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DESTRUCTIVE CONFLICT: A DETERMINANT OF EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY IN GHANA HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY, ADUM-KUMASI

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Abstract

According to Jaffee (2001), the place of work is characterized by conflict which is analyzed as meta-theoretical framework that identifies the constant and overarching challenges facing organizations. This descriptive study sought to identify and describe the effect of destructive conflict on employees' productivity in Ghana Highway Authority. Self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain data from staff of the Ghana Highway Authority, Kumasi. The study found that destructive conflicts (caused by lack of resources; criticisms and gossip; accusation; unfair provision of different kinds of benefits; pay cut without consent; individuals consistently failing to admit their weakness; etc.) do not occur very often. Apart from 'killing' an individual emotionally, such conflicts hurt group cohesion, promote interpersonal hostilities, divert energies, create bad feelings, lead to high labour turnover and costly litigations. It is recommended that complains and suggestions of the staff should be addressed at staff durbars and union meetings and feedback given to them through their representatives.

1. Introduction

Conflict in the workplace is a common occurrence; this is because of differences in employees' personalities and values. According to Jaffee (2001), the world of workplace is characterized by conflict which is analyzed as meta-theoretical framework that identifies the constant and overarching challenges facing organizations. Albright et al (2002) suggests that conflict exists when two or more parties disagree about something. These parties are interdependent, meaning that the resolution of the conflict to mutual satisfaction cannot occur without some mutual effort. The disagreement may be real or perceived, but it is psychologically felt by at least one of the parties. Believing that conflict will simply disappear is an inaccurate assumption because simple conflicts can grow into major problems if not dealt with appropriately. Dealing with employees' conflict in a timely manner is crucial to maintaining a work environment.

Richard, et. al (2009) stated that organizational performance should be related to factors such as profitability, improved service delivery, customer satisfaction, market share growth, and improved productivity and sales. Organizational performance is therefore affected by a multiplicity of individuals, group, and task, technological, structural, managerial and environmental factors. Individual incompatibilities between the employees and in their groups can adversely affect their work output resulting in decreased performance.

According to Hirschman (2001), destructive conflict mostly results in bad feelings, high turnover and costly litigation. It is a most challenging phenomenon for employees according to Phillips & Cheston, (1979). Also, it is among the most frustrating and painful experiences for management (Earnest & McCaslin, 1994). It can bring the groups, departments and sometime whole organization to a standstill (Fritchie & Leary, 1998). To remain competitive, organizations must embrace conflict resolution strategy to manage risk, improve its performance and achieve its corporate goals and objectives.

In the last few couple of years the road sector in Ghana has been bedeviled with increased work place conflicts emanating from its new business strategic options aimed at re-organizing its competitive edge. Initiatives related to reduction of the labour cost reviewing and renegotiating third party contract and recruiting expatriates, road contractors and consultants have been met with stiff resistance from employees and their unions. Thus, this study seeks to identify the effects of destructive conflict on employees' productivity in Ghana Highway Authority.

To achieve the objective, the study will seek to provide answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the factors that affect employee productivity in Ghana Highways Authority?
2. What are the causes of destructive conflicts in Ghana Highways Authority?
3. How does destructive conflict affect productivity of employees in Ghana Highways Authority?

2. Literature Review

According to Margaret (2014), employee productivity is an assessment of the efficiency of a worker or group of workers. Productivity may be evaluated in terms of the output of an employee in a specific period of time. Employee productivity is an important consideration for businesses because much of the success of any organization relies on it. According to Paul Krugman, (1994) productivity is commonly defined as a ratio between the output volume and the volume of inputs. Thus, it measures how efficiently production inputs, such as labor and capital, are being used in an economy to produce a given level of output. To realize a lucrative enterprise, it is important to understand how productivity works.

