

# An Assessment of Conflict Management Practices and Their Effects on the Management of Local Government Authorities in Moshi District Council, Tanzania

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**Abstract:** *In each organization, conflict is an everyday phenomenon. Conflicts are impossible to avoid, but it is possible to manage them through early and timely recognition. Conflicts appear to be inevitable and once there is human interaction, conflict seems to aggravate. The purpose of the study was to assess the conflict management practices and their effects on the management of local government authorities in Moshi District Council, Tanzania. The study adopted a case study research design and data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire which was self-administered at the respondents' work stations. The target population was 73; comprising 21 councilors, and 52 permanent staff. The data was collected was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study revealed a number of conflict resolution mechanisms used by local authorities in Tanzania. They include mediation, disciplinary committees, meetings, informal discussions, seminars and, guidance and counseling. The study also revealed that these mechanisms are only effective when they are implemented through collaboration of both staff and councilors. In order to address the conflict management issues identified, the study recommends that, whereas conflict management is necessary, the council through its top management, the District Executive Director and the head of departments should make deliberate efforts to formulate conflict management systems that facilitate early and timely identification with resolution strategies that are cost-effective. The Local authorities should make the staff and their representative aware on how to appreciate and control the conflict to reduce turnover, wastage of resources and increase productivity and work citizenship.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, affective conflict, resource conflict, conflict management, conflict identification, conflict resolution

## 1. Introduction

For a group to be effective, individual members need to be able to work in a conflict-free environment. If conflict is well managed, it adds to innovation and productivity (Murthy, 2006). Briscoe and Schuler (2004) offer procedures for turning dysfunctional conflict into functional conflict, stating that too many organizations tend to take a win-lose, competitive approach to conflict or at worst avoid conflict altogether. Such a negative view of conflict ensures that a group is ineffective and the activity within it becomes destructive. However, a positive view of conflict leads to a win-win solution.

Within a group, the member can take any one of the three views of conflict; dysfunctional conflict, conflict avoidance and functional conflict. Some practicing top management officers, view group conflict negatively and thus seek to resolve or eliminate all types of disputes. Dowling et al. (2008). These top officials contend that conflicts disrupt the organization and prevent optimal performance. As such, conflicts are a clear indication that something is wrong with the organization and that sound principles are not being applied in managing the activities of the organization. Browaeys and Price (2008) base their approaches on the principles of authority and unity of command to eliminate conflict. They believe that conflicts could be eliminated or avoided by recruiting the right people; carefully specifying job descriptions, structuring the organization in such a way as to establish a clear chain of command, and establishing clear rules and procedures to meet various contingencies. Top management officers

view all conflicts as disruptive and their task is to eliminate them (Griffin, 2006). The main fear was that intense dispute eventually emerges from unchecked minimal conflict. Instead of permitting such heated conflict to develop, proactive officers need to root out the problems that cause conflicts within groups and between groups (Thomas & Christopher, 2001).

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The general objective of the study was to assess the conflict management practices and their effects on the management of local government authorities in Tanzania, using Moshi District Council as the case for the study. The study sought to identify the types, causes, consequences of conflict and management mechanisms.

## 3. Research Problem

Local government authorities in the United Republic of Tanzania as established by the Local Government Acts Number 7 and 8 of 1982 are important grassroots institutions which have both administrative and development roles. The development role, which is the most critical, involves ensuring the wellbeing of the people in areas of social service provision, agricultural development, community development and governance (Dryden, 1968). The on-going local government reforms in Tanzania are geared towards providing more power and autonomy to local authorities to manage their own affairs

and discharge their functions more effectively (Mogella, 1987).

Local government authorities in Tanzania are run by two groups of people with different status. One group consists of councilors who are elected through a democratic process and then qualify to become the key decision-makers on issues pertaining to the management of the councils. The second group comprises permanent public officials (staff) who implement the decisions made by the councilors. However, the authorities are characterized by frequent conflicts, misunderstanding, and mistrust between councilors and staff. The conflict between the two groups has been in existence in various councils in Tanzania; a situation that hinders cooperation and effectiveness in achieving the set objectives, with negative consequences on regional socio-economic development.

#### 4. Research Methodology

The study adopted a case research design. The design allowed detailed explanation of the phenomenon in depth and is a method that was used to narrow down a very broad area of research to make it small so as to manage the resources available. The study covered target population of 83; comprising 52 public staff officers and 21 councilors. Data was collected directly from the respondents using semi-structured questionnaires. Data analysis involved processing, analyzing, acting encoding categorizing the collected data to fulfill the objective of the research. Data was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively,

whereby factual and logical interpretations, comparison and explanation of the study findings. Descriptive statistical tools mainly frequencies, percentages and ... were used to analyze data.

#### 5. Results and Analysis

The study achieved a response rate of 72.3%, comprising 64.4 male and 35.6 female.

