never resume duty should they decide to take this long term leave.

This has created room for discords and conflicts. Although confrontations are not made, staff are in conflict and disagreement as they bear grudges. Conflict is perceptible in the way support staff who have been affected with this change in status quo carry on with their work. This is seen in their slowness to attain tasks and group objectives; the indifference expressed in their speech when communicating with the authorities involved and other lukewarm mannerism.

Such conflicting stands in the workplace are not just because staff's personal feelings are hurt but because workplace culture concerning structural changes as these are not clearly defined. Obtaining and instilling the right culture and properly disseminating information when changes turn-up; having the right rationale for such changes and producing legal documents; and binding laws to this effect will go a long way to resolve and correct some of these issues.

3.3. Language use in conflict creation

Word Choices

The study found that when respondents are in disagreement or are dissatisfied with task distribution and completion, the choice of words used is partly responsible for conflicts experienced at the workplace. It was found that words and expressions that show concession were top on the list with a 56.9% while those that express negotiation came in next with 43.1% of the population affirming to it. Team building and task orientation which should be the focus even in instances of dissatisfaction were neglected as only 23.5% and 33.3% of the population consider using such expressions. 27.5% of the population attest to using expressions and phrases that justify themselves in instances of dissatisfaction and 37.3% use expressions and phrases that show revolting and this is considerable high.

Table 2 Showing distribution of respondents by Language expressing dissatisfaction

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	No	Percent	

Team Building: collaborate, joint action, group effort, many hands make work lighter, man isn't an island, Synergy	12	8.6%	23.5%
Justifying: the reason for this..., my reaction was due to..., why didn't you ask me why...,	14	10.1%	27.5%
Task Oriented: 360-degree thinking, over time, focus, hard work, commitment, proactive, hit the nail on the head, the bottom line	17	12.2%	33.3%
Power Talks: you had no right to, it wasn't your place to, you had to get authorization before, procrastinate	9	6.5%	17.6%
Evolution or Change: Take it to the next level, paradigm shift, raise the bar, win-win yes, you're right... I'm with you on that... we should stop fighting...	17	12.2%	33.3%
Revolution or Escalation: Throw him/her under the bus, dismiss, I quite, stop treating people like trash, I can't take this nonsense, you are so insensitive, barking up the wrong tree, back to square one, no need to take that tone of voice with me.	19	13.7%	37.3%
Negotiation: bonus, understand, consider, Let's take a deep dive, it takes two to tango, Tell me what it is about me that irritates you. How can I fix this? Help me understand. / Please, explain what you mean.	22	15.8%	43.1%
Concession: ok, it's ok, yes, I know, if you say so, I understand, let sleeping dogs lie, it's no longer of importance, you win, etc.	29	20.9%	56.9%
Total	139	100.0%	272.5%

Communication acts respondents use in expressing dissatisfaction

Complaining (62.7%), grumbling (51.0%), analysing (37.3%), self-concealing (33.3%), listening (33.3%), pointing out mistakes and giving corrections in private (31.4%), and criticising (25.5%) are the prominent speech acts that staff display when dissatisfied or in disagreement with either a supervisor, boss or colleague(s). It is interesting to note that although complaining and grumbling are top on the list, a good number of respondents also make efforts in analysing the conflict situation, and this is a pointer to handling conflicts objectively.

Complaining (58.8%), pointing out mistakes and giving corrections in private (56.9%), scolding (54.9%) educating (45.1%) and questioning (33.3%) are the speech acts most used by respondents' supervisors, bosses or subordinates when expressing dissatisfaction or offense. It is interesting to note the Anglophone Cameroon administrative tertiary education system practices "complaining" most when frustrated with work irrespective of their position.

Table 3 Showing distribution of respondents by communication acts used in expressing dissatisfaction

Speech acts respondents use			Speech acts used on/with respondents		
	Count	Percent of Cases		Count	Percent of Cases
Grumble	26	51.0%	Grumble	4	7.8%
Scold	4	7.8%	Scold	28	54.9%
Yell	4	7.8%	Yell	11	21.6%
Criticise	13	25.5%	Slander	6	11.8%
Blame	7	13.7%	Criticise	13	25.5%
Gossip	10	19.6%	Blame	12	23.5%
Complain	32	62.7%	Gossip	2	3.9%
Insulting	1	2.0%	complain	30	58.8%
Self-justify	7	13.7%	insulting	8	15.7%
Self-conceal	17	33.3%	self-justify	3	5.9%
Self-criticise	1	2.0%	self-conceal	1	2.0%
Pointing out mistakes and giving corrections in public	5	9.8%	pointing out mistakes and giving corrections in public	15	29.4%