2.1 Factors Affecting Employee Productivity

Taylor (1998) identified four key principles that could be applied to dramatically improve workplace productivity. Taylor's principles advised managers to systematically design each job, scientifically select and train the workers, cooperate closely with the workers and divide the work and responsibility equally between the worker and management. Koretz (1995) cited three key productivity factors. These are; inadequate supervision and coaching, Employee involvement in decision-making and Too much work and insufficient rewards and chances to advance.

Leonard (2000) noted that the factors can also affect productivity: which are; less organizational bureaucracy, a greater sense of purpose and clear goals and being able to see results were essential to productivity.

2.2 Overview of Conflict

Brown et al. (1993) define conflict as doubt or questioning, opposition, incompatible behavior, controversy or antagonistic interaction and disputes is one of the range of events considered as conflict. To Kumaraswamy & Yogeswaran (1998), conflict can be said to exist when a claim or assertion made by one party is rejected by the other party. This shows that disputes are more likely to occur when the conflicting parties shows an action or arguments to a controversy.

2.2.1 Levels of Organizational Conflicts

According to Aula and Siira (2010), during the past 25 years, organizations have changed, so did their attitude to conflict management. Companies try to adopt a strategic approach to managing organizational conflicts. Generally, there are four levels of organizational conflict. According to Gareth & Jennifer (2008), the sources of interpersonal conflict include personal dislikes or personality differences. Intragroup conflict refers to conflict within a group, team or department. This type of conflict involves more than one person within the same group. Intergroup conflict refers to conflict between different groups, teams and departments, example is conflict between frontline workers and online customer service agents. Inter-organizational conflict, according to Jones & George (2008), refers to conflict between different organizations.

2.2.2 Types of Organizational Conflict

Over the years organisations have been taught to view conflict from a negative perspective. Nowadays two different orientations to conflict have evolved, these are Constructive (it supports the goals of the organization and improves its performance and encourages greater work effort and helps task performance according to Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008) and Destructive conflict (it is negative and damaging to the quality of the relationship according to Lopez, 2008).

2.3 Causes of Destructive Conflicts

According to Weiss (2003), conflict is a visible human energy; it is the evidence of human urgency; it is the consequence of competitive striving for the identical goal, rights, and resources. If you can find out the foundation of the conflict quickly, you can resolve it quickly, because each type of conflict has its own distinctive preliminary position. According to Runde and Flanagan (2007), conflicts may arise between individual due to scarcity of resources, different attitudes, values or perceptions, disagreements about needs, goals, priorities, positions, and interests, poor communication, lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities and a clash of personalities, difference of view, bullying or harassment. Mary J. Yerkes (2008) suggested that destructive conflict flows from unhealthy people and relationships. Where there is destructive conflict, you will often find a pattern of cruelty, neglect, deception, control, indifference and even abuse in the relationship. Employees who feel they are judged negatively lose focus, fail to complete tasks, suffer a decrease in productivity and lose self-confidence. Without the respect of their co-workers, these employees experience frustration and resentment; they might spend more time trying to get even rather than dealing with the underlying issues.

2.4 Effects of Destructive Conflicts on Employee Productivity

Each conflict has its consequences. According to Violetta (2012) there are two kinds of outcomes: Positive and Negative.

2.4.1 Positive Outcomes

Destructive conflict is positive when its influence is optimistic. Thus, it improves and stimulates creativity and innovations, encourages interest and curiosity, thus, it betters the excellence of decisions and the effectiveness of a group (Violetta, 2012). Based on the view of Runde and Flanagan (2007), the beneficially managed conflicts, advance communication, open information sharing, produce vigorous ideas, raise the value of decision making, develop working relationships, and innovate solutions. Constructively managing conflict helps in analytical thinking; it promotes competition, and energizes people. It also helps to increase cohesiveness and it serves as a

base for organization improvement. Functional conflict is also very helpful for group think as it confronts the status quo and therefore can pressure on the formation of new ideas (Violetta, 2012).

