



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIA

Joseph Emmanuel¹ & Stella Ethanhami Garba²

¹Center for Peace and Security Studies, Modibbo Adama University, Yola, Nigeria

Josephemmanuel199000@gmail.com

²Department of Business Administration, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

Stellagarba13@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examined conflict management and the future of human resource management in Nigeria. The study was guided by four research questions and four null hypotheses. A correlational survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 1,250 employees and human resource personnel drawn from selected public and private organizations in Nigeria, while a sample size of 385 respondents was selected using Taro Yamane's formula. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting the respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Conflict Management and Future of Human Resource Management Questionnaire (CMFHRMQ)." The instrument was validated by experts in Human Resource Management and Organizational Behaviour, while Cronbach Alpha reliability method yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Out of the 385 copies of the questionnaire administered, 372 copies were properly completed and returned, representing a 96.6% response rate. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while simple linear regression analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that conflict management strategies had significant effects on employee productivity, job satisfaction, organizational harmony, and the future effectiveness of human resource management in Nigeria. The study concluded that effective conflict management is essential for enhancing organizational effectiveness and sustainable human resource management in modern organizations. The study recommended, among others, that organizations should establish effective conflict management policies and provide regular training for human resource managers on modern conflict resolution strategies.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Human Resource Management, Employee Productivity, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Harmony.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable feature of organizational life because organizations comprise individuals and groups with diverse values, interests, expectations, and goals (Mills & Mene, 2020). According to Omene (2021), workplace conflict is a natural outcome of interactions among employees and management and becomes more pronounced in modern organizations characterized by increasing diversity and complexity. Although conflict has traditionally been perceived as a disruptive force, contemporary organizational thinking recognizes it as a potentially constructive process capable of stimulating innovation, organizational learning, and



adaptation when effectively managed (Shabani et al., 2022). Consequently, conflict management has evolved from a reactive dispute resolution mechanism to a strategic organizational capability that contributes to long-term organizational sustainability and competitiveness.

The context within which organizational conflict occurs has changed considerably over the last decade. Digital transformation, globalization, artificial intelligence, remote and hybrid work arrangements, workforce diversity, and changing employee expectations have introduced new forms of workplace interactions and disagreements that differ significantly from traditional industrial disputes (Stone & Deadrick, 2015). Organizations increasingly face challenges associated with virtual communication barriers, technological adaptation, employee well-being concerns, algorithmic decision-making, and generational differences in work values and expectations (Suseno et al., 2022; Awalluddin & Maznorbalia, 2023). These emerging realities require organizations to adopt proactive conflict management systems capable of preventing disputes and promoting collaboration in increasingly dynamic and technology-driven work environments.

The field of Human Resource Management (HRM) has similarly undergone a transformation from traditional personnel administration to strategic human resource management and digital HR systems. According to Stone and Deadrick (2015), the future of HRM is being shaped by technological advancement, globalization, and changing workforce demographics. In Nigeria, HR professionals increasingly perform roles as strategic partners, change agents, and employee champions responsible for facilitating organizational transformation and resilience (Okeyika et al., 2023). The post-pandemic workplace has further accelerated the adoption of remote work, digital collaboration platforms, artificial intelligence applications, and data-driven HR decision-making processes (Vahdat, 2022). Employee relations management has therefore become central to organizational competitiveness because the quality of employment relationships directly influences productivity, adaptability, and organizational sustainability (Roper & Higgins, 2020).

Despite growing scholarly attention to strategic HRM, the concept of the future effectiveness of Human Resource Management remains insufficiently developed within Nigerian HR literature. Existing studies largely assess HR effectiveness using traditional indicators such as productivity, employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance outcomes. However, the future of work requires broader and more dynamic measures of HR effectiveness that reflect the realities of technological disruption, workforce diversity, and changing employment relationships.

In this study, future effectiveness of HRM refers to the ability of HR systems, policies, and professionals to remain adaptive, technologically enabled, strategically relevant, and sustainable in responding to emerging workplace challenges and opportunities. Unlike traditional HR effectiveness measures, future HR effectiveness emphasizes preparedness for future organizational realities and the capacity of HR functions to maintain relevance in an increasingly uncertain and complex environment. Specifically, this construct is operationalized through six dimensions: digital HR capability, employee relations sustainability, adaptability and organizational resilience, workforce inclusion and diversity management, conflict prevention and early warning systems, and strategic HR decision-making.



Conflict management assumes particular importance within this emerging HR environment because unresolved workplace conflict can undermine digital transformation initiatives, weaken organizational adaptability, reduce employee trust, and impede strategic decision-making processes. Conflict management refers to the process of identifying and addressing disagreements constructively in order to minimize negative outcomes and improve organizational effectiveness (Rahim, 2023). According to Thomas (2008), organizations employ strategies such as avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration in managing conflicts. Evidence from Nigerian organizations suggests that collaborative and compromising approaches produce more favourable organizational outcomes than adversarial approaches (Nwokedi et al., 2022). Effective conflict management therefore contributes not only to organizational harmony but also to innovation, resilience, and strategic adaptation in changing work environments (Salami & Ososuaapor, 2022).

