

Evaluating the Effect of Trust as a Mediator between Conflict Management Styles and Employee Performance

Sheikh Raheel Manzoor

Business Administration Department, IQRA National University, Swat Campus

Dr.raheelmanzoor@inuswat.edu.pk

Munsif Ullah

Business Administration Department, IQRA National University, Swat Campus

Dr.munsifullah@inuswat.edu.pk

Hayat Ullah

Research Scholar, IBMS, The University of Agriculture, Peshawar

hayatcmr@gmail.com

Abstract: Organizational conflict is one of the most critical issues within the workplace setting. Workplace conflict is a complex phenomenon that considerably influences employee performance and attitude. The various researchers used different conflict management styles (CMS) to solve workplace conflicts inside the organization. The current research study examines the influence of CMS on employee trust and performance. The study targeted population was the middle and lower-level managers of International Brands Limited (IBL), Pakistan. The data were gathered from the various branches of IBL, Pakistan. The primary data was collected by using questionnaires. The data were evaluated via mediation analysis. The result revealed that the CMS has a positive influence on employee performance and employee trust. Second, employee trust has a positive effect on employee performance, and lastly, employee trust complementary mediates the relationship between CMS & employee performance. The study will assist the students in expanding their understanding of conflict management styles, employee trust and performance.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Performance, Trust, Employee, Workplace, IBL

Introduction:

Every type of organization requires a certain level of employee trust (Ambrose & Schminke, 2017; Mehmood, Macky & Le Fevre, 2023). Trust plays a crucial role in firm success, particularly when motivating and satisfying employees (Le & Nguyen, 2023; Zaheer, 2016). All firms want to succeed and establish a culture of trust within their boundaries (Siyaleet al., 2023; Sliter, 2018). Transparency in the organizational structure is ensured through trust (Mehmood, Macky & Le Fevre,

2023). Trust is a stable belief in the reliability of someone's abilities, trust, or something (Le & Nguyen, 2023; Moon & Jun, 2018). The positive expectations of employee organization-level positions, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies were reported in research studies as workplace trust (Le & Nguyen, 2023; Shockley & Zalabak, 2018). As a result of mistrust conflict usually occurs and is seen as a consequence of distrust (Wardana et al., 2023). Conflict arises in firms if there is a lack of trust between employees and management (Ambrose & Schminke, 2017; Rahim, 2023). The disagreement affects the organization's everyday operations and harms performance (Gilboa et al., 2018; Rahim, 2023). As per a previous study, conflict in a work area is directly related to reducing output (Bonn & Lee, 2016; Rahim, 2023). Conflict or dispute is a dynamic phenomenon that can be difficult to spot in the workplace (Buhagiar & Anand, 2023; Sliter et al., 2016). The employee's performance and satisfaction suffer due to conflict (Rahim, 2023; Hershcovis & Barling, 2016). Thus, conflict increases the turnover rate along with employee fatigue, stress, and burnout frequently (Buhagiar & Anand, 2023; Demsky et al., 2019). When there is a difference between two parties with the same interest, explain the definition of Conflict (Iskamto, Ghazali & Afthanorhan, 2022; Taylor & Kluemper, 2018). Relationship, task, and process conflicts are the three primary forms of Conflict (Tjosvold & Hui, 2017).

Work conflict is when members of a group dispute the actual task to be completed, even though the goal and objective are the same (Ribeiro et al., 2023; Lim & Tai, 2018). Task conflict has a mixed influence on firm performance, as one study found that it has a negative influence, while another found that it has a positive effect (Rahim et al., 2023; Bowling & Beehr, 2016). For instance, small levels of task conflict have been developed to increase group performance, promote togetherness, and enhance individual obligations, commitment, and satisfaction levels (Mehmood, Macky & Le Fevre, 2023; Judge & Scott, 2016). According to Mehmood, Macky & Le Fevre, (2023), task conflict happens when there are opposing thoughts and opinions regarding a work. Task conflict is less likely to threaten one's identity and self-esteem and may generate lower strong emotions than relationship conflict (Iskamto, Ghazali & Afthanorhan, 2022; Dreu et al., 2015). Thus, relationship conflict is related to personal and social conflicts unrelated to work (Sliter & Jex, 2017). A prior study shows that relationship conflict has an insignificant effect on a firm's performance as it is associated with a personal conflict, not a workplace-related concern (Soieb et al., 2017). Hence, this dispute threatens the company (Demsky & Fritz, 2018).