2.4.2 Negative Outcomes

Destructive conflict is mostly dysfunctional when unrestrained opposition eventually leads to the devastation of the group. This category of conflict can decrease group effectiveness leading to bad communication and lack of group cohesiveness. Runde and Flanagan (2007) identified costs associated with poorly managed argument to include time wastage, lowered morale, higher absenteeism, grievances, and complaints are just some of the results that can stem from mismanaged conflict.

Rittle (2007) stated that conflict takes notice away from other important activities, it undermines one's spirits or self-confidence, sharpens differences, and it guides to negligent and harmful behavior such as fighting, verbal abusive, harassment and so on. According to Chirstie (2013) negative outcomes of conflict are rejections, mistakes of commission, desiring an avoidance rather than approach strategy, and practice more harmful emotions.

Other effects of dysfunctional conflict in organisations include the following:

- a. Conflicts affect individual and organizational performance. Resolving conflicts takes a toll on managerial time and energy which could be more productively spent.
- b. In a conflict situation, people may promote their self-interests or personal gains at the cost of others or the organization.
- c. Intense conflicts over a prolonged period affect individuals emotionally and physically, and give rise to psychosomatic disorders.
- d. Time spent on conflicts, if costed, could have been spent doing more productive things.
- e. Conflict may lead to work sabotage, employee morale problems and decline in the market share of product/service and consequent loss of productivity.

3. Scope of the Study

The study focused on the effect of destructive conflict on the productivity of Ghana Highways Authority, Kumasi. Ghana Highways Authority in Kumasi as one of the organizations prone to destructive conflicts due to frequent political interference of its decisions. The population of the study comprises of the total number of staff in Ghana Highways Authority, Kumasi. The total number of the staff is 110.

4. Methodology

The success or otherwise of any research endeavor depends on the methodology used. This work adopts descriptive research design for the purposes of describing the views and opinions of respondents on the subject matter of the study. The data was primarily obtained through self-administered questionnaires. In all, 110 questionnaires were administered to various categories of staff of Ghana Highway Authority. Out of this 100 questionnaires were successfully retrieved, giving a response rate of 90.91%. Results were analysed through the use of frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts generated with SPSS version 16.0 and Microsoft Office (Excel) 2016. Census sampling technique was used in present study. The selected area was Ashanti Region in Ghana.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Overview of Socio- demographic Characteristics

This section, as shown in table 1 below, depicts the overview of socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed respondents. It covers characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, highest qualification, hierarchical order and work experience.

Table 1: Overview of socio-demographic characteristics

Category	Percentage (%)	Category	Percentage (%)
Age:		Highest Qualification:	
Below 25 years	34	Senior High School	6
25 to 34 years	28	Diploma	18
35 to 44 years	14	Degree	46
45 to 54 years	10	Master's Degree	30
55 years or more	14		
Gender:		Hierarchical order:	
Male	34	Top management	12
Female	66	Administrative staff	18
		Supportive staff	70
Marital status:		Work experience:	
Never Married	50	Under 5 years	50
Married	46	5 to 9 years	18
Divorced	2	10 and 14 years	14
Widowed	2	15years or more	18

Source: Field survey, 2016

5.2 Factors that Affect Productivity of Employees

From figure 1, 82% of the respondents say workplace conflicts have considerable impact on their productivity, while 18% disagree to it. This means that majority of the respondents agree that conflict in the workplace has considerable impact on the productivity of the organization and its members.