In Nigeria, workplace conflict arises from numerous sources including ineffective communication systems, leadership deficiencies, inequitable resource allocation, salary-related grievances, ethnic diversity, and cultural differences (Ayinde et al., 2021). The multicultural nature of Nigerian society further complicates workplace conflict management because employees often possess different cultural values, communication styles, and workplace expectations. HR professionals also contend with weak institutional conflict resolution frameworks and inadequate organizational support for formal dispute management processes (Adetunji & Adetunji, 2018). Furthermore, the rapid digitalization of workplaces following the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced additional conflict dimensions associated with virtual work environments, technological adaptation challenges, employee surveillance concerns, and work-life balance issues (Vahdat, 2022).

Several studies have established positive relationships between conflict management and variables such as organizational productivity, employee commitment, job satisfaction, innovation, and industrial harmony (Chika-Anyanwu & Oparanma, 2020; Edeh & Udensi, 2017; Shabani et al., 2022). Similarly, research in Nigerian public universities indicates that strengthening conflict management strategies enhances employee commitment and organizational stability (Igbinoba et al., 2023). However, these studies largely focus on traditional organizational outcomes and conventional workplace settings. Limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding conflict management as a determinant of the future effectiveness of HRM, particularly within the context of digital transformation, artificial intelligence integration, remote work arrangements, workforce inclusion, employee well-being, and strategic workforce planning.

The originality of this study lies in three major respects. First, it extends conflict management literature by conceptualizing conflict management as a determinant of the future effectiveness of HRM rather than merely as a predictor of productivity, job satisfaction, or organizational harmony. Second, it examines this relationship across both public and private organizations in Nigeria, thereby providing broader insights into sectoral similarities and differences in HR practices and conflict management systems. Third, it applies conflict management theory to emerging Nigerian workplace realities characterized by digitalization, generational diversity, artificial intelligence adoption, remote work, and evolving employment relationships.



The future of HRM in Nigeria depends significantly on the ability of organizations to integrate proactive conflict management strategies into their strategic HR frameworks. HR professionals will increasingly require competencies in emotional intelligence, communication, negotiation, and technology-enabled dispute resolution to effectively manage future workplace challenges (Min et al., 2020). Consequently, conflict management should no longer be viewed merely as an operational HR function but as a strategic capability that supports organizational resilience, adaptability, workforce inclusion, and sustainable employee relations in the future of work (Chaudhry et al., 2022). This study is therefore justified by the need to examine how conflict management practices can enhance the future effectiveness of HRM in Nigeria's rapidly evolving organizational environment and contribute to the development of resilient, adaptive, and inclusive workplaces capable of thriving in the digital age.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the increasing recognition of human resource management as a strategic tool for organizational growth and sustainability, many organizations in Nigeria continue to experience persistent workplace conflicts arising from poor communication, ineffective leadership, unequal treatment, cultural diversity, inadequate welfare packages, and resistance to organizational change. These conflicts have negatively affected employee morale, productivity, cooperation, innovation, and organizational stability, thereby limiting the ability of human resource managers to effectively achieve organizational goals in an increasingly digital and competitive business environment. Furthermore, the evolving nature of work, technological transformation, and changing employee expectations have intensified the need for modern conflict management strategies that can promote healthy workplace relationships and organizational adaptability. However, many organizations still rely on traditional and reactive approaches to managing conflict, which are inadequate for addressing contemporary workplace challenges. It is against this background that this study examines conflict management and the future of human resource management in Nigeria.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to examine conflict management and the future of human resource management in Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the effect of conflict management strategies on employee productivity in organizations in Nigeria;
2. determine the influence of conflict management on employee job satisfaction in organizations in Nigeria;
3. assess the role of conflict management in promoting organizational harmony and effective employee relations; and
4. examine the extent to which conflict management predicts the future effectiveness of human resource management in Nigeria.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:



1. What is the effect of conflict management strategies on employee productivity in organizations in Nigeria?
2. What influence does conflict management have on employee job satisfaction in organizations in Nigeria?
3. What role does conflict management play in promoting organizational harmony and effective employee relations?
4. To what extent does conflict management predict the future effectiveness of human resource management in Nigeria?

