Organisational Conflict and Employee Performance: A Case of Kampala International University- Main Campus

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ABSTRACT

The study examined organizational conflicts and their effects on employee performance using Kampala International University (KIU) Main campus. The study aimed at establishing the various types of conflicts, their main causes, potential areas of conflicts and the effects conflicts have on employee performance. Three methods of data collection were used to study 100 respondents namely self-administered questionnaire, formal and informal interviews. The study found out that there are five types of conflicts at KIU. These include intrapersonal conflicts, interpersonal conflict, intra faculty conflicts, inter faculty conflicts and inter organizational conflict. Secondly the study found out that there are several causes of conflict at KIU among which are absence of materials for staff use, interference of top management in day to day activities of the university, centralized decision making, lack of employee empowerment, cultural differences which cause mistrust and suspicion, conflicting roles and responsibilities due to job ambiguity and failure of the university to pay lecturers for overload. Thirdly potential areas for more conflicts at KIU abound and unless they are addressed immediately, they may culminate into more conflicts either in the short or long run or both. Fourthly, most (over 95%) of staff at KIU believe that conflicts have led to unnecessary stress, blockage in communication, lack of cooperation, increased sense of distrust and suspicion, staff absenteeism due to demoralization, loss of morale and lack of a sense of belonging. To overcome the following, KIU should ensure good planning for the scarce resources, clarify what each individual is expected to accomplish, train employees in conflict management, reduce unnecessary interferences of top management in lower management affairs and streamline the administrative machinery of the university.

Keywords: Organizational conflict, Employee performance, Kampala International University

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is any misunderstanding, clash, dispute or tension within an individual (Intrapersonal conflict) or between two or more parties (interpersonal conflict) (Lumen, 2025). Conflict is a result of differences in ideology, interest or opinions. Conflict is as old as mankind. The term conflict can also mean a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have or think they have incompatible goals (McCorkle & Reese, 2009). Conflict may arise where there are diverse interest groups. Conflict may lead to confrontation and may sometimes lead to violence. War is a form of conflict (Smith, 2020).

It has been observed that conflict is intimately related to change and interpersonal dealings. Because people come together to satisfy a ray of psychological needs. Social needs in general are awash with conflict (Bouckenooghe, De Clercq & Deprez, 2014) In the course of their interactions people deal with differences as well as similarities with aversion and affinities. In social relations, Sigmund Freud's parallel of humans and porcupines is apt. Like porcupines, people prick and injure each other if they get too close, they will get too cold if they fall far part (Maden, 2023).

In almost all organizations, there have been a lot of conflicts which have in some instances hindered effective

service delivery. However, it's unfortunate to learn that most managers or leaders ignore conflicts between employees hoping that they will disappear or will not affect the performance of the organizations. On the other hand, some managers are of the view that conflicts are healthy and essential for good performance of their organizations (Awour, 2023).

In universities the leaders seem to concern themselves with academic issues. They rarely go deep in issues affecting employees and employers. These are later detected in the later stage when the situation has already gone out of hand. It's no wonder therefore that some universities have been affected by such conflicts in form of strikes, apathy and pretense attitude towards work which leads to low employee performance. Such conflicts if not timely found out and addressed can spread to students or other University staff and have adverse effects (Obasan, 2025).

Worse still the readiness to address these potential conflicts is still questionable. One wonder whether there are effective conflict resolution mechanisms that can abate the intending conflicts based on clear conflict mapping of the parties involved (Ouma & Mbatia, 2023). The study aimed at establishing the major causes and potential areas of conflict at KIU, the relationship between conflict and employee performance at KIU, and measures if any that KIU main campus has put in place to mitigate the negative effects on employees' performance using KIU main campus as a case study. The study was guided by the following objectives: To establish the types of conflicts prevalent at KIU; To establish the major causes of conflict at KIU; To examine potential conflicts among employees at KIU; To establish the effects of conflict performance at KIU main campus.