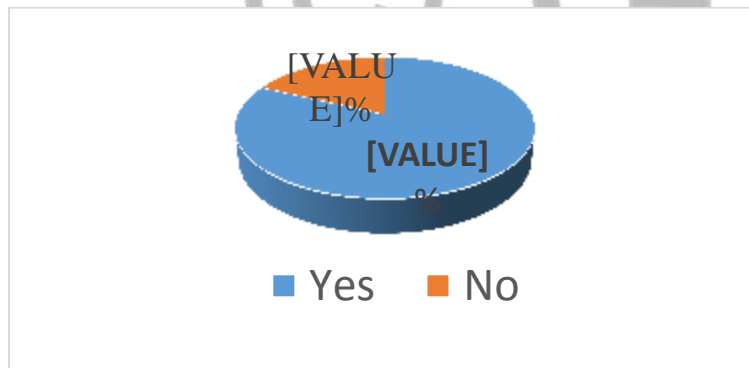


Figure 1: Workplace conflicts have considerable impact on your productivity

Source: Field Survey 2016

Figure 2 below indicates that majority of respondents (54%) have ever experienced destructive conflict(s) in their organization while 46% have not experienced a such conflict(s) in their organization.

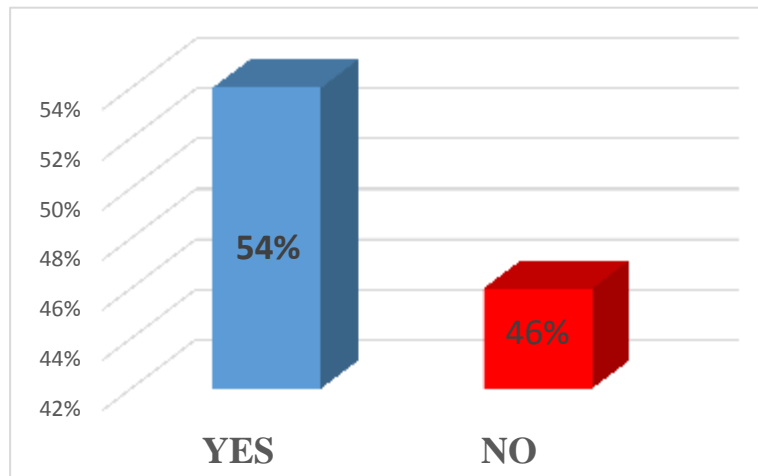


Figure 2: Ever experienced a destructive workplace conflict(s) in your organization

Source: Field Survey, 2016

From Figure 3, 34% of respondents (representing minority) indicated that destructive conflict occurs often whereas 66% of respondents insist that destructive conflict occurs sometimes at their workplace. This shows that the occurrence of destructive conflicts is not as prevalent.

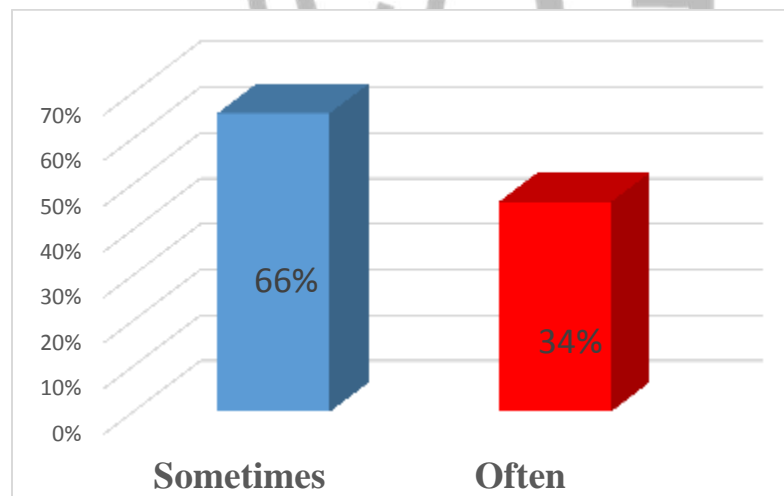


Figure 3: How often workplace conflicts do occur?

Source: Field Survey, 2016

When asked to select as many factors, as are applicable, that affect productivity most in their organization, respondents, as indicated in Table 2, 82% chose inadequate supervision and coaching; 73% employee involvement in decision-making; 70% went for less organizational bureaucracy; 64% selected too much work; 59% insufficient rewards and chances to advance; 65% considered greater sense of purpose and clearer goals; while 76% agreed

with being able to see results. Obviously, this reveals that majority of respondents identified inadequate supervision and coaching, employee involvement in decision-making, less organizational bureaucracy, too much work, insufficient rewards and chances to advance, a greater sense of purpose and clear goals, and being able to see results as the factors that affect productivity most in their organization.

