



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP MEDIATION IN RESOLVING WORKPLACE DISPUTE: STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores workplace disputes and how they generally harm organisational productivity and its employees. It identifies the causes of workplace conflicts, their havoc-wreaking consequences, and approaches for managing and resolving conflicts. This research also identified some of the causes of disputes in an organisation which include communication problems, competing goals, individual differences, task interdependence, differing common interests and goals, etc., which appear as major conflict roots. On the other hand, it is also observed that cultural differences, such as religious background and ethnic differences, errors and employee turnover, increase clashes. Leadership mediation which involves the intervention of a mediator to intervene in dispute matters to resolve the conflict professionally. Thus, leadership mediation is also explored in this study as the first step of dispute resolution. The method adopted for this study is the qualitative method where secondary data review and analysis was undertaken. The case study adopted for this study is Nestle Company. To proffer solutions to these numerous conflicting issues in the workplace, the Alternative Dispute Resolution model is adopted. It advises that its models are to be embraced by a mediator (leadership mediation) to resolve conflicts. Very briefly, the social exchange theory is also adopted to tease out the realities of social interactions among employees at Nestle. It finds that leadership mediation is more effective in dispute resolution. The study recommends that leadership mediation is significant in resolving issues in the workplace.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a growing interest in examining the role of leadership mediation in resolving workplace disputes by adopting suitable means to ensure effective resolution intervention. Notably, leadership interference in workplace conflict is sine qua non as leaders remain the last resort for providing equanimity when disputes arise. It is believed that there is no final resolution to organisational tensions and disputes. This is a result of the enduring features of all workplace structures inhabited by the human factor. With this, unceasing changes within organisations have driven the development of organisational theories and leadership strategies to mitigate issues. Whereas disputes in the workplace are not novel. Jaffee (2007) notes that conflict has its history in the work environment. In the same vein, Mwogereze (2023) establishes that the issue of workplace dispute has been continuously echoed in pieces of research over 6000 years ago. This is why Ayub and Jehn (2021), in Mwogereze's *Workplace Conflicts and Employee Performance in Institutions in Kamuli District* opine that

examining how workplace conflict starts and finishes in history aids in recognising how Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) practitioners create improved practices. Mwogereze (2023), and Argyris and Schon (2018) observe that workplace conflict is documented in the Bible:

The Book of Genesis reports that Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Abel (NIV Bible, Genesis 4). Cain, the older brother, was a farmer. Abel was a shepherd. When the time came for both brothers to show their sacrifices to God/their boss, the boss favoured Abel's sacrifice and this caused a conflict between Cain and Abel which later resulted in Cain murdering Abel.

While workplace disagreements and resolution processes might have changed over the last few 1000 years, conflict trails and patterns have not. This is because workplace disputes are offshoots of contradictory interests, opposing behaviours, and misunderstandings in a given work environment. Also, these clashes could range from

loggerheads over tasks, to rivalry or nepotism in an organisation. Meanwhile, Kriesberg (2007) puts it that a toxic workplace can fuel tensions and deteriorate into disputes. When an organisation lacks the capacity for conflict resolution it will spark workplace troubles, this is why O'Sullivan (2017) says the conflict resolution model is understanding the sources of conflict and in turn, it aids peace-making by apprising the selection of involvement in support for resolution of conflict. Valdes (2023) identifies the causes of workplace conflict which include: communication issues, differing goals, personal differences, task interdependencies, status inconsistencies, and resource competition emerge as major conflict sources. He stresses that cultural distinctions, such as religious and ethnic prejudice, and miscommunications magnify conflicts. Also, to understand what element in the workplace is instigating a conflict, Kasumba (2021) says the whole systems and processes need to be scrutinised. In this case, unsettled glitches in the workplace could result in dwindling output, employee dissent, and tampering with an organisation's status. Thus, Valdes (2023) states that it becomes necessary to address workplace disputes that involve practical actions, including fostering impeccable workplace communication, encouraging esteem and inclusionary value, and adopting dispute resolution skills.