Pointing out mistakes and giving corrections in private	16	31.4%	Pointing out mistakes and giving corrections in private	29	56.9%
Questioning	11	21.6%	questioning	17	33.3%
Listening	17	33.3%	listening	10	19.6%
Analyse	19	37.3%	analyse	12	23.5%
Self-disclose	1	2.0%	Self-disclose	2	3.9%
Apologise	11	21.6%	apologise	3	5.9%
Praise	2	3.9%	praise	1	2.0%
Support	4	7.8%	support	6	11.8%
Educate	5	9.8%	educate	23	45.1%
Advice	12	23.5%	advice	11	21.6%
Peace-making	11	21.6%	peace-making	5	9.8%
Total	236	462.7%		252	494.1%

Staff’ reaction to the use of the aforementioned speech acts

It was important to check members’ reactions to the use of word choices, communicative acts as well as the context and manner of use as the reaction determines if conflict will escalate, be managed or be resolved. The data showed that 49.0% take to corrections irrespective of how they come, while 43.1% and 35.3% express dissatisfaction and are demotivated. This is mostly seen in instances where subordinates are forced to concede because they are being threatened with dismissal or demoting as seen in tables 13 and 21. Although these occurs, worthy of note is the fact that 35.3% of the population are also challenged to work better when these expressions are used.

The study found that workers in subordinate position also used acts like complaining and grumbling, and these are expressed both directly and indirectly. It was therefore needful to ascertain the reaction of others (bosses) to respondents’ use of these communication acts, word choices and their different manner and context of use. Prominent to these reactions were cautioning (64.0%), expression of anger or fury (48.0%) and threats of dismissal (40.0%). With the percentages for expression of anger/fury and threats of dismissal this high, staff most likely work under dures possibly fuelling conflict consciously or unconsciously, and this affects output and productivity.

Table 4 Showing distribution by staff’ react to these uses

Respondents’ reaction to these uses				How others react to respondents’ use			
	Responses		Percent of Cases		Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent			N ^o	Percent	
Frustration	15	12.2%	29.4%	Threats of Dismissal	20	18.5%	40.0%
Dissatisfaction	22	17.9%	43.1%	Dismissal	2	1.9%	4.0%
Demotivation	18	14.6%	35.3%	Expression of Anger and Fury (prominent use of mere & common secretary or driver)	24	22.2%	48.0%
Rebellion	6	4.9%	11.8%				
Stand Corrected	25	20.3%	49.0%	Educating	14	13.0%	28.0%
Motivated	8	6.5%	15.7%	Cautioning	32	29.6%	64.0%
Encouraged	11	8.9%	21.6%	Motivating	9	8.3%	18.0%
Work Better	18	14.6%	35.3%	Praising	7	6.5%	14.0%
Total	123	100.0%	241.2%		108	100.0%	216.0%

3.4. Conflict Management Styles and Preferences

The different items outlined in the table below were meant to check the conflict management styles that are common to the Anglophone Cameroon tertiary administrative system. Although no one

conflict management style is constant, respondents were expected to identify with the style that they used most. The five practices outlined are representative of the Thomas-kilmann conflict management model that projects five conflict management styles.

21.6% of the sample adhered to frequently using the **competing** style indicative of the practice “I pursue my own concerns and make sure I get the desired result.” 21.6% use the **accommodating** style (unassertive & cooperative) more than other styles as indicated by the item “I neglect my concerns to satisfy the concerns of actor(s) in conflict.” 17.6% of the population attest to using **avoiding** as indicated by the item “I do not pursue my concerns or anyone else’s.” Less respondents associate with the **collaborating** style as seen by the 11.8% that agree to the practice “I implement a solution that partially satisfies all parties involved in the conflict.” 27.5% of the population uses the **compromising** style in managing conflict that arise at the workplace and this is representative of the practice “I work with all parties involved to find a solution that fully satisfies everyone.”

Respondents’ take on the different practices indicate that there is no significant disparity amongst the choices of the conflict management styles. However, compromising is top on the list, closely followed by accommodating and competing. Although a majority of them seem to tilt towards compromising, the data in table 13 does not correlate. Up to 56.9% of these respondents use words that are indicative of concession in instances of conflict and these word choices are rather relatable to accommodating and avoiding. This therefore confirms the researcher’s observation that most workers in the said context do not have a formal and proper orientation of exiting conflict management styles and strategies nor an appreciation of the place of language in these processes.