##### Existence, Types and Causes of Conflict

Objective 1 of the study sought to determine existence of conflict and the various types of conflict that exist in local authorities in Tanzania. According to the study findings, 60.3 % of the respondents were aware of the existence of conflict in local government authorities while 39.7 were not. The conflicts identified include delay in implementation of government priorities, continuous complaints from the citizens, councilors' and staff themselves, and continuous turnover and voluntary resignation by staff. From the study findings in Table 1, the types of conflict identified included scarce resources conflict supported by 38(52%) of the respondents, followed by affective conflict; 19(26%) while Authority ranked last with only 16(22%) of all 73 respondents. This proves that allocation of resource is the most causative agent of conflict in local government authorities in Tanzania, the reason for delay of the implementation of government priorities and programmes.

**Table 1: Kinds of Conflict**

Kind of Conflict	Staffs		Councilors		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Scarce Resource Conflict	30	57.7	8	38	38	52
Affective Conflict	13	25	6	28.6	19	26
Authority Conflict	9	0	7	33.3	16	22

The results in Table 2 illustrates the causes of conflict in local government authorizes; 61(83.6%) of the respondents were of the view that lack of accountability was the main cause of the conflict since it facilitated nepotism and misuse of public funds. Lack of transparency was also the common cause whereby 40(54.8%) of the respondents responded that lack transparency in decision making and resource allocation created disagreement in utilization of

the additional competences to raise performance. However, poor information, negative attitudes and poor organization structures seemed to have the same effects on management of conflict in local authorities in Tanzania. From the findings, it shows that accountability is something important and it must be taken precisely and accurately to avoid the conflicts in local government authorities in Tanzania.

**Table 2: Causes of Conflict**

Causes	Staffs		Councilors		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Lack of accountability	43	82.7	18	85.7	61	83.6
Poor information sharing	22	42.3	9	42.9	31	42.5
Lack of transparency	19	36.5	21	100	40	54.8
Negative attitudes	17	32.7	14	66.7	31	42.5
Poor organization structure	12	23	19	90.5	31	42.5

Apart from providing the list against which respondents were required to tick, in case they were relevant, the study required them to mention other causes of conflict besides those which were listed in the questionnaire.

The respondents almost gave similar responses as they seemed to have undergone similar experiences in the management of local authorities (Table 3). Delay in salaries was the most itching problem. It was identified by

72(98.6%) out of 100% of the respondents, followed by the miss-use of public funds; 67(91.8%), 65(89%) cited delay in promotion, 56(76.7%) of the respondents indicated non-payment of allowances. Lack of trust was cited by 50(68.5%) and lastly 37(50.7%) of the

respondents were of the view that inefficient delivery of services was another type of conflict. This implies that, in any council, salaries should be paid in time so as to avoid conflict.

**Table 3: Other Causes of Conflict**

Other causes	Staffs		Councilors		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Delay in salaries	52	100	20	95.2	72	98.6
Miss-use of public funds	46	88	21	100	67	91.8
Lack of trust	32	61.5	18	85.7	50	68.5
Delay in promotion	50	96.2	15	71.4	65	89
In efficiency delivery of services	18	34.6	19	90.5	37	50.7
Nonpayment of allowances	47	90.4	9	42.9	56	76.7

**Effect of Conflict on Management of Local Authorities**

The study examined various issues to determine whether respondents were aware of the effects of conflict on the management of local government authorities. As shown in Table 4, out of 73 respondents, 46(63%) indicated awareness and understanding of conflict while 22(30%) were of contrary opinion, while 5(7%) never responded to the question.

**Table 4: Awareness of Effects of Conflict**

Category	Yes		No		No responses	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Staffs	33	63.5	17	32.7	2	3.8
Councilors	13	61.9	5	23.8	3	14.3
Total	46	63	22	30	5	7

Further, the study sought to establish the effect of conflict on the management of local authorities. According to the study findings, the respondents who perceived conflict as a positive aspect in the council were more than those who

said it had negative effect and both positive and negative effects. However, 39(53%) of the respondents indicated that it has positive effects, 24(33%) of the respondents responded that it has negative effect and 10 (14%) responded that it has both negative and positive effects. From the findings, it proves that conflict has both negative and positive effects on management of local authorities. Furthermore, the responses on what were the positive and negative effects of conflict in local authorities are presented in Tables 5 and 6. Improvement in salaries ranked highest with the total number of 58(79%) of all respondents whereby both improvement in service delivery and improvement in problem identification ranked the lowest with 20(27%). This clearly shows that, staffs are happier when they get good salaries as it increases their working morale in the council. It also means that conflict provides the opportunity for exploring ideas and alternative approaches to problems, thus improving the quality of decision making, involvement in the discussion and increases staff members desire to collaborate and strengthens their commitment to work together to achieve workplace goals.

**Table 5: Positive Effects of Conflict**

Positive effects	Staffs		Councilors		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Improvement in salaries	41	79	17	81	58	79
Improvement in service delivery	14	27	6	29	20	27
Improve promotion of individuals	32	62	11	52	43	59
Improve in decision making	20	38	5	24	25	34
Improve problem identification	11	21	9	43	20	27

The findings in Table 6 shows that, strikes rank highest by 54(74%) of the responses from the respondents, while mistrust 25(34%), miss-use of public funds had 42(58%), poor quality of services 31(42%) and inefficient delivery of services had 34(47%) in that order.