1.5 HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Conflict management strategies have no significant effect on employee productivity in organizations in Nigeria.
2. Conflict management has no significant influence on employee job satisfaction in organizations in Nigeria.
3. Conflict management does not significantly promote organizational harmony and effective employee relations.
4. Conflict management does not significantly predict the future effectiveness of human resource management in Nigeria.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.1 Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict is an inherent feature of organizational life, arising from the incompatibility of goals, interests, or values among individuals or groups within a workplace setting. However, the scholarly treatment of conflict has shifted significantly over the past two decades. Early conceptualizations, such as those by Thomas and Kilmann (2008), positioned conflict primarily as an interpersonal phenomenon to be managed through stylistic choices. More recent scholarship, by contrast, emphasizes conflict as a structurally embedded feature of modern workplaces shaped by demographic diversity, technological mediation, and evolving employment relationships (Rahim & Katz, 2020; Omene, 2021). This shift is not merely semantic; it carries profound implications for how conflict management is theorized and practiced. Where Thomas and Kilmann (2008) focused on individual behavioral styles, Rahim and Katz (2020) demonstrate that gender and generational differences significantly influence which strategies employees prefer and perceive as effective. Similarly, while Mills and Mene (2020) identify poor communication, resource scarcity, and role ambiguity as primary causes of workplace conflict, Omene (2021) argues that these traditional causes are now compounded by digital communication platforms, remote work arrangements, and cross-cultural team dynamics that introduce novel vectors of disagreement. The tension between these perspectives is instructive: if conflict causation has evolved, then conflict management frameworks developed for co-located, homogeneous workforces may be insufficient for contemporary Nigerian organizations navigating digital transformation and multicultural workforce composition. This study addresses this theoretical lag by examining conflict management not merely as a stylistic repertoire but as a strategic competency that enables future HRM effectiveness.



2.1.2 Conflict Management

Conflict management refers to the deliberate process of identifying, addressing, and resolving disagreements in a constructive manner to minimize negative impacts and enhance organizational outcomes (Rahim, 2023). Yet the literature reveals a persistent divide between prescriptive and descriptive approaches. On the prescriptive side, Kabbani and Dalati (2025) assert that effective conflict management is essential for maintaining good performance, arguing that the collaborating style (characterized by high assertiveness and high cooperativeness) fosters win-win scenarios linked to increased engagement. Salami and Ososuaipor (2022) similarly position conflict management as a strategic managerial tool that aligns individual and organizational goals. However, descriptive studies paint a more nuanced picture. Nwokedi et al. (2022), in their empirical study of Nigerian breweries, found that collaborative *and* compromising strategies yield the most significant positive effects on organizational performance, suggesting that context (not universal prescription) determines optimal strategy selection. This finding contradicts the unilateral endorsement of collaboration advanced by Kabbani and Dalati (2025) and raises a critical question: if compromising strategies are equally effective in certain Nigerian organizational contexts, why do prescriptive frameworks continue to privilege collaboration? The answer may lie in the failure of existing literature to account for Nigeria's unique institutional environment, where power distance, ethnic diversity, and bureaucratic inertia shape how conflicts are experienced and resolved. This study contributes to resolving this contradiction by examining how conflict management strategies differentially predict future HRM effectiveness across public and private sector contexts in Nigeria.

Furthermore, while existing studies have examined conflict management effects on productivity and morale (Chika-Anyanwu & Oparanma, 2020; Edeh & Udensi, 2017), none have systematically investigated how these practices function as enablers of *future-oriented* HRM capabilities, specifically digital HR transformation, generational inclusion, and strategic workforce planning. This gap is particularly acute in Nigerian scholarship, where the conflict management literature remains largely disconnected from the digital HRM and strategic HRM discourses that dominate global HR research.

2.1.3 Conflict Management Strategies

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) provides a foundational framework for understanding five distinct conflict management styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating (Thomas & Kilmann, 2008). While this framework has achieved near-hegemonic status in conflict management research, its application across diverse organizational contexts has yielded contradictory findings that the literature has not adequately reconciled.

In the Nigerian context, Nwokedi et al. (2022) found that collaborative and compromising strategies produced the most significant positive effects on organizational performance in the brewery sector. Conversely, Aruoren and Okeke (2025) report that conflict management strategies including *avoidance* and *accommodation* also demonstrate significant positive effects on employee productivity among Nigerian employees, a finding that directly contradicts Western scholarship, which typically positions avoidance as dysfunctional (Rahim



& Buntzman, 2019). This contradiction is not merely methodological; it reflects the reality that in high-power-distance, collectivist cultures such as Nigeria's, avoidance may function as a face-saving mechanism that preserves long-term relationships, whereas in individualist Western contexts, it is interpreted as withdrawal or neglect. Kinontao et al. (2025) add further complexity by demonstrating a statistically significant relationship between the collaborating style and job satisfaction, yet their study did not examine whether this relationship holds across different sectors or organizational types. The absence of comparative public-private sector analysis in these studies represents a significant gap, given that public-sector bureaucracy in Nigeria is characterized by weak institutional mechanisms, political interference, and unionized workforces that fundamentally alter conflict dynamics (Obiorah & Nwakamma, 2022).