This issue requires specific attention from management since it elicits anger, indifference, and distrust (Hur et al., 2016). Members of the group who are involved in a conflict over a relationship feel threatened (Hershcovis & Barling, 2018) and are less interdependent (Jiang & Zhao, 2017). They do not exchange more information with one another. Thus, they ultimately have an impact on the firm's overall performance. Consequently, with interpersonal conflicts, the company's management will see employee misbehavior, minimal interdependence among group members, and, most importantly, little

trust (Cho et al., 2016). Process conflict refers to how tasks should be accomplished in the workplace, who is responsible for what, and how tasks should be distributed (Tepper & Henle, 2016). A process conflict happens when group members are assigned guidelines and recourses (Gilboa et al., 2018). This research aims to examine the impact of workplace conflict management styles on employee trust and performance.

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Study Objectives

1. To explore the impact of conflict management styles on employee performance and employee trust.
2. To examine whether employee trust mediates the relationship between conflict management styles and employee performance.

Significance

The discipline of human resources management, in particular, would benefit greatly from this research. This study intends to explore the dynamics of workplace conflict and its effects by filling in the information gaps left by earlier research and adding to the body of knowledge already available. Graduates may benefit from the research's conclusions, which will provide them a thorough understanding of different conflict management strategies. Additionally, HR experts can use the findings to improve organizational effectiveness generally and deal with workplace problems successfully. Some possible outcomes of this study include establishing and maintaining good employee relations, encouraging employee excitement, and increasing staff output. The conclusions drawn from this study can also help managers streamline organizational processes. In the end, this study contributes to a greater understanding of these fundamental ideas by offering insightful information on how conflict resolution strategies, employee trust, and overall employee performance interact.

Statement of Problem

The conflict between staff members is a common problem at work, and it significantly impacts how well people perform and how much they trust the company (Buhagiar & Anand, 2023; Iskmt et al., 2022; Wardana et al., 2023; Kazemi et al., 2022). While more study exists, that has yet to be

conducted to investigate the impact of organizational conflict on the organization's overall performance (Wardana et al., 2023; Buhagiar & Anand, 2023; Iskmta et al., 2022; Le & Nguyen, 2023; Mehmood et al., 2023; Nurhalim, 2022; Ibrahim & Mohamed, 2018). Workplace conflict may result in more significant absences, lower organizational trust (Buhagiar & Anand, 2023; Wardana et al., 2023; Nurhalim, 2022; Pearson et al., 2016), psychological disorders (Lawani et al., 2022), and higher turnover, absences, and anxiety (Ribeirp et al., 2023; Wardana et al., 2023). In order to prevent workplace conflict, the management should focus more on making strategies that can mitigate workplace conflict (Ellis & Abbott, 2020; Wardana et al., 2023). The current study mitigates the prevailing gaps by examining the impact of conflict management styles on employee performance and trust and the mediating effect of employee trust in the relationship between conflict management styles and employee performance.

Literature Review

Employee performance is thought to be significantly impacted by conflict management (Osun, 2009; Okro et al., 2019). Osun (2009) conducted research on conflict resolution in a Nigerian government agency and discovered that conflict resolution styles positively impact employee performance. The study made clear the importance of employing efficient conflict management techniques in the development of organizations. Okro et al. (2019) also examined the effect of conflict management on worker performance in the Nigerian banking sector. The study found that effective conflict management strategies are positively correlated with worker performance, leading to high organizational performance. In order to achieve high employee performance and organizational success, these studies emphasize the significance of employing effective conflict management techniques. In order to investigate the effect of conflict management on employee performance, Olang (2017) carried out a study in the USA. The study's outcome revealed that conflict resolution styles improve individual and organizational performance. The investigator also recommended that a conflict management strategy could enhance worker performance. Effective communication has been recognized as a powerful technique for resolving disputes and raising worker productivity.