This shows that in order for the people to get their rights, they must refuse to work and is normally organized by a body of employees as a form of protest, typically in an attempt to gain concession from their employer.

**Table 6: Negative Effects of Conflict**

Negative effects	Staffs		Councilors		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Miss-use of public funds	32	62	10	48	42	58
Poor quality of services	23	44	8	38	31	42
In efficient delivery of services	29	56	5	24	34	47
Strikes	41	79	13	62	54	74
Mistrust	18	35	7	33	25	34

The other negative effects of conflicts identified were decline of projects which ranked highest 89%, while poor attendance ranked (30%). Other negative effects of conflict were poor revenue collection 52(71%), dissatisfaction 35(48%) and disunity 40(55%).

This clearly shows that in the council projects are not put into first consideration in managing their daily services. So many projects are failing and thus conflict is very easy to occur in such places. From the findings it shows that poor management of conflict can lead to poor results that weakened the operationalization of governance activities.

**Table 7: Other Negative Effects of Conflict**

Negative effect of conflict	Staffs		Councilors		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Poor revenue collection	37	71	15	71	52	71
Dissatisfaction/disappointment	28	54	7	33	35	48
Decline of developmental projects	45	9	20	95	65	89
Poor attendance	13	25	9	43	22	30
Disunity	21	40	18	86	40	55

### Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Regarding the question on effectiveness of conflict resolutions mechanisms in the local government authorities in Tanzania, the study sought to identify the techniques in a place for conflict resolution. According to the study findings (Table 7), 53 (73%) of the respondents indicated that is there are mechanisms for conflict resolution, whereby 13(19%) of the respondents responded to the contrary. The results clearly show that there are available mechanisms for conflict resolution in local authorities as declared by many.

As shown in Table 8, the most frequently used conflict resolution mechanisms was guidance and counseling (56%) which was used to reduces errors, burnouts, and promote team work. Others were seminars (36%), mediation (23%), disciplinary committees (38%) and informal discussion (25%). From the findings, guidance and counseling was most common technique. It encompassed all developmental activities through which individuals were assisted to accept, understand, appreciate, harmonize and utilize own abilities, aptitudes, interests and attitudinal patterns in relation to the aspirations.

**Table 8: Conflict Resolution Mechanisms**

Mechanisms	Staffs		Councilors		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Seminars	21	40	5	24	26	36
Mediation	9	17	8	38	17	23
Disciplinary committees	16	31	12	57	28	38
Informal discussion	11	21	7	33	18	25
Guidance and counseling	27	52	14	67	41	56

### 6. Conclusions

From the findings, there was conflict of different types in local government authorities in Tanzania; affective conflict, resource conflict, goal conflict and cognitive conflict. Nonetheless, the most prevalent was resource conflict, affective conflict and authority conflict.

Conflict in local authorities in Tanzania had both positive and negative effects, though positive effects outweighed the negative effects. The negative effects identified were miss-use of public funds, poor quality of services, inefficient delivery of services, strikes and mistrust between the staffs and the councilors. The positive effects

include improvement in problem identification and solution, improvement in decision making, improvement in service delivery, making managers promote the employees at work places, and improvement in salaries. Among the conflict resolution mechanisms, guidance and counseling was frequently used because it reduces errors, burnouts, and promotes team work. Others are seminars, mediation, disciplinary committees and informal discussion.

## 7. Recommendations

The study focused on assessing conflict management practices and their effects on the management of local government authorities. The study revealed that indeed a conflict exist in local authorities in Tanzania, mainly between staff and the councilors. To ensure smooth and efficient management of local authorities in Tanzania, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Effective measures should be taken by the District Executive Officer (DED) to address the existing and future problems, management issues, financial use and leadership conducts, such as strategic planning that deals with conflict management and appreciation, cut off bureaucracy to easy communication, job description must be clear to avoid overburden of task, clear auditing system to avoid misuse of resources and clear code of good conduct.
2. The local authorities through their top management; the District Executive Director and the Head of Departments should introduce continuous conflict training system to make the staffs and their representatives aware on how to appreciate and control the conflict to reduce turnover, wastage of resources and increase productivity and work citizenship.
3. Local government authorities should conduct guidance and counseling sessions where necessary, in order to help create harmonious relationships between councilors and staff. Supervision and psychotherapy is necessary, as it can change the behavior of both councilors and staffs.
4. Establishment of clear goals that integrate both staff and organizational aspirations will help bring harmony and corporate focus. This will avoid goal conflict, provide measurability of efforts and make public representatives and staff more responsible and productive, reliable to the needs of the community and of the organization.
5. To help come up with lasting solutions for recurring causes, it is necessary for the top officials to enhance the capacity of councilors and staff through training and experience sharing tours and workshops. These trainings and workshops should focus on increasing conflict management skills, enhancing capacity to analyze information related to conflicts, and narrowing down social distance among the members of different ethnic and religious groups.

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