METHODOLOGY

Using a case study design the researcher adopted a descriptive approach which used a qualitative technique was used to obtain in depth data about conflicts and their effects on employees' performance in KIU main campus. The quantitative technique was used to generate and present data in quantitative form especially in tables and numbers frequencies and percentages are used. The study was carried out in Kampala international university main campus. Along Ggaba road which is just 3 kilometers from the city center. The study mainly focused on establishing the effects on employee's performance at Kampala International University Main campus.

The targeted population included the teaching staff, non-teaching staff and administrators of KIU. The teaching staff who compromised of lecturers were selected because they were the actual implementers of the university's education programmes. Hence, they were in position to give their views concerning the potential areas of conflict and the effects of conflict on the performance on the employees of the university. The non-teaching staff were also included in the study and gave their own perceptions about the situation in university as far as potential employees are concerned. They were able to point out some of the conflicts that had already occurred and the effects they had on their performance. The university administrators were on the other hand involved since they are the ones charged with the responsibility of mobilizing both the teaching and non-teaching staff for the smooth running of the university activities. They were thus aware of the employee conflicts that could have taken place whether they had been cause of those conflicts or other teaching staff. This led to comparison of data for better analysis of the data. The study therefore targeted the entire staff of KIU which by then was estimated to be 200. A sample of 100 respondents was used of these 41 were women and 59 men. These included 20 administrators 42 teaching staff 38 non-teaching staff as shown in;

Table 1: Categories of respondents included in the sample

Categories of respondents studied at KIU	No. of respondents studied	Percentage
Administrators	20	20%
Teaching Staff	42	42%
Non-teaching staff	38	38%
Total	100	100%

As shown in table 1, the teaching staff had more respondents in the sample 42% followed by non-teaching staff 38% and administrators had the least percentage.

This was so because given the fact that teaching staff are more than the non-teaching staff and the administrators are less than the foregoing two categories.

The category of administrators included directors, deputy directors, Deans, deputy deans, heads of departments and faculty administrators. The teaching staff category included professors, senior lecturers, lecturers and teaching assistants. The non - teaching staff included the secretaries, desk officers, cleaners, drivers and estate staff. For all the three categories of the staff studied, a purposive sampling technique was used, it was used to ensure that only those respondents presumed to be knowledgeable of the issues being studied were included in the sample. This would ensure not only good quality but also good quantity of responses generated from respondents.

In the process of selecting the sample, a staff list was acquired from the directorate of human resources which had details of the staff and their corresponding job titles. A cluster sampling technique was used by dividing the KIU staff on the list into three clusters based on named categories in Table 1 (Teaching staff, non-teaching staff and administrators) all the three categories of the respondents were requested to inform and or recommend to the researcher any other employees/respondents that they deemed knowledgeable about issues under investigation. A combination of cluster and snowball sample procedures coupled with purposive sampling technique inevitably enabled the researcher to generate the desired data on various issues being investigated.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The following findings are presented according to research objectives.

Types of Conflicts at KIU

The first objective of the study was to establish the types of conflicts prevalent at KIU. Findings to achieve this objective were sought using research question one which stated that; what are the types of conflicts prevalent at KIU?

Findings show that five type of conflicts are prevalent at KIU namely intrapersonal conflict, interpersonal conflict, Intrafaculty conflict, interfaculty and inter-organizational conflict.

1. Intrapersonal conflicts; This is a state of discomfort experienced by an individual which in KIUs case are brought about by factors like excessive workload, abrupt but yet constraining assignments enormous pressure due to unrealistic targets and deadlines, poor leadership skills and poor management styles, overwhelming financial demands, and stress among others.
2. Interpersonal conflicts; these are conflicts between and or among individuals.
3. Intra faculty conflicts; these are conflicts between or among employees of the same faculty.
4. Inter faculties conflicts; these are conflicts between one faculty and another or between employees of one faculty with those of another.
5. Inter-organizational conflict; these are conflicts between KIU as a corporate and any other corporate organization.