Similarly, Agwa (2016) conducted a study across Nigeria examining the impact of various conflict management techniques on employees' performance. The conflict affects the organization when many stakeholders have contrasting viewpoints on a choice that impacts them all. Stakeholders' opinions need to be in alignment in order to lessen conflicts inside an organization. According to a Malaysian study by Said et al. (2016), there is a link between better employee performance and a variety of conflict management strategies. The "communication" conflict resolution strategy was the main focus of the study, which discovered that it had a favorable impact on organizational performance. Conflict resolution in an organization can be accomplished quickly and effectively through communication. To reduce conflicts, the management must consult with staff members before enacting new rules or processes. Workplace conflict might be avoided and resolved by employing

conflict management techniques, including avoidance, compromise, controlling, and integration.

H1: Conflict management styles have a substantial effect on employees' performance.

Using quantitative and theoretical methodologies, Brown et al. (2014) investigated the effect of employee trust on job performance in the USA. The researchers used the quality of the goods or services, financial results, and labor productivity to evaluate employee performance. The results showed that employee trust positively impacts employee behavior and performance because trusting staff members are more inclined to carry out their tasks with integrity. As a result, trust has an advantageous effect on employee performance. Similarly, Chinedu et al. (2018) looked at the relationship between organizational trust and worker performance in Nigeria with the goal of understanding how organizational trust influences worker performance. The investigators used a questionnaire to gather information from the hotels they selected in Edo State. They used multiple regression modeling to analyze the data and discovered that work satisfaction and trust among employees and supervisors had a beneficial impact on employee performance. The investigation concluded that building mutual trust is essential for any organization since it can influence individual and organizational performance. In China, Jin and Mingxuan (2017) looked at the connection between organizational trust and productivity. The researchers used a survey to examine the relationship between workers' trust in their immediate supervisors and upper management and their influence on performance. The result was done on a sample of a state-owned firm and showed that employee trust in their managers was strongly correlated with performance. Varshney (2018) performed a study in Saudi Arabia to examine the effect of employee trust on work performance. The study's findings show that trust significantly affects work performance.

H2: Employee trust has a considerable effect on workers' performance.

Aryee and Pawan (2016) examined how trust influences organizational justice and outcomes in China. The findings showed that trust completely mediated the association between procedural justice and work attitude; it only partially mediated the link between distributive and procedural justice and organizational commitment. Using trust as a mediating factor, Gilstrap and Collins (2017) investigated the link between a leader's actions and their followers' work satisfaction. The results demonstrated that trust played a critical role in mediating the influence of different leadership styles on employee performance. The findings also showed that trust favorably mediated the effect of leadership behavior on employee job satisfaction. Similarly to this, trust was investigated by Newman et al. (2018) as a mediator in the relationship between moral leadership and organizational citizenship. The research findings demonstrated that trust mediated the relationship between ethical leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Kim, Hur, and Junsang (2018) conducted a study in Korea to investigate the relationship between customer perception and company reputation, using trust as a mediator. According to their findings, trust fully mediates the relationship between customer perception and company reputation, and customers' level of trust significantly impacts their brand

decision. Kara, Mohd, Shamsudin, and Chauhan (2018) studied the mediating role of organizational trust in the relationship between perceived organizational support and consumer deviance in Malaysia. The results of their study indicate that organizational trust partially mediates the link between perceived organizational support and constructive deviance. Chan and Huang (2016) researched in China to investigate the relationship between manager conflict management techniques and employee attitude outcomes, with trust as an intermediary. Their study found that conflict management styles are strongly linked to subordinate work satisfaction and their attitudinal outcomes, which are fully mediated by trust. Omisore and Adiodun (2018) performed a study in Nigeria to investigate organizational conflict's origins, consequences, and cures, using trust as a mediator. Their research findings suggest trust is a critical factor in organizational conflict and fully mediates its effects. Caesene and Mierop (2017) investigated the link between perceived organizational support and workplace conflict in Germany, with failure-related trust as a mediator. Their study found that trust strongly supports the relationship between perceived organizational support and workplace conflict.