Table 5 Showing distribution of respondents by conflict Management Styles and preferences

	Frequency	Percent	Valid P	Cumulative P
I pursue my own concerns and make sure I get the desired result (Competing)	11	21.6	21.6	21.6
I neglect my concerns to satisfy the concerns of actor(s) in conflict (Accommodating)	11	21.6	21.6	43.1
I do not pursue my concerns or anyone else’s (Avoiding)	9	17.6	17.6	60.8
I implement a solution that partially satisfies all parties involved in the conflict (Collaborating)	6	11.8	11.8	72.5
I work with all parties involved to find a solution that fully satisfies everyone (Compromising)	14	27.5	27.5	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

When the effectiveness of these choices were checked, it was found that avoiding, collaborating and compromising didn’t record instances of ineffectiveness. Competing was found to be most practiced by those in some form of hierarchy. One of the ways that this was expressed was through scolding. The chi-square test of independence revealed a significant association between hierarchy and scolding, $X^2(1) = 16.425$, $P < 0.001$ indicating that workers in subordinate position are scolded ($f_e = 25$) by their bosses more than is expected ($f_o = 18.1$). Therefore, the use of the speech act scolding is dependent on the position of the worker. Although the bosses disagree to using this speech act, subordinates differ when they agree that their bosses usually use this speech act on them and this is confirmed by the focus group discussion. This projects problems with accountability and workplace norms. If only 3 position admit to using this speech act which is recurrent from the responses of the subordinates, then most of them are dishonest, thus failing the system.

Table 6 Chi-square test showing the influence of workers’ position on the use of speech acts (scolding) in conflict

Scold		Position Holder		Total
		Position Holder	Non Position Holder	
No	Count	15	8	23
	Expected Count	8.1	14.9	23.0
Yes	Count	3	25	28
	Expected Count	9.9	18.1	28.0
Total	Count	18	33	51
	Expected Count	18.0	33.0	51.0

$$X^2 - \text{test: } X^2(1) = 16.425, P < 0.001$$

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.425a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	14.125	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	17.435	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	16.103	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	51				
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.12.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					

It was of prime importance to get respondents' take on the impact of these conflicts and their resolutions. Most of the respondents (46.0%) attested to living conflicts with damaged relationships and problem solving skills (40.0%). A good number of them (34.0%) also confirmed ending conflicts with quality decisions. 30.0% of the population indicated leaving conflicts with poor production and 28.0% practiced withdrawal and resentment. Having damaged relationships, poor production, resentment and withdrawal after conflict ought to have been managed shows that conflicts were poorly managed and the consequences are severe.

Language use in Conflict Management Styles

It was important to ascertain the language practices involved in the use of these conflict management styles and to see if those involved in the use of these processes are aware of the relationship therein and its effects. Language or a repertoire that is resonant of words and expressions like "I'm not prepared to change my position; I know best; do as you are told; my view is clearly the right one etc." in conflict management situations reflects *competing*. Just as with the conflict management strategies and preferences, 21.6% of the respondents acknowledged using language reflecting competing strategies to a greater extent. 15.7% used it often and 5.9% used it very often.

However, even though 21.6% of the respondents cited *accommodating* as their preference for conflict management strategies, 45.1% rather have a high frequency of using words and expressions that reflect accommodating. The study found that 33.3% often used such expressions and 11.8% very often used same words and expressions. They include the following: "I concede to that point; I agree with you there; what's your preferred outcome; how do you think we can handle this; I'm prepared to accept that etc."

The same goes for words and expressions that echo compromising, collaborating and avoiding. 47.1% and 15.7% of the population often and very often use words indicating collaborating ("we will look into it; my position is...what is yours; how can we solve this; let's see to it that; let's work together on it; etc.") in conflict management and resolution situations. The study also found that compromising ("Let's find a quick solution; suggest something then; meet halfway on; split the difference etc.") has similar attention as 60.8% and 15.7% often and very often use this style in resolving conflicts. Lastly, repertoire that is reflective of avoiding "Whatever you want, suit yourself, I prefer not to discuss it, that's outside my brief etc." was often and very often used by 33.3 and 11.8% of the sample population making a total of 45.1%. This is contrary to the data provided in

table 25 above, and continually confirms the preceding discussions questioning members understanding of the conflict management principles and processes. The correlation between language use reflecting these strategies and the choice of the frequently used strategies only holds true for *competing*.

This means as hypothesised earlier, although members of the workplace would identify with one style at a time, they are prone to using more than one conflict management style in a single conflict situation or use the different styles based on the different conflict situations they are faced with. It is also interesting to note the high rate of use in the last three management styles though they are very different.