Table 2: Which of the following affect productivity most in your organization?

Response	Percentages (%)
Inadequate supervision and coaching.	82
Employee involvement in decision-making.	73
Less organizational bureaucracy.	70
Too much work	64
Insufficient rewards and chances to advance.	59
A greater sense of purpose and clear goals	65
Being able to see results	76

Source: Field Survey 2016

Table 3 shows responses on the disruptive behaviours that mostly affect employees' productivity. 91% of respondents identified loss of commitment to work, 69% chose broken relationship among employees; 81% of respondents consider work instability & insecurity, while 76% considered absenteeism as comprising those disruptive behaviours that mostly affect productivity of employees. The respondents thus agree that loss of commitment to work, broken relationship among employees, work instability and insecurity, as well as absenteeism are disruptive behaviours that mostly affect employees' productivity.

Table 3: Which of the following disruptive behaviors mostly affect employee productivity?

Response	Percentages (%)
Loss of commitment to work.	91
Broken Relationship among employees	69
Work instability & Insecurity	81
Absenteeism	76

Source: Field Survey 2016

5.3 Causes of Destructive Conflict in Organization

Table 4 summarizes the responses on causes destructive conflict in Ghana Highway Authority. **Table 4: Which of the following causes destructive conflict in your organization?**

Responses	Percentages (%)
Lack of resources.	56
Criticisms and gossip.	81
Accusation.	87
Unfair provision of different kinds of benefits (training opportunities).	69
Pay cut without consent	
Individuals consistently failing to admit their weakness; lie, rationalize and deny; apologize instead of changing behaviour	75
Blaming others instead of "owning" their part of the problem and who are defensive instead of being open to feedback	84
	71

Source: Field Survey 2016

Accordingly, 56% selected lack of resources, 81% criticisms and gossip, 87% accusation, 69% unfair provision of different kinds of benefits (training opportunities), 75% chose pay cut without their consent, 84% said when individuals consistently fail to admit their weakness; lie, rationalize and deny; or apologize instead of changing behaviour, with 71% going in for individuals blaming others instead of “owning” their part of the problem or when they are defensive instead of being open to feedback. They thus agreed that the causes of destructive conflicts in their organization are lack of resources; criticisms and gossip; accusation; unfair provision of different kinds of benefits (training opportunities); pay cut without consent; individuals consistently failing to admit their weakness; lie, rationalize and deny; apologize instead of changing behaviour; and Blaming others instead of “owning” their part of the problem and who are defensive instead of being open to feedback.

5.4 Effects of Destructive Conflicts on Employee Productivity

The study assessed the effects of destructive conflicts from both the positive and negative background with results discussed in the following two subsections.

5.4.1 Negative Effects of Destructive Conflicts

Table 5 also presents responses on negative effects of destructive conflict on employee productivity. Accordingly, 55% of response suggest destructive conflicts hurt group cohesion, 63% say it promotes interpersonal hostilities, 68% say it diverts energies, 59% states that it creates bad feelings, 67% of respondents suggest high labour turnover, 51% chose costly litigations as the negative effects of destructive conflicts. On the ability of destructive conflicts to cause death, 49% said it can kill emotionally and spiritually whereas 53% said it can kill physically. Thus the respondents agree that apart killing an individual emotionally and spiritually, destructive conflicts hurt group cohesion, promote interpersonal hostilities, divert energies, create bad feelings, lead to high labour turnover, costly litigations and it can even kill physically.