Moreover, the literature on formal conflict resolution mechanisms reveals additional tensions. Lazarus (2014) emphasizes collective bargaining and negotiation as significant contributors to employee productivity, while the ILO (n.d.) underscores grievance procedures as essential for maintaining workplace equilibrium. Yet in Nigeria, the enforcement of collective agreements remains problematic. Arthur-Jolasinmi and Abusomwan (2024) document judicial inconsistencies in the interpretation of collective agreements, with courts in *Nigeria–Arab Bank Ltd. v Shuaibu* (1991) holding that the legal status of such agreements is "doubtful." This legal ambiguity creates a structural vacuum where formal grievance procedures may exist on paper but fail in practice—a reality that most conflict management studies in Nigeria ignore. The Trade Disputes Act 1976 mandates voluntary grievance procedures before statutory intervention, but Adetunji and Adetunji (2018) note that weak institutional conflict resolution mechanisms and limited organizational support for formal dispute resolution persist across Nigerian organizations. This disjuncture between legal framework and institutional reality constitutes a critical contextual variable that existing conflict management scholarship has failed to integrate.

2.1.4 Human Resource Management

Human resource management has evolved from traditional personnel administration to a strategic function that aligns human capital with organizational objectives. However, the literature reveals competing narratives about the pace and depth of this transformation in Nigeria. On one hand, Okeyika et al. (2023) document the application of artificial intelligence in HRM as transformative, noting that AI has revolutionized recruiting processes and elevated HR managers to strategic partner roles. On the other hand, Ojogiwa and Nhari (2024) argue that embracing digital human resource management in the Nigerian public sector remains a "critical imperative" rather than an accomplished reality, suggesting that digital transformation is aspirational rather than achieved. This tension between technological promise and institutional lag is central to understanding the future of HRM in Nigeria.

The global literature on digital HRM offers ambitious projections. Nawaz et al. (2024) identify AI in HRM as presenting both opportunities for efficiency and challenges regarding ethical decision-making and data security. Stone and Deadrick (2015) argue that the future of HRM is fundamentally shaped by technological advancements, globalization, and changing workforce demographics. Yet these global frameworks often assume institutional capacities (robust IT infrastructure, data governance protocols, and skilled HR analytics personnel) that are



unevenly distributed across Nigerian organizations. Amoako et al. (2023) note the acceleration of e-HRM system adoption in Nigeria, but Adias (2025) cautions that digital HRM transformation in Nigeria impacts talent management, performance, and workforce well-being in ways that require culturally adaptive implementation. The gap between global best practices and Nigerian institutional realities remains undertheorized, particularly regarding how conflict management competencies enable or constrain the digital transformation of HRM functions.

2.1.5 Future of HRM in Nigeria

The future of HRM in Nigeria is shaped by several converging trends: digital transformation, AI and automation, workforce diversity, changing employee expectations, and strategic sustainability (Vahdat, 2022; Suseno et al., 2022; Cortez, 2025). However, a striking omission in this literature is the absence of conflict management as a mediating or moderating variable in HRM transformation. For instance, while SHRM (2025) identifies generational diversity as a critical future workforce trend requiring culturally sensitive policies, and while Obiorah and Nwakamma (2022) document how ethnocentric behavior among public sector managers undermines diversity management in Nigeria, neither literature stream examines how conflict management practices mediate the relationship between diversity and HRM effectiveness.

This omission is particularly problematic given Nigeria's unique socio-cultural landscape. The Federal Character Principle (FCP), designed to ensure equitable ethnic representation in public employment, has paradoxically generated more conflict than it resolves. Adeleye et al. (2014) document how the FCP's quota system (stipulating 2.5% to 3% representation per state) has been manipulated to favor certain ethnic groups, with 80% of Permanent Secretaries in Federal Ministries drawn from Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba combined, despite constitutional mandates for equitable distribution. The "Nigerian factor" (characterized by nepotism, favoritism, and political interference) transforms workforce diversity from a competitive advantage into a conflict generator (Osawe, 2015; Olalekan & Ibietan, 2019). In this context, conflict management is not merely a reactive tool for resolving disputes; it is a prerequisite for the very functioning of HRM systems that must navigate ethnic polarization while pursuing meritocratic objectives.

Furthermore, the rise of remote work and digital communication since the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new conflict vectors. Vahdat (2022) documents the acceleration of digital transformation in Nigerian HRM, yet Odole (2023) notes that social media and digital platforms amplify workplace tensions through rapid information diffusion and polarized group dynamics. The literature on digital HRM (Amoako et al., 2023; Adias, 2025) does not address how HR managers should manage conflicts that originate or escalate through digital channels—a gap that this study addresses by examining conflict prevention systems as a dimension of future HRM effectiveness.