Table 7 Showing distribution of respondents by language used in conflict management styles

	Rarely	Not Often	Often	Very Often	Total
I'm not prepared to change my position; I know best; do as you are told; my view is clearly the right one; that's quite the opposite (<i>Competing</i>)	24 47.1	16 31.4	8 15.7	3 5.9	51 100.0
I concede to that point; I agree with you there; what's your preferred outcome; how do you think we can handle this; I'm prepared to accept that etc. (<i>Accommodating</i>)	12 23.5	16 31.4	17 33.3	6 11.8	51 100.0
Whatever you want, suit yourself, I prefer not to discuss it, that's outside my brief etc. (<i>Avoiding</i>)	8 15.7	13 25.5	27 52.9	3 5.9	51 100.0
we will look into it; my position is... what is yours; how can we solve this; let's see to it that; let's work together on it; etc. (<i>Collaborating</i>)	6 11.8	13 25.5	24 47.1	8 15.7	51 100.0
Let's find a quick solution; suggest something then; meet halfway on; split the difference etc. (<i>Compromising</i>)	2 3.9	10 19.6	31 60.8	8 15.7	51 100.0

3.5. Effects of Conflicts Processes

Most of the respondents (46.0%) attest to living conflicts with damaged relationships. However, a good number of them (40.0%) end up attaining problem solving skills, and quality decisions (34.0%). Other negative effects staff experienced after conflict include poor production (30.0%) and withdrawal and resentment (28.0%).

If most of the prominent effects are damaging, then it is a call for concern. An appropriate organisational culture is the starting point for proper workplace practices, minimal conflict situations, and a firm foundation for the implementation of conflict resolution.

Table 8 Showing respondents' opinion on effects of conflicts

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	No	Percent	
Social change	8	5.0%	16.0%
Innovation	10	6.2%	20.0%
Development in creativity	10	6.2%	20.0%
Quality decisions	17	10.6%	34.0%
Problem solving skills	20	12.5%	40.0%
Solidarity	8	5.0%	16.0%
Group Cohesion	12	7.5%	24.0%
Poor production	15	9.4%	30.0%
Withdrawal	14	8.8%	28.0%
Damaged relationships	23	14.4%	46.0%
Incompletion of tasks	9	5.6%	18.0%
Resentments	14	8.8%	28.0%
Total	160	100.0%	320.0%

3.6. Organisational culture and professionalism

It was found that most staff are not trained in administration or professionalism before they are employed to these different organisations or engaged in the different tasks put before them. They learn or are expected to learn on the job and most of the learning is acquired informally. Thus when confronted with new workplace norm, expectations or systems, conflicts are bound to arise as staff find it difficult adjusting to new systems. This is expressed in the way participants from the Institution A handled the cancellation and restriction to obtain formal education. This change didn't just affect their growth as individuals but also their resources as they inquired financial losses; many had paid tuitions fees and acquired other resource/infrastructure for the learning process.

It has been widely recorded that most of the administrative or management staff of universities in Cameroon have no prior training to this effect, this makes the recording of mismanagement to be higher than necessary. Njeuma, D. L et al (1999, p. 14) state that "various heads of institutions have demonstrated extremely limited management skills... that the institutions concerned have been basically derailed from their main missions." The University of Buea which Njeuma, D. L et al (1999, p. 14) affirmed to be much better than the others has also in recent years fallen short in one too many ways.

The continuous decay of its misconducts by students, staff and even the public is a cause for concern. The current dismissals, demotions, and suspensions of administrators because marks are being traded for sex (Agbaw-Ebia, 2021) and investigation on money exchanging hands for marks (2021/0844/UB/AdA/PD/AdD/CS/AP/AA) is clear evidence that the system has lost its sense of professionalism and prestigious culture. It only calls the mind the conflicts that are born from such scandals between staff involved and those who are investigating the issues at hand or those trying to cover it up. Some of these happenings have been alleged to be setups being used to settle scores or create vacant positions for others assume. Worthy of note is the fact most of the managements of universities in Cameroon have failed in the administering the institutions (Njeuma, D. L et al, 1999, p. 14). Had there been mechanisms in place to ensure that all staff holding office should be schooled extensively on educational and corporate administration, then the less mishaps would be recorded.

3. Conclusion

The results provided by the focus group discussions do not only confirm the questionnaire responses but also expand them, giving the study a stance from where to propose solutions that will ameliorate the situation. As earlier noticed, smaller groups tend to function better administratively than larger groups do, and top management is responsible for maintaining a conducive working environment. This data places bosses and smaller units as the preferred groups to be educated, and trained to instil change.

Language has been again proven to be an important factor in conflict practices; be it its initiation, prevention, management, escalation or resolution. As earlier established, conflict is an inevitable part of living because it is related to "situations of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation". Therefore, if development must be recorded, organisations will have to welcome conflicts with a high level of objectivity.

This study situates professionalism, team building, effective business communication skills and an unbreakable organizational culture as an appropriate platform for curbing conflicts and having win-win results from conflicts that arise at the workplace. Implementing these in the Anglophone Cameroon Administrative Tertiary Education Systems will not only improve their workplace functionality and productivity but also their economic growth.

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