Table 2 shows the percentages of respondents who cited the prevalence of particular types of conflicts

	Conflict Types	Respondents who cited the conflict type	Percentages
1	Intrapersonal conflicts	89	89%
2	Interpersonal conflicts	72	72%
3	Intra-faculty conflicts	28	28%

4	Inter - faculties conflicts	11	11%
5	Inter organizational conflicts	22	22%

As shown in Table 2 the most prevalent type of conflict in KIU main campus is intrapersonal conflicts or conflicts within individuals which prevails among 89% of the staff, followed by interpersonal conflict which prevails among 72% of the staff followed by intra faculty conflict (28%) and inter faculties conflicts are at least at 11%.

Major causes of various types of conflicts at KIU

Objective two of the study was to establish the major causes of the conflict at KIU. Data to achieve this conflict was sought using the research question two which stated that, what are the major causes of the various conflicts at KIU? Findings show the following as the major causes of conflicts generally.

1. University fees increments and fees penalties levied on the late school fees payers. Some of the respondents/employees at KIU are parents or guardians to students at KIU. Many of them get intrapersonal conflicts due to the fact that university fees were hiked by the university and in addition they end up paying fees penalties due to late fees payment. Their concern was while the university pays the salaries late and is not charged for late payment of the salary they (employees) are fined for paying school fees late.
2. Poor communication among members in the department. Respondents noted that at KIU there is a tendency of administrators keeping silent about important information therefore activities of and in departments are not well coordinated. As a result, there are intra-faculty and interfaculty conflicts.
3. Break down in the chain of command. Some of the university's staff prove to be aloof and untouchable because they are for some reason close to the top management therefore some officers lose command over such subordinates. This leads to lack of definite scalar chain and promotes familiarity hence leading to disrespect.
4. Poor orientation of employees. Over 80% of the respondent employees studied hardly went through or received any substantial orientations, especially those who have their first jobs at the institution. Some were of the view that they would end up doing things haphazardly and sometimes ending in conflict roles and responsibilities.
5. Job descriptions are not vividly given to employees of the university and so they clash while doing the same job. This causes conflicts which are interpersonal and intrapersonal.
6. No defined management. A university must be governed by authority as stipulated by National Council of Higher Education. It should prioritize acquiring and disseminating knowledge basically through research and should not be primarily a profit-making company, respondents argued. They noted that that is not how KIU is currently governed.
7. Rumor mongering among employees is very rampant. It causes conflict because gossip divides people and there will be less cooperation.
8. Late coming, it was discovered that many staff come late not only to the university for work but also come late for meetings. This causes conflicts between the employer and the employees, as there is always work obstruction and postponement of important meetings which retards performance.
9. No salary scales. Respondents noted that there are wide disparities with regard to salaries earned by different staff of the same and different calibers. They were concerned that some staff of lower qualifications end up earning more than those who are highly qualified hence a big demotivation and consequently fuels intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts.
10. Competition and lack of respect for the organizational structure. This is so because people want more powers in a short time yet they don't deserve it. Therefore, there is always competition which could cause negative or positive promotions.
11. Different personalities and culturalization. KIU has many staff of many nationalities and cultural background. Being an International university there are people of all walks of life which end up conflicting at various stages due to differing values, views and approaches.
12. Job Insecurity over 80% noted that there is no security at KIU given the fact that bosses are ever threatening to sack them for noncompliance. They also reported that KIU usually lays off staff without consulting them and all other parties involved hence leading to both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts.

13. Absence of materials for facilitation at the job was also cited as a cause for intra and interpersonal conflicts.
14. Interference of top management in day to day activities of the university has led to intra and interpersonal conflicts.
15. Centralized decision making that is evident in the institution does not make it clear on who to approach or have issues addressed instead of relying on persons with contacts with top management.
16. Lack of robust employee motivation. This motivation can mean giving bonuses, employee benefits of for example overtime pay or giving an award to those that excelled at their work in terms of competence, punctuality, smartness and performance. This motivates employees and boost morale to perform duties satisfactorily.
17. Gender differences cause mistrust and suspicion which leads to conflicts in the university. Being an international university there are instances where divergent cultures don't meet up to the same goal for example treatment of women in authority.
18. Conflicting roles and responsibilities due to job ambiguity resulting from lack of proper and clear job descriptions and failure of the University to pay lecturers for the overload, especially at the postgraduate supervision makes many teaching staff to grumble and conflict with the postgraduate directorate staff.