To address this issue, effective resolution of conflicts in the workplace must be taken seriously to aid the smooth running of an organisation. According to Overton and Lowry (2013), conflict arises regularly in any workplace; for instance, health care is not an exception and the undesirable concerns include disorganised teamwork, lessened patient fulfilment, etc. It is believed that the embrace of effective resolution in disputation matters will usher in value-added teamwork, efficiency, and employee satisfaction. Using health care as an example, Overton and Lowry (2013) demonstrate that dispute intervention strategies deployed in a disruptive physician case, and a particularly difficult conflict situation in healthcare, are addressed. Barritt (2022) observes that employers began to understand that they needed to improve an effective way to deal with these unavoidable conflicts in the workplace. Effective resolution is significant as it brings about conflict management which is a vital ability that leaders must own, for the success of the team, group, unit, or employees they lead (Ronquillo, Ellis, & Toney-Butler, 2023).

Statement of the Problem: The majority of organisations are faced with workplace disputes and they have not fully leveraged leadership mediation as a solution to the lingering crises among staff members. It is no doubt that the roles of leadership are pivotal in organisational activities. So many organisations have been affected by the unending conflicts that erupt which tamper with a company's productivity, reputation, peaceful coexistence, etc. A general look at some of the types of disputes in the workplace has proven that leadership mediation is a suitable measure to surmount their persistence. In this regard, the position of this study is considered to proffer remedies to workplace conflicts in organisations. Put differently, Turan and Taylor (1997) emphasise the significance of alternative dispute resolution models in resolving conflicts, saying that "The traditional approaches have created discontent among disputants and become costly in terms of money, time, and energy. Unlike traditional models of conflict resolution, such as courts and administrative

decisions, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) models emphasize informality, face to face communication, problem-solving orientation, parties shaping the processes, decisions by consensus, and, if necessary, third party assistance." Also, this study seeks to examine how leadership mediation is crucial for resolving these disputations.

Research Objectives

The followings are the research objectives

- Examining the roles of leadership mediation in workplace disputes.
- Assessing the common processes that employers are adopting to resolve conflicts and their understanding of leadership mediation.
- To find out the efficient strategies for ultimate resolution for conflicts in work places.

Theoretical Framework

There are numerous theoretical guides that can be used to carrying out an assessment on workplace dispute in respect to leadership mediation. Generally, it is important to exemplify how a leader is crucial to an organisation survival. On this note, Gajewski (2014) states that, if a positive organisation is one where internal trouble is curtailed, then it stands to reason that a result-oriented leader is a person who knows how to manage dispute.

He further notes that

Handling conflict, though, should not be approached intuitively, as the field of mediation has developed numerous techniques to understand and address conflict. To date, though, these techniques have not been categorized by leadership styles. The purpose of this study was to develop such a framework to understand how conflict resolution relates to the disciplines of mediation, organisational behaviour, and organizational leadership. To further this endeavour, four themes were developed. These themes drew upon a quadrant categorization methodology proposed by Leonard L. Riskin, which was then compared to four leadership styles: situational leadership, transformational leadership, leader-member exchange theory, and servant leadership.

Relevant to this study is the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as a theoretical guide as pioneered by Frank Sander. Stephen et al. (1992) in Uwazie (2011) *Alternative dispute resolution in Africa: Preventing conflict and enhancing stability*, note that Alternative Dispute Resolution covers a series of mediation apparatuses for resolving conflicts that are connected to but function outside formal court litigation processes. Uwazie (2011) opines that Alternative Dispute Resolution can contribute to creating an active dispute settlement system and bridge the gap between the formal legal system and traditional modes of African justice. This is to say that Alternative Dispute Resolution is very crucial in dispute mediation being adopted by leaders to resolve conflict in a workplace. Kohlhoffer-Mizser (2020) posits that Alternative dispute resolution methods are meant to assist individuals and expressly leaders with some levels of conflict solving. In her

study conducted by Kohlhoffer-Mizser, through a questionnaire shared to leaders on conflict matters, asking if they will choose court procedure or the alternative dispute resolution? In 124 answers, the leaders prefer alternative dispute resolution if they are at liberty to select. This approach is said to manage conflict dimensions as individual ideal, unchanging over time and across circumstances. Kohlhoffer-Mizser (2020) mentioned that leadership styles or behaviours remain stable over time and are expected to be significantly related to conflict management styles. Also, Uwazie (2011) says, "Mediation allows parties to feel they have received their 'day in court' in a way that trials commonly do not." He stresses that:

Mediation revolves around the help of an independent facilitator or mediator who has developed finely honed counselling and resolution skills through training and life experience. An initial mediation training curriculum of 40 to 60 hours includes practical exercises on the anatomy and analysis of conflicts, theory, mediation ethics and strategies, communication dynamics, active listening techniques, cross-cultural competency, consensus-building, and bringing the parties to closure, among others. Trained facilitators guide the mediation process to ensure trust, confidence, and productive communication between parties.

In the indentation above are the items needed by a leader in resolving conflict: analysis of conflicts, theory, mediation ethics and strategies, communication dynamics, active listening techniques, cross-cultural competency, consensus-building, and bringing the parties to closure, among others. The study of mediation styles cannot be fully captured without relating it with the field of organisational leadership linking with the theoretical framework for the study, alternative dispute resolution. Gajewski (2014) in his work posits that organisational leaders that adopt active mediation styles may eventually become more successful than those that do not. This paper, in an effort, also sought to establish the connection between leadership and mediation in the analysis. Furthermore, the social exchange theory is also adopted as a theoretical foundation for the analysis of the case study. Cook et al. (2013) state that the social exchange theory is a human behaviour framework which is established to account for the process of how individuals build and uphold relationships.

Literature Review: Here are relevant pieces of literature reviewed to give a direction to the study. Valdes (2023), in his study, ventures into the nexus between cultural differences and workplace conflict. Thus, he looks into how they can address the origin of conflict (cultural differences) and its impact on organisations, and approaches for handling and resolving disputes. Meanwhile, Valdes states that communication issues, differing goals, personal differences, task interdependencies, status inconsistencies, and resource competition emerge as major conflict sources, adding that cultural nuances, such as religious and ethnic discrimination, miscommunications, and employee turnover, increase conflicts. It is suggested in the study that diversification is necessary as it is a tool for resolving disputes and optimistic workplace dynamics.

Mwogereze (2023), in an attempt to examine workplace conflicts and processes, reveals that the prevalent work-family

conflict, bad policies, financial problems, poor communication, rivalry and mistrustfulness between staff continue to wreak havoc in workplaces using Kamuli District as a case study. Unique Different from this study, Mwogereze study recommends that there is a need to reduce the time it takes to debate a dispute. Also, this study opines that the procedure of finding solution to dispute should be enlisted in every organisation and efficiently applied. In contrast with this study, he mentions that employees who are authorised to solve a conflict will not allow dispute to blow out of proportion, while it is believed that a leader should be saddled with the responsibility of mediating in conflict. He agrees that it is significant to reward workers who do not give room for conflicts to escalate and put their strength to surmounting unexpected disputes. Finally, he submits that workplace conflicts are unavoidable in organisations when workers of different experiences and different work patterns are in the same place. Corroborating Mwogereze's position, Overton and Lowry (2013) emphasise that clash occurs regularly in any workplace, they stress that the adverse penalties include disorganised team work, unsatisfactory clients' services, etc. Their work proves that dispute resolution skills programme could help to resolve workplace crises. It is believed by Wyllie, Tshidi and Wyllie (2020), that dispute is inevitable in workplace. Regrettably, it has proven to be a natural part of human interface and on its own it is not evil nor detrimental. Meanwhile, they note:

How it is seen and handled; as well as the engagements and behaviours depicted by those clashing that can whichever way resolve it or worsen the conflict. In the words of Wall and Callister (1995) they say, "When we're in a conflict, we don't see it that way. There are good guys; there are bad guys; we don't just disagree. Conflict-to most of us-is mighty unpleasant" (p.515). Dispute is therefore inevitable due to the diversity inherent in people. People experience conflict in various areas of life; between families, among colleagues, between employees and employers, between people of different political affiliations and differing beliefs, religions, tribes and between countries. Some even experience Intrapersonal conflict (internal conflict within one 'self').

To examine leadership impacts in dispute matters in workplace, Doucet, Poitras and Chênevert (2009), in a study, evaluate the influence of managers' leadership styles (transformational, transactional and laissez-faire) on both the level and the nature of workplace conflicts (cognitive and relational in nature). They use data from hospital employees in Canada which a total of 1,031 completed questionnaires are received, representing a response rate of 46 percent. The hypothesis is tested using confirmatory factor and numerous deteriorations. It is noted that the two conflict scopes do not derive completely from the same mechanisms, since only two out of the eight leadership scopes assessed influence both cognitive and relational conflicts. They posit that inspirational drive has an adverse influence on cognitive conflicts while intellectual stimulation and passive management by exception seem to foster it. Put differently, inspirational drive and individualised reflection negatively impact relational conflicts whereas management by exception-active and management by exception-passive influence it positively. The study highlights the significance of

a leadership ability to introduce a common dream and prove individualized consideration to reduce workplace conflict during periods of organisational change, stressing that dispute management signifies an important role for leaders which few experimental studies have surveyed how leadership impacts workplace clashes. Also, Dagli and Sigri (2014), in a research conducted, examine if mediation can be employed as an effective technique in conflict management by leaders or not. On the quest of this assessment, principals and vice-principals within the context of this study are termed as leaders while teachers are classified as the followers. Doing this, a survey is made on 239 participants in five schools selected in Ankara, 22 principals and deputy principals are interviewed and a case study was conducted on 210 teachers. The findings of their study demonstrate that relationship conflict is the most encountered conflict type at workplace. It is determined that teachers prefer the integrating and compromising style, and similarly leaders prefer these two styles increasingly. While interviewing leaders, it shows that they are always ready to intervene in the disputes through the mediation process. The conflicts effected disputants in two basic subjects - motivation and performance and they came to an agreement that the mediators are to be chosen from within the school (Dagli and Sigri, 2014). In the case study method that was applied on subordinates, it is observed that the followers are for resolving of the three cases by mediation and they have a perception of leaders as managing the current mediation process. When all findings are evaluated it is concluded that mediation is an effective method that can be implemented by leaders to resolve the issues at workplace. Kohlhoffer-Mizser (2020) describes a leader as someone who supervises, manages and controls another person in an organisation. In this vein, Kohlhoffer-Mizser assesses the connexion between leadership decision-making and dispute resolution and she opines that leadership intervention in disputes is sine qua non.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach adopted for this study is strictly qualitative which involves the use of secondary data. This qualitative study gives a cursory look into the inevitability of disputes in the workplace and how leaders can wholly proffer solutions to them through the process of mediation. Also, this study is benchmarked on ontological and epistemological moulds. The research design mainly relies on the methodology (qualitative), and scholarly reflections which direct the research process. A descriptive design is employed for this study as it is projected to allow exhaustive analysis for the fundamental themes. All Data use for this study is sorted and examined using content thematic analysis as an analytical tool.

Case Study: Nestle is a renowned food and beverage corporation founded by Henri Nestle in 1866, it is headquartered in Vevey, Vaud, Switzerland. Nestle's operation began after its creation establishing the Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Company. In 1867, Nestle founder developed baby food and the company merged with Anglo-Swiss Company to form a group named 'Nestle Group'. Argyris and Schon (2018) mention that conflict is inevitable in any organisation. Nestle is not an exception. An organisation like Nestle, its disputes range from interpersonal conflicts, miscommunication, group jealousy and supply allocation

disagreements, etc. This could mount negative tension and it will affect team confidence, productivity, and importantly company's overall performance.

The Problem: It has been proven that the reliability on Human Resource Management to resolving dispute is ineffectual. Once dispute escalates before the intervention of Human Resource, it complicates dispute and further makes the situation complex, and damages relationships and productivity. UK Essays (2018) identifies one of the organisational disputes that happened in Nestle which is the lack of training programme for the workers. It is no doubt that employers need to plan training programme for workers in the organisation as it is crucial. Jia and Jia (2020) observe that workers are particular about doing their job well, in order to contribute the growth of the company. This is for them to attain a promotional height in respect to the organisation promotional plans. Meanwhile, the lack of training in Nestle result to the lethargic behaviour of the workers which makes them unable to work with the group causing dispute among them. This will make the employees ignorant of their job descriptions and lead to inefficiency. This also makes the employees not fit to work in a group because they will feel hopeless and depressed (Jia and Jia, 2020). The consequences of lack of training led to the Food and Drug Administrative (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warning the entire populace to avoid buying the pre-packaged Nestle Toll House refrigerated cookie dough because it contains a foodborne bacterium that might cause sickness (Andrei, 2020 & Jia and Jia 2020).

Another problem that causes dispute in workplace is miscommunication among workers. Nestle is found wanting in this situation. Poor communication could wreak havoc in the organisation. By all means, communication problem must be solved. Grossman (2023) states that, "communicating effectively in the workplace is not just exchanging information. When done well, there is real power in internal communications to move organizations forward, engaging employees in collective action that supports the organisation's mission and vision." Thesis leader (2020) in Jia and Jia (2020) *Organisational Conflict in Nestle*, says as Nestle works in traditional environments and provinces around the world, communication between workers sometimes might break down in daily corporate events.

Jia and Jia (2020) finds out that the organisational dispute ensued in Nestle because of altercation in some departments. This happened between marketing departments and manufacturing departments where the marketing department wanted to use more time of the product line to manufacture more diverse products, and this would make the manufacturing department embark on a costlier production to get the products. Jain (2016) corroborates dispute among departments with the fact that disputes and misunderstandings can happen because all departments have unlike goals. Jia (2020) mentions:

Arising of conflicts among departments caused by many reasons, such as communication problems, unclear jurisdiction, lack of common interest and goals, and task interdependence. These issues will cause employees turnover in Nestle. Figure 1 shows that the total number of

employees in Nestle from 2008 to 2019. It shows a decreasing in number of employees start from 2014 to 2019. The numbers of employees are decreased from 339,000 in 2014 to 291,000 in 2019.

Solution: The Alternative dispute resolution model will be used to examine this case study and show how it can be adopted to solve workplace crisis. Kohlhoffer-Mizser (2020) says that Alternative dispute resolution methods are meant to assist individuals and expressly leaders with some levels of conflict solving. This model is adopted because Nestle is a reputable and big organisation. Alternative dispute resolution model can be used by leaders to mediate in any kind of disputes. Turan and Taylor (1997) note that “unlike traditional models of conflict resolution, such as courts and administrative decisions, alternative dispute resolution (ADR) models emphasise informality, face to face communication, problem-solving orientation, parties shaping the processes, decisions by consensus, and, if necessary, third party assistance, etc.”

According to Bingham (1986), Alternative dispute resolution in its approaches allows the disputants to meet face to face to agree on resolution of a particular issue or a controversial situation...this is unintentional developments that involve agreement creation, dual problem solving, or negotiation. As leadership mediation is necessary to push the alternative dispute resolution comes negotiation which is its tool in resolving conflicts. This aids the meeting of parties who have an actual conflict of interests. An approach developed by Fisher, Ury and Patton (1991) which are *principled, interest-based, problem-solving*, and *win-win* recognised basic essentials of negotiation. These essentials can be utilised by a leader to mediate in disputes in workplace, and these consist of the following steps: Separate the people from the problem, focus on interests, not positions, invent options for mutual gain and insist on using objective criteria. Then, this leads to leadership mediation which involves the support of a satisfactory, impartial, and neutral third party. Turan and Taylor (1997) observe that the third party (leader) is a mediator who helps parties to resolve their differences.

In this case, leadership mediation which involves a third party is crucial. A leader must be wisely selected for a dispute and should be impartial, object, intelligent and possess the ability to handle complex matters. The usefulness of alternative dispute resolution models for Nestle will help in leadership mediation as it opens way for free-flow of communication and open conflict resolution. However, Moore (1986), as cited in Turan and Taylor (1997) says roles to be played by a leader include: legitimisation, the process facilitator, the resource expander, the problem explorer, the agent of reality, the scapegoat, and the leader. Leadership mediation is significant because, the mediator himself or herself detaches from the issues, dejects emotions, discerns and speaks, and provides numerous solutions and negotiation strategies.

If there is a problem among the staff in Nestle as regards being nervous on their job descriptions which makes them feel down or tensioned, a leadership mediation is needed to allow an informal discussion which is a tool of alternative dispute resolution model in order to solve worker's situation. It also supports creation of a training programme to aid the need of

such a worker. Jia and Jia (2020), in their study, state that in order to unravel the issue of unknowledgeable workers, Nestle invested in their training and development programme. This sense of responsibility by Nestle is simply a leadership mediation that helps to solve the issues of their workers simply by open communication and negotiation which is an element advised by alternative dispute resolution to be adopted by a mediator. This catapults us to the core values of alternative dispute resolution which include: impeccable communication, negotiation, mediation and settlement and also offers basic skills and techniques for efficient conflict management. The need for the training programme is to help new teams study their individual departments in a bid to contribute effectively and to the company's goals.

Within the scope of alternative dispute resolution, it gives room for a mediator to propose smooth communication as a solution to a workplace dispute. For instance, Jia and Jia (2020) state that Nestle has embraced horizontal communication as a result of ensuring open communication in the organisation. Corroborating this, Grossman (2022) believes that effective communication is a crucial for business success, adding that for most leaders, this can be an important blind spot that ruins relationships, make goals harder to achieve, limits advancement opportunities, and impedes overall business and personal success. He further notes that if communication is well-achieved, there is a real influence in internal communications to stimulate organisations growth, engaging employees in joint action that aids the organisation's mission and vision. Nestle, a reputable organisation, with certain fundamentals and standards needs to fully embrace effective communication to quell dispute. Since then, Nestle has operated and communicated in the same way. It is observed that dealing with individuals is always full of trustworthiness and transparency, which encourages stable and open discussion. This communicative method is effective for Nestle.

Meanwhile, as alternative dispute resolution allows for smooth relationship among workers, it brings us to social exchange theory which states that feelings and emotions should interchange for a fruitful and durable relationship (Huang et al., 2016). It is of a note that biased relationships is detrimental for an organisation's growth. Therefore, employees should be a priority in their company to reduce issues among them and encourage conflict-reducing behaviour and lovable work environments. Social Exchange Theory is very important among workers in Nestle Company because a group is formed by two or more people for eternal social interaction. According to Turan and Taylor (1997), this advice is suggested by alternative dispute resolution that when a leader wants to mediate in a conflict, it must first create interaction (negotiation) among the disputants for free flow of communication during the face to face conflict resolution. Every individual needs to have a good relationship with other members so that they can stay in a group to work.

By and large, Nestle as an organisation has a history of issues among units/departments overtime. Inarguably, disputes are expected in a situation when there are two groups that have contending goals. In this case, leadership mediation must set in instantaneously when there is a case of rift or misunderstanding between two to not let the situation become

complicated. The alternative dispute resolution models must be put into action when situation in a workplace becomes intense.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Findings revealed that leadership mediation is critical for creating an atmosphere that prevents disputes. Once a company has fashioned this atmosphere, workers will behave in a way that averts conflict. A worker who behaves somewhat like a recidivist must undergo the alternative dispute resolution training programme to be taught how to avoid conflicts, or maybe suggest a different employment. An organisation must know that it is its responsibility to offer the possibilities and dispute management training. The leadership mediation with the adoption of Alternative dispute resolution model for Nestlé can effectively reduce workplace tensions, improved employee confidence and productivity, and improved leadership skills. This has confirmed the power of pre-emptive conflict resolution and the significance of empowering leaders to create a positive and helpful workplace.

It is recommended that to resolve workplace disputes, there is a need for the employer to create a setting for open communication where people can share ideas. An organisation must also intensify the acuity of equality and to also increase the significance of finding everlasting solutions to disputes. It also recommends that a dispute resolution policy be established and efficiently implemented in a workplace. In addition, employees who do not allow conflicts spiral out of control be rewarded and integrated into conflict resolution committee.

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