2.1.6 Conflict Management and Employee Productivity

The relationship between conflict management and employee productivity is well-documented, yet the literature reveals important contextual variations. Min et al. (2020) establish



that collaborative approaches yield substantial benefits for organizational efficiency, while Shabani et al. (2022) argue that constructive conflict management fosters environments where diverse viewpoints enhance problem-solving. However, these findings primarily derive from Western or Asian organizational contexts. In Nigeria, Aruoren and Okeke (2025) found that collective bargaining, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise all have significant positive effects on productivity a broader range of effective strategies than Western literature would predict. This divergence suggests that cultural context moderates the conflict management-productivity relationship, yet no study has examined whether this moderation extends to future-oriented HRM outcomes such as digital capability or strategic workforce planning. This study fills that gap by testing whether conflict management strategies differentially predict the six indicators of future HRM effectiveness.

2.1.7 Conflict Management and Job Satisfaction

Employee relations and job satisfaction are intrinsically linked to conflict management practices, yet the literature has inadequately integrated organizational justice and employee voice as mediating mechanisms. Kinontao et al. (2025) demonstrate a significant relationship between collaborating styles and job satisfaction, while Roper and Higgins (2020) position HR practitioners as critical actors in workplace conflict resolution. However, these studies treat job satisfaction as a terminal outcome rather than as an indicator of sustainable employee relations in an era of remote work and gig economy participation.

The organizational justice literature offers a critical missing link. Psychological contract breach (where employees perceive that employers have failed to fulfill promised obligations) significantly predicts intention to leave, but justice perceptions can stem this tide (Business Management and Entrepreneurship Academic Journal, 2022). In Nigeria's public sector, where bureaucratic inertia, delayed promotions, and arbitrary transfers are endemic, psychological contract breaches are frequent triggers of conflict that formal conflict management systems fail to address. Similarly, the employee voice literature emphasizes that effective communication prevents misunderstandings that escalate into conflicts, yet Nigerian organizations are characterized by hierarchical communication structures that suppress upward feedback (Ayinde et al., 2021). The failure of existing conflict management studies to integrate organizational justice and employee voice represents a significant theoretical limitation that this study addresses by conceptualizing employee relations sustainability as a multi-dimensional indicator of future HRM effectiveness.

2.1.7 Conflict Management, Organizational Harmony, and the Nigerian Industrial Relations Context

Workplace harmony and organizational climate are significantly influenced by conflict management approaches, yet the Nigerian context introduces complexities that generic frameworks cannot capture. Shabani et al. (2022) found that collaboration and accommodation foster supportive organizational environments, but their study did not account for the ethnic and religious fault lines that define Nigerian workplaces. Obiorah and Nwakamma (2022) document how ethnocentric behavior among public sector managers creates a "spirit of animosity" rather than cooperation, with the abuse of federal character principles denying workers a sense of



belonging. In this environment, accommodation strategies may reinforce existing power asymmetries rather than generate genuine harmony, particularly when accommodation is demanded from ethnically marginalized employees.

The industrial relations literature further complicates this picture. Fajana (2006) and Arthur-Jolasinmi and Abusomwan (2024) document the legal framework for collective bargaining in Nigeria, including the Trade Unions Act 1973, the Trade Disputes Act 1976, and the Labour Act 2004. However, the enforcement of these frameworks is weak. The National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN) has held that workers need not exhaust dispute resolution procedures before striking (NICN/ABJ/179/2016), yet the Court of Appeal in *Oshiomhole & anor v FGN & anor* (2006) restricted strike rights to trade disputes narrowly defined. This judicial inconsistency creates uncertainty for both employers and unions, undermining the predictability that formal grievance procedures are designed to provide. Chukwuemeka et al. (2012) identified funding, leadership ineffectiveness, and low employee participation in decision-making as major conflict factors in Nigerian local government, while a field survey in NTA Kaduna found that recognition of union activities and creation of industrial relations units significantly reduce conflict incidence. Despite these findings, the literature has not examined how conflict management practices interact with union presence, collective bargaining effectiveness, and legal compliance to shape future HRM outcomes a gap this study addresses through its comparative public-private design.

2.1.8 Conflict Management and the Future of HRM

The strategic importance of conflict management in future workplaces is acknowledged but under theorized. Igbinoba et al. (2023) demonstrate that bolstering conflict management strategies is essential for sustaining academic staff commitment in Nigerian public universities, while Min et al. (2020) identify emotional intelligence, negotiation, and communication as critical HR competencies for managing workplace conflict. However, these studies treat conflict management as a tool for maintaining present-state harmony rather than as a strategic enabler of future HRM capabilities.