So as evidenced above causes of conflicts at KIU are many and diverse.

Potential areas of conflicts among employees at KIU

Objective three of the study was; to identify potential areas of conflicts among employees at KIU. Data to achieve this objective was sought using research questions three which stated that; what are various potential areas of conflicts among employees at KIU?

1. Amenities for student's academics as well as curricula activities although available are inadequate.
2. Electronic devices like overhead projectors, power point projectors, printer's, photocopiers plus many other machines which make learning easy are almost not available in some faculties and schools.
3. Remuneration of many staff is low compared to other Universities in the region.
4. Teaching staff are overloaded (Minimum load being 15 hours a week) compared to some other universities which require minimum load of 6, 9, and 12 hours per week.
5. Lack of clear administrative policies and procedures that are institutionalized rather than individualized.
6. Abrupt and uncoordinated retrenchment/termination of staff which triggers job insecurity among staff.
7. Poor command of communication as there is a tendency of having the top management being involved in the not so important activities of the university whereby offices of authority are rarely recognized and there is centralized decision making. Levels of bureaucracy are not recognized.
8. Addressing student needs. Student's needs like having some space for guild offices which are facilitated and provision of allowances to student leaders currently are not well streamlined and harmonized.
9. Absence or poor customer and client relations due to pressure of meeting deadlines and work stress.
10. Few opportunities for coworkers to interact in a relaxed and casual atmosphere (get together parties)
11. Poor working conditions for example lack of office equipment. There are some offices that are fully facilitated yet others do not have even basics that an office should have so to say space, computers and manpower.
12. The tendencies to have some employees get appointment letters while others don't have.

As already noted, respondents argued that unless the above areas are adequately handled and decisively addressed, they may culminate into more conflicts either in the short run or the long run or both at KIU.

Effects of conflicts on employee performance

Objective Four of the study: to establish the effects of conflicts on employee's performance at KIU. Data to achieve this objective was sought using research question stating that: what effects (positive or negative) do conflicts have on employee's performance at KIU?

Positively, respondents noted that when some light functional conflicts are in place employees work hard because

of the competition created. In their arguments, competition encourages hard work. In an organization that has competition for positions and placement, people will always work hard to maintain the positions or to get higher ones, deadlines are met skills are improved all of which help to improve employees and university performance.

On the other hand, over 95% argued that the prevailing conflicts effect very negatively employee performance. They generally gave the following as the main negative effects of conflicts on employee performance at KIU.

1. Conflicts at KIU have led to unnecessary stress which have affected employee's performance.
2. Conflicts at KIU have led to blockage in communication, lack of cooperation and increased sense of distrust and suspicion, all of which have resulted in reduced employees' performance in several faculties and directorates.
3. In some faculties and directorates at KIU, conflicts have led to staff absenteeism due to demoralization, loss of morale, lack of the sense of belonging therefore no organizational commitment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

From the study findings the researcher makes the following conclusions.