H3: Conflict management styles significantly influence employee performance, which is mediated by employee trust.

Related Theory

According to the Social Exchange Theory, people interact with others based on the idea of reciprocity in an effort to maximize benefits and reduce costs (Blau, 1964). Employees assess the various conflict resolution techniques used by their managers and coworkers in the context of conflict management using the perceived advantages and disadvantages of each technique. According to research, effective conflict management techniques including teamwork and problem-solving strategies encourage successful outcomes in organizations. These communication patterns encourage, deference, and a desire to work out compromises (Jehn, 1995). Employee impression of trust in their peers and managers increases when they observe such constructive conflict management. Positive workplace dynamics are facilitated by trust, a critical element of social exchange interactions. A favorable work environment, knowledge exchange, and uncertainty reduction are all facilitated by high levels of employee trust (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Trust encourages cooperation, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among employees by making them feel safe in their relationships. Furthermore, the level of trust influences how well employees work significantly. According to research (Colquitt et al., 2007), higher levels of trust are linked to higher levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and engagement. Employee collaboration, dispute resolution, and job focus are all made possible by trustworthy connections, which ultimately improve team and individual performance. In conclusion, Social Exchange Theory offers a theoretical foundation for comprehending how various conflict management modalities impact employee trust, which in turn influences employee performance. Positive work environments that encourage cooperation and collaboration among employees, as well as constructive conflict management techniques, all contribute to enhanced performance outcomes.

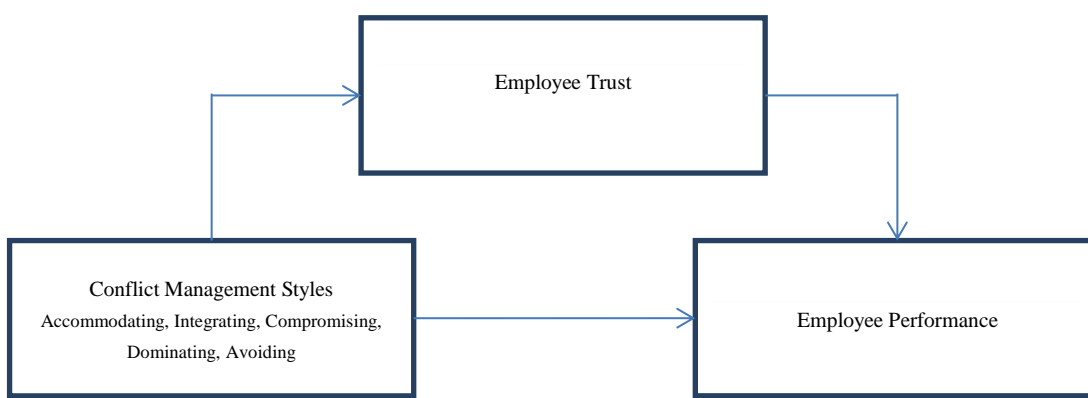


Fig-1: *Framework*

Methodology

Population & Sample

In this study, the targeted population was middle and lower-level managers who work at International Brands Limited (IBL) in Pakistan. The data was collected from IBL branches in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Abbottabad. The reason for selecting IBL was that previous research had indicated higher conflict rates in multinational companies than in other organizations (Kazmi & Iqbal, 2019). The study included 239 middle and lower-level managers working in the IBL offices in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Peshawar, and Abbottabad, Pakistan. Francis' (2018) study on conflict and employee turnover intentions used a sample of 170 individuals. For their study on cognitive breach of contract and personnel performance, Fotohabadi and Kelly (2018) utilized a sample size of 180 people. In the case of the present study, an arbitrary sampling technique was employed, considering financial and time constraints, resulting in the selection of 221 individuals from the offices of IBL in Pakistan. The proportional allocation technique was utilized for convenience, which can be defined as follows.

n = Sample

N = Population

N_i = NumberNumber of personnel in the i -th stratum

n_i = NumberNumber of selected personnel from the i -th stratum

Table 3.1

Offices

Office Cities	Populace	Staff
Islamabad	73	62
Abbottabad	33	30
Peshawar	21	20
Rawalpindi	66	47
Karachi	46	62
Total	239	221

Source (HR IBL, 2022)

Data Collection & Measurements

The researcher gathered primary data from the five branches of IBL through questionnaires that utilized a five-point Likert scale. Personal delivery was used to administer questionnaires in Peshawar, Islamabad, and Abbottabad, whereas email was used to distribute questionnaires in Lahore and Karachi. The study explored conflict management using 18 items developed by De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001). The employee performance was evaluated using nine established items as per the work of Pradhan and Jena (2017). The measurement of employee trust involved three items adapted from Ayoko and Pekerti's (2008) study.

Data Analysis

The participants were segregated into two categories based on their gender. Of 227 respondents, 218 were men, and nine were women, constituting 96% and 4% of the sample. The data shows that female participants were a minority. As previously mentioned, the participants were grouped according to their age. As a result, individuals aged between 21 and 32 comprised 159, those between 33 and 43 accounted for 57, while those aged 44 represented 12, constituting 70%, 25%, and 5%, respectively. According to the statistical frequency, most respondents fell under the age bracket of 21 to 32.

Table 4.1

Demographics

Gender	Freq	Percent
Men	217	95.1
Women	08	3.9
Ages	Freq	Percent
21-32	158	69.2
33-43	56	24.5
44 & above	11	4.5

Reliability

The statistical analyses showed that the reliability for the three factors, namely conflict

management styles, employee trust, and employee performance, was satisfactory, with a range of over 0.70, as Sekaran (2003).

Table 4.2 *Reliability*

Factors	A	Item
Conflict-Management-Style	.745	18
Trust	.775	3
Performance	.781	9

Regression

Table 4.3 indicates the influence of CMS on employee performance. The results suggest that CMS is responsible for 72% of the variation in employee performance. Additionally, based on statistical standards, CMS directly and positively impacts employee performance ($t=24.4, \beta=.852, .05, CI[.7999-.9401]$). An optimistic beta estimate about a specific outcome, such as employee performance, implies that using CMS can observe positive fluctuations. The results show that CMS has a favorable impact on employee performance. The findings also showed that CMS accounts for 55.2% of the difference in employee trust. The CMS also directly and favorably impacts employee trust ($t=16.6; =.743; =.05; CI[.6489-.8230]$). The beta estimate for a specific outcome can be used to identify improvements in employee trust brought on by CMS. In conclusion, CMS has a favorable impact on worker trust. The analysis also showed that employee trust directly and favorably influences employee performance, accounting for 51.3% of the variation in that performance ($t=15.3, =.71, .05, CI[.1877 \text{ to } .2938]$). According to the beta estimate, employee trust can be used to spot positive fluctuations in employee performance. As a result, employee performance benefits from employee trust.

Table 4.3 *Regression Analysis*

Factors	B	StdEr	Beta	T	Sig
(Const)	.459	.120		3.69	.000
CMS	.869	.034	.850	23.2	.000
$R^2=.549, F=265, p<.00, DV: Trust$					
Factors	B	StdEr	Beta	T	Sig
(Const)	.920	.148		6.22	.000
CMS	.730	.042	.754	16.2	.000
$R^2=.451, F=110.6, p<.00, DV: Performance$					
Factors	B	StdEr	Beta	T	Sig
(Const)	.719	.169		4.11	.000
Trust	.731	.045	.709	17.2	.000
$R^2=.512, F=114.2, p<.00, DV: Performance$					
Factors	B	Std.Error	SBeta	T	Sig
(Const)	.449	.137		3.22	.000
CMS	.869	.031	.851	23.67	.000
(Const)	.272	.103		2.77	.000
CMS	.361	.081	.309	4.29	.000
Trust	.187	.078	.177	2.15	.000
$R^2=.379, F=115.5, p<.05, DV: Performance$					

Discussion & Conclusion

This study sought to understand the interplay between conflict management strategies and employee performance and how management styles impact both. It also explored the function of employee trust as a mediator in this interaction. In addition to using the MedPower approach to look at power, the researcher used the Baron & Kenny (1986) paradigm to evaluate mediation causality (Kenny, 2017). According to the study's estimation of the effect of CMS on employee performance, it has a direct and favorable impact. As a result, CMS enhances staff performance. The study calculated the effect of CMS on employee trust and discovered that it has a direct and favorable impact. In the end, CMS has a favorable impact on workers' trust. The study also calculated the effect of employee trust on employee performance and discovered that it has a direct, positive impact on employee performance. Employee performance is ultimately improved by employee trust. Finally, a mediation study was carried out, and the results showed that the mediation between CMS and employee performance is complemented by employee trust. According to the study, employee trust is essential to an organization's development and long-term viability. Management and decision-makers should consider the crucial importance of conflict management methods, particularly the trust factor, for the organization's long-term survival to ensure robust and sustainable organizational performance.

Findings

The study's statistical results showed a substantial relationship between employee trust and performance and conflict management approaches. The analysis also revealed that employee trust has a significant favorable impact on job performance. Additionally, the study added to the body of knowledge on the topic by demonstrating how employee trust mediates the link between CMS and performance. The data analysis validated hypothesis three, specifically focusing on this mediating effect. These results emphasize the necessity for organizations to prioritize these aspects in order to achieve long-term success by emphasizing the role that conflicts management techniques and employee trust play in predicting and boosting employee performance.

Recommendations

Employee trust is an intangible yet palpable conviction or confidence that employees have in their colleagues, reinforcing individual accountabilities within an organization. As it has significant implications for enhancing employee performance, organizations should integrate methods that foster trust among personnel with a CMS intervention strategy. Moreover, since these methods directly impact job performance, companies should adopt techniques that enhance staff confidence through effective conflict resolution strategies. In light of today's demanding and competitive market, it is imperative to investigate variables that influence employee trust between employees and businesses across various sectors of Pakistan's business world so that all Pakistani enterprises can remain competitive.

Limitations and Future Research Area

Due to time and budget restrictions, the study used an arbitrary sampling method, which

yielded a sample size of 221 people. The relatively small number of participants could restrict the generalizability of the results to the more significant population of managers at all levels in international corporations, notwithstanding the efforts made to guarantee proportionate allocation between different workplaces. Data from International Brands Limited (IBL) offices in particular Pakistani cities, including Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Abbottabad, were used in the study. Due to the exclusion of managers from different areas or organizations, this sampling technique may induce bias. The results might differ from Pakistan's general manager population or international corporations. Self-report measures have been employed in the data-gathering process through questionnaires. Because participants might give socially acceptable answers or may not fully reflect their actual experiences or perceptions, this strategy raises the possibility of response bias. The objectivity and dependability of the data gathered may need to be improved by the reliance on subjective self-evaluation. Data were gathered in the study using a cross-sectional approach at a certain period. This approach limits understanding of how these variables may vary over time and the ability to establish causal links between variables. A more thorough understanding of the relationships between conflict management, employee performance, and trust may be obtained through longitudinal or experimental approaches. The study concentrated on managers at a particular multinational corporation's middle and lower levels in Pakistan. The findings don't apply to managers at all organizational levels. The study combined human delivery and email dissemination to administer the questionnaire. The validity and reliability of the data obtained could be affected by this method's potential for introducing variations in response rates and quality. To improve the reliability and applicability of the results, future research should address these limitations by using more extensive and diverse samples, more objective assessments, a more comprehensive range of factors, and longitudinal or experimental methods.

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