Table 5: Negative effects of destructive conflict

Responses	Percentages (%)
Hurts group cohesion.	55
Promotes interpersonal hostilities.	63
Diversion energies	68
Bad feelings.	59
High labour turnover	67
Costly litigations.	51
It can kill emotionally and spiritually.	49
It can even kill physically.	53

Source: Field Survey 2016

5.4.2 Positive Effects of Destructive Conflicts

Table 6 presents the responses on the positive effects of destructive conflict in the organization. 70%, 60%, 76%, 81%, 55%, 79%, 58% and 63% of respondents suggested, respectively, that destructive conflict improves and simulates creativity and innovations; encourages interest and curiosity; advances communication; promotes open information sharing; raise the value of decision making through vigorous ideas; helps in analytical thinking, promotes competition and energizes people; develops working relationships and innovative solutions; and helps to increase cohesiveness and serves as a base for organizational improvement. In effect, respondents agree that the positive effects of destructive conflict includes improving and simulating creativity and innovations; encouraging

interest and curiosity; advancing communication; promoting open information sharing; raising the value of decision making through vigorous ideas; helping in analytical thinking, promoting competition and energizing people; developing working relationships and innovative solutions; and helping to increase cohesiveness while serving as a base for organizational improvement.

Table 6: Positive effects of destructive conflict your organization

Responses	Percentages (%)
Improves and simulates creativity and innovations.	70
Encourages interest and curiosity,	60
Advance communication	76
Open information sharing	81
Vigorous ideas raise the value of decision making.	55
Helps in analytical thinking, promotes competition and energizes people	79
Develop working relationships, and innovate solutions.	58
Helps to increase cohesiveness and serves as a base for organizational improvement	63

Source: Field Survey, 2016

When the view of respondents was sought on whether or not they believed that their organization would be better off without destructive conflicts, Figure 4 below indicates that 88% responded in the affirmative while 12% did not see their organization becoming better just for the fact that destructive conflicts were eliminated. What this means is that, according to the respondents if destructive conflicts were eliminated from the life of organizations, such organizations would become better off.

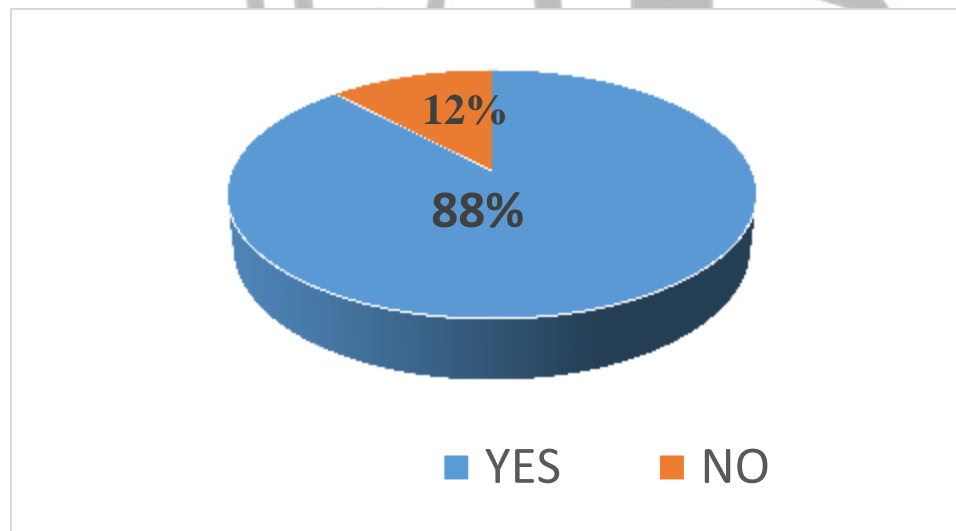


Figure 4: Organizations would be better off if destructive conflict can be eliminated

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Finally, respondents were asked to assess whether destructive conflicts affect productivity. Figure 5 below illustrates their responses. Whereas 49% of respondents suggest that destructive conflict does not affect productivity and 51% of respondents suggested destructive conflicts affect productivity. This means that the

responses were nearly split between yes and no thus making the effects of destructive conflict on productivity seem to be a gloomy one.