1. Five types of conflict exist at Kampala International University. These include interpersonal conflict, intrapersonal conflict, intra faculty conflict and the least prevalent one is interfaculty conflicts.
2. There are several causes of conflict at KIU. Among others they include absence of materials for staff use, interference of top management in day to day activities of the university, centralized decision making, and lack of employee empowerment, cultural differences which cause mistrust and suspicion, conflicting roles and responsibilities due to role ambiguity and failure of the universities to pay lecturers for overload.
3. Potential areas for more conflicts at KIU abound and unless addressed immediately may culminate into more conflicts either in the short or in the long run or both. These among others include poor working conditions, poor customer and client relations, poor command of communication, abrupt and uncoordinated retrenchment, termination of staff, lack of clear administrative policies and procedures, teaching staff overloaded, poor remuneration of some staff and lack of inadequate amenities for students' academics.
4. Majority (over 95%) of the employees of KIU view conflicts as detrimental to the students' performance. This is because they believe that conflicts have led to unnecessary stress, blockage in communication, lack of cooperation, increased sense of distrust and suspicion, staff absenteeism due to demoralization, loss of morale and lack of sense of belonging.

Recommendations

In order to mitigate the negative effects of conflicts and enhance employees' performance, the researcher recommends that Kampala International University does the following.

1. Creation of liaison officers; the conflict between departments of faculties may be reduced by establishing liaison officers. Liaison officers are those who are neutral in their outlook and are sympathetic to both parties and kind of speak the language of both groups. They do not have vested interest in any of these groups and hence they can be expected to make fair and equitable decisions.
2. Ensure that staff get to know each other and understand each other better. Since one of the major causes of conflict is lack of proper knowledge and facts about how people think and act, it may be a good idea to let individuals work in different working groups so that they get to know each other better and understand each other better. Care should be taken however so that these individuals are technically capable of fitting in various working groups. This mutual understanding will result in trust and respect for each other thus reducing the likelihood of conflict.

3. Ensure good planning for allocation of scarce resources. Conflicts will occur whenever the wants and needs of two or greater parties are greater than the sum available for allocation. These resources may be in form of a pay rise, promotion, office space, equipment and so on. These conflicts can be reduced by planning ahead about the proper distribution of such resources instead of making haphazard and last-minute allocations.

4. Since interdependence is one of the major causes of conflict, it is necessary for KIU to identify and clarify poorly defined and poorly arranged interdependencies and make them adequately understood and reliable. This can be achieved through more contacts and improved coordinating mechanisms. This would make two interdependent units act as a single unit thus eliminating the cause of conflict.

5. Clarify what each individual and sub-unit is expected to accomplish. Another cause of conflict is undefined, unclear and ambiguous job expectations. It is important to clarify what each individual and each sub unit is expected to accomplish. This would identify the authority-responsibility relationship and a clear line in hierarchy. In addition, policies procedures and rules should be clearly established and all communication channels must be kept open so that each person can clearly know exactly what role he has to play and to whom he has to report in the hierarchical structure. This would avoid situations in which none of the two units does the job because each unit assumed that the other unit was supposed to do it for both units do the same jobs because of unclear instructions thus duplicating efforts due to misunderstanding. Such problems would not occur if each unit is fully aware of his responsibility.

6. Training of employees in conflict management. Training of employees in conflict management and resolution is so crucial. This will help to ensure that departmental or faculty issues and conflicts are handled in a more professional and diplomatic way.

7. Reduce unnecessary interferences of top management in lower management affairs. There should be minimal influence and interference of the Board of Trustees in the simple and lower level day to day running of the university affairs to enable lower level cadres to exercise sound and critical judgment in the execution of their duties.

8. Streamline administrative machinery of the university. Top management should streamline the administration by having and ensuring clear policies and recruitment, human resource development, strategic planning for the institution, promotion and conflict resolution. This will reduce conflict especially when the policies are implemented with accountability and fairness.

9. Appreciation of cross-cultural differences. University administration should appreciate cross cultural differences by realizing that staff members are of diverse origins, and should therefore be well oriented and integrated.

10. Lastly university administration should ensure good accountability on employee benefits like paying staff on time. Preferably at the end of each month instead of mid-month and having a definite salary scale. All these will go a long way to motivate staff and directly or indirectly reduce conflicts.

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Disclaimer: This research was carried out by Martha Begumya and submitted in 2009 to the School of Postgraduate Studies at KIU. The findings of the study are presented here in original form. However, citations in the introduction and their references have been updated.