This theoretical vacuum is particularly evident in three areas. First, while digital HRM and AI integration are widely discussed as future trends (Nawaz et al., 2024; Okeyika et al., 2023), no study has examined how conflict management competencies enable HR managers to navigate the ethical dilemmas, algorithmic bias concerns, and employee resistance that accompany technological transformation. Second, while generational diversity is recognized as a critical workforce trend (Cortez, 2025; SHRM, 2025), the literature has not explored how conflict management practices must adapt to manage tensions between digital-native Generation Z employees and older cohorts accustomed to traditional hierarchical structures. Third, while strategic workforce planning is central to future HRM effectiveness, existing studies have not examined how conflict management influences predictive analytics adoption, scenario planning, and foresight methodologies in Nigerian organizations. This study addresses all three gaps by operationalizing future HRM effectiveness as a six-dimensional construct and testing the predictive power of conflict management practices across these dimensions.



2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human Relations Theory. The human relations theory, originating from Elton Mayo's Hawthorne studies in the 1920s, posits that social factors, group dynamics, and interpersonal relationships significantly influence employee satisfaction and productivity (EBSCO, 2018). The theory emphasizes cooperative leadership, communication between management and employees, and the role of workplace culture in setting productivity standards. However, the theory has been critiqued for its neglect of power asymmetries, structural inequality, and institutional constraints—limitations that are particularly salient in Nigeria's bureaucratic context, where political interference and ethnic patronage override relational considerations. This study extends the human relations theory by integrating conflict management as a mechanism that transforms interpersonal relationships into strategic HRM capabilities, rather than treating harmony as an end in itself.

Thomas–Kilmann Conflict Management Theory. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), developed in 1974, identifies five conflict handling styles based on assertiveness and cooperativeness dimensions (Thomas & Kilmann, 2008). While this framework has been widely applied, it has been critiqued for its cultural bias toward Western individualist assumptions and its failure to account for collectivist contexts where avoidance and accommodation may serve relationship-preservation functions. Kabbani and Dalati (2025) note that collaborating and accommodating styles foster teamwork, yet their study does not examine whether these styles are equally effective across Nigeria's ethnic diversity spectrum. This study addresses this limitation by testing the TKI framework against future HRM effectiveness indicators in a comparative public-private Nigerian context.

Linkage of Theories to the Study. The human relations theory and the Thomas-Kilmann conflict management theory are complementary but insufficient frameworks for this study. The human relations theory establishes that positive interpersonal relationships are essential for organizational effectiveness but does not explain how these relationships enable digital transformation or strategic workforce planning. The Thomas-Kilmann theory offers a practical framework for analyzing conflict styles but does not account for institutional factors such as Nigerian labor law, union influence, or bureaucratic inertia. This study integrates both theories with insights from organizational justice, employee voice, and Nigerian industrial relations scholarship to explain how conflict management practices predict the future effectiveness of HRM in Nigeria. By examining conflict management not merely as a stylistic choice but as a strategic competency that underpins digital capability, employee relations sustainability, organizational adaptability, workforce inclusion, conflict prevention systems, and strategic HR decision-making, this study offers a theoretically grounded and contextually relevant framework for repositioning HRM in Nigeria toward future-ready practice.

2.3 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated the significant impact of conflict management on organizational outcomes. According to Nwokedi et al. (2022), collaborative and compromising conflict management strategies positively influence organizational performance in Nigerian breweries. Min et al. (2020) found that supervisory behavior, mediated



by conflict management strategies, significantly affects sustainable employee performance. Chika-Anyanwu and Oparanma (2020) established that conflict significantly diminishes workers' morale in Nigerian manufacturing companies. Aruoren and Okeke (2025) confirmed that collective bargaining, avoidance, accommodation, and compromise strategies have significant positive effects on employee productivity in Nigerian organizations. Kinontao et al. (2025) found a statistically significant relationship between collaborating conflict management style and job satisfaction. Kabbani and Dalati (2025) demonstrated that prioritizing collaborative and accommodating styles improves conflict resolution and fosters supportive organizational environments. Amoako et al. (2023) examined factors influencing electronic human resource management implementation in public organizations in emerging economies, highlighting the role of digital transformation in HRM practices.

Gap in Literature

Despite the substantial body of research on conflict management and HRM, several weaknesses and gaps persist in the literature. Conceptually, there is limited attention to conflict management as a determinant of future HR effectiveness in the Nigerian context. Methodologically, many existing studies rely on cross-sectional designs that limit causal inferences, and there is a scarcity of longitudinal research tracking how conflict management practices evolve with changing HRM trends. Additionally, most studies have focused on specific sectors such as manufacturing and banking, leaving gaps in understanding conflict management across diverse Nigerian industries including education, healthcare, and public service. The need for the present study in the Nigerian context is justified by the necessity to examine how conflict management practices can enhance the future effectiveness of HRM in Nigeria's dynamic organizational environment, particularly as digital transformation, workforce diversity, and changing employee expectations reshape the workplace landscape. This study addresses the gap by integrating conflict management with the future trajectory of HRM in Nigeria, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how proactive conflict management strategies can position organizations for sustainable success.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational survey research design to examine the relationship between conflict management practices and the future effectiveness of Human Resource Management (HRM) in Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to investigate the extent to which variations in conflict management practices predict variations in dimensions of future HR effectiveness without manipulating any study variables. Furthermore, the correlational survey design is suitable for studies involving the use of regression analysis to examine predictive relationships among variables within naturally occurring organizational settings. The study was conducted among selected public and private organizations located in Nigeria's six geopolitical zones to ensure broad sectoral representation and enhance the generalizability of findings. The selected organizations comprised government ministries, public tertiary institutions, government agencies, manufacturing firms, financial institutions, telecommunications companies, and service-oriented private enterprises. A total of twelve organizations were selected for the study, consisting of six public-sector organizations and six private-sector organizations.



The population of the study comprised 1,250 employees and Human Resource personnel drawn from the selected organizations. This population included senior management staff, middle-level management staff, HR professionals, and non-management employees whose experiences and perceptions were considered relevant to workplace conflict management and future HRM practices. A sample size of 385 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's sample size determination formula at a 5% level of precision. The study employed stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. The first level of stratification was based on organizational ownership (public and private sectors), while the second level was based on staff categories, namely senior management staff, middle-level management staff, HR personnel, and non-management employees. Thereafter, respondents were selected proportionately from each stratum using simple random sampling to ensure adequate representation across organizational categories and employee groups.

Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Conflict Management and Future Human Resource Management Effectiveness Questionnaire (CMFHRMEQ)." The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A elicited information on respondents' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, educational qualification, organizational type, years of work experience, and employment category. Section B contained items measuring the study constructs using a four-point Likert response format of Strongly Agree (SA = 4), Agree (A = 3), Disagree (D = 2), and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1). The structure of the questionnaire is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Structure of the Questionnaire Instrument

Construct	Number of Items	Item Numbers	Cronbach Alpha
Conflict Management Practices	6	1–6	0.86
Digital HR Capability	3	7–9	0.83
Employee Relations Sustainability	3	10–12	0.85
Adaptability and Organizational Resilience	3	13–15	0.81
Workforce Inclusion and Diversity Management	2	16–17	0.80
Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Systems	2	18–19	0.84
Strategic HR Decision-Making	1	20	0.78
Overall Instrument	20	1–20	0.84

The conflict management construct served as the independent variable, while the six dimensions of future HRM effectiveness constituted the dependent variable. Composite scores for each construct were computed by obtaining the arithmetic mean of responses to the items measuring the respective construct. Higher mean scores indicated stronger perceptions of the presence of the construct within respondents' organizations. The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three experts comprising two specialists in Human Resource Management and one specialist in Organizational Behaviour. Their observations and recommendations guided the revision of ambiguous and overlapping items before final administration.

A pilot study involving 30 respondents from organizations outside the study sample was conducted to determine the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach Alpha reliability analysis was performed for each construct as well as for the overall instrument. The reliability coefficients



ranged from 0.78 to 0.86, while the overall reliability coefficient of 0.84 indicated that the instrument possessed satisfactory internal consistency and was suitable for the study. Copies of the questionnaire were administered personally by the researchers with the assistance of trained research assistants. Out of the 385 copies distributed, 372 copies were correctly completed and returned, representing a 96.6% response rate, which was considered adequate for statistical analysis.

Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive influence of conflict management practices on dimensions of future HRM effectiveness at a 0.05 level of significance. Prior to regression analysis, the assumptions underlying regression modelling were examined. Linearity between the independent and dependent variables was assessed using scatterplots and partial regression plots. Normality of residuals was examined using histograms and normal probability plots, while independence of errors was assessed using the Durbin-Watson statistic. Homoscedasticity was evaluated through residual scatterplots, and multicollinearity among predictor variables was examined using Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance statistics. The diagnostic results indicated that the assumptions of linearity, normality, independence of errors, homoscedasticity, and absence of multicollinearity were satisfactorily met, thereby confirming the suitability of the data for regression analysis.

4.1 RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the effect of conflict management strategies on employee productivity in organizations in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Effect of Conflict Management Strategies on Employee Productivity

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Conflict management strategies improve employees' commitment to work.	372	2.81	0.71	Agree
2	Effective conflict resolution enhances employees' performance level.	372	2.76	0.68	Agree
3	Workplace harmony resulting from conflict management improves productivity.	372	2.83	0.65	Agree
4	Employees work more effectively when organizational conflicts are properly managed.	372	2.79	0.62	Agree
5	Conflict management reduces work-related stress that affects productivity.	372	2.75	0.72	Agree
	Grand Mean		2.79	0.68	Agree

The result in Table 2 showed a grand mean of 2.79, which was above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents agreed that conflict management strategies positively affect employee productivity in organizations in Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What influence does conflict management have on employee job satisfaction in organizations in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Influence of Conflict Management on Employee Job Satisfaction

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Effective conflict management improves employees' satisfaction with their jobs.	372	2.74	0.69	Agree
2	Employees feel more valued when workplace conflicts are fairly resolved.	372	2.78	0.63	Agree
3	Proper conflict management increases employees' morale.	372	2.72	0.66	Agree
4	Employees are more satisfied in organizations with peaceful work environments.	372	2.77	0.71	Agree
5	Conflict management enhances trust between employees and management.	372	2.74	0.68	Agree
	Grand Mean		2.75	0.67	Agree



The result in Table 3 revealed a grand mean of 2.75, which was above the criterion mean of 2.50. This implied that the respondents agreed that conflict management positively influences employee job satisfaction in organizations in Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What role does conflict management play in promoting organizational harmony and effective employee relations?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation on Conflict Management, Organizational Harmony, and Employee Relations

S/N	Items	n	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Conflict management promotes peaceful coexistence among employees.	372	2.70	0.72	Agree
2	Effective conflict management improves teamwork in organizations.	372	2.68	0.70	Agree
3	Proper conflict resolution strengthens employee relations.	372	2.73	0.66	Agree
4	Conflict management helps to maintain organizational stability.	372	2.71	0.69	Agree
5	Workplace conflicts can be minimized through effective communication.	372	2.69	0.67	Agree
	Grand Mean		2.70	0.69	Agree

The result in Table 4 showed a grand mean of 2.70, which was above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents agreed that conflict management promotes organizational harmony and effective employee relations in organizations in Nigeria.

Research Question 4: To what extent does conflict management predict the future effectiveness of human resource management in Nigeria?

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation on Conflict Management and Future HRM Effectiveness

S/N	Items	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Conflict management improves the future effectiveness of HR managers.	372	2.71	0.68	Agree
2	Organizations with effective conflict management achieve better HR outcomes.	372	2.75	0.66	Agree
3	Conflict management supports organizational adaptability in the future workplace.	372	2.70	0.69	Agree
4	HR professionals require conflict management skills for future organizational success.	372	2.74	0.65	Agree
5	Effective conflict management strengthens long-term organizational sustainability.	372	2.72	0.70	Agree
	Grand Mean		2.72	0.68	Agree

The result in Table 5 revealed a grand mean of 2.72, which was above the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicated that the respondents agreed that conflict management predicts the future effectiveness of human resource management in Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1: Conflict management practices do not significantly predict digital HR capability in public and private organizations in Nigeria.

Table 6: Regression Analysis of Conflict Management Practices and Digital HR Capability

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p-value	95% CI	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(df1, df2)	Decision
Conflict Management Practices	0.386	0.046	0.397	8.329	p < .001	[0.295, 0.477]	0.158	0.156	69.373 (1,370)	Rejected

The regression result in Table 5 shows that conflict management practices significantly predicted digital HR capability among organizations in Nigeria ($\beta = 0.397$, $t = 8.329$, $p < .001$). The model explained approximately 15.8% of the variance in digital HR capability ($R^2 = 0.158$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.156$). Although statistically significant, the explanatory power of the model was modest, suggesting that other organizational factors such as digital infrastructure, leadership support, technological readiness, and employee digital competence may also influence digital HR capability. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Conflict management practices do not significantly predict employee relations sustainability and workforce inclusion in public and private organizations in Nigeria.



Table 7: Regression Analysis of Conflict Management Practices on Employee Relations Sustainability and Workforce Inclusion

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p-value	95% CI	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(df1, df2)	Decision
Conflict Management Practices	0.441	0.047	0.436	9.317	p < .001	[0.348, 0.534]	0.190	0.188	86.806 (1,370)	Rejected

Table 7 reveals that conflict management practices significantly predicted employee relations sustainability and workforce inclusion ($\beta = 0.436$, $t = 9.317$, $p < .001$). The model accounted for approximately 19.0% of the variance in employee relations sustainability and workforce inclusion ($R^2 = 0.190$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.188$). The result indicates that organizations with stronger conflict management mechanisms tend to experience more sustainable employment relationships and more inclusive workplaces. However, the relatively modest coefficient of determination suggests that additional factors such as compensation systems, organizational culture, employee welfare programmes, diversity policies, and leadership style may also contribute significantly to these outcomes. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 3: Conflict management practices do not significantly predict the future effectiveness of Human Resource Management in public and private organizations in Nigeria.

Table 8: Regression Analysis of Conflict Management Practices and Future HRM Effectiveness

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p-value	95% CI	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F(df1, df2)	Decision
Conflict Management Practices	0.334	0.051	0.325	6.607	p < .001	[0.234, 0.433]	0.106	0.103	43.657 (1,370)	Rejected

The result presented in Table 7 indicates that conflict management