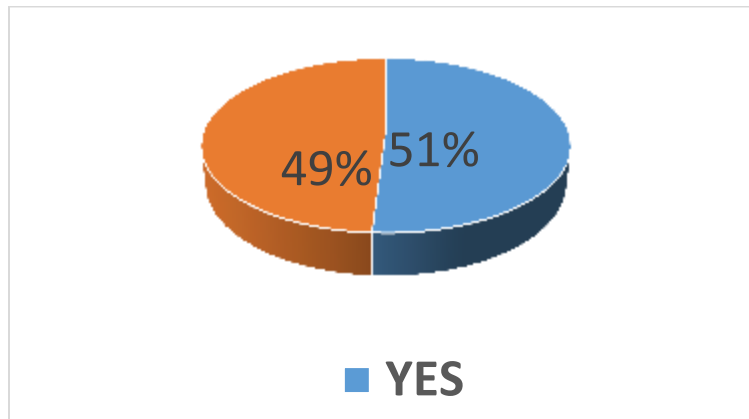


Figure 5: Does Destructive conflict affect your productivity

Source: Field Survey, 2016

6. Findings and Conclusion

Based on the results discussed above, the following findings and conclusions are made.

Conflict in the workplace has considerable impact on the productivity of the organization and on its members. Again the results showed that majority of respondents have ever experienced a destructive conflict(s) in their organization even though destructive conflicts do not occur very often.

On the specific factors that affect organizational productivity, the study identified inadequate supervision and coaching, employee involvement in decision-making, less organizational bureaucracy, too much work, insufficient rewards and chances to advance, a greater sense of purpose and clear goals, and being able to see results. It was also found that loss of commitment to work, broken relationship among employees, work instability and insecurity, as well as absenteeism are disruptive behaviours that mostly affect employees' productivity.

The causes of destructive conflicts in organization that were found by the study includes lack of resources; criticisms and gossip; accusation; unfair provision of different kinds of benefits (training opportunities); pay cut without consent; individuals consistently failing to admit their weakness; lie, rationalize and deny; apologize instead of changing behaviour; and Blaming others instead of "owning" their part of the problem and who are defensive instead of being open to feedback.

Apart killing an individual emotionally and spiritually, destructive conflicts hurt group cohesion, promote interpersonal hostilities, divert energies, create bad feelings, lead to high labour turnover, costly litigations and it can even kill physically. On the positive side, destructive conflict improves and simulates creativity and innovations; encourages interest and curiosity; advances communication; promotes open information sharing; raises the value of decision making through vigorous ideas; helps in analytical thinking, promotes competition and energizes people; develops working relationships and innovative solutions; and helps to increase cohesiveness while serving as a base for organizational improvement.

The study finally concludes from the results that if destructive conflicts were eliminated from the life of organizations, such organizations would become better off. However, the effects of destructive conflict on productivity seemed not to be a clear one.

7. Recommendations

Based on the results, it is recommended that for the proper management of destructive conflict, the major causes and managing techniques of destructive conflict should be recognized. Complaints and suggestions of the staff should be addressed at staff durbars and union meetings and feedback given to them through their representatives. Also, management should deal fairly with its entire staff irrespective of their positions to avoid accusations of favoritism.

8. Limitations

Every human activity is characterized by certain setbacks. The major difficulty encountered in the research was the collection of data from the respondents. Some of the respondents were reluctant to answer the questionnaires because they thought the researcher was conducting the study for their organizations to reprimand them. Others also rejected the questionnaire because they did not see its importance. Finance was another challenge since the researcher had to make several calls to facilitate the data collection due to the limited time for the study. Some respondents demanded money before they answered the questionnaires, even though the researcher did not pay such monies. Finally, the impossibility of studying the whole population due to inadequate resources is another challenge that limits the generalizability of findings. However, because samples could equally spell out similar outcomes, the researcher believes in the potential for generalizing the results of the study. Despite these limitations, the integrity of the research was not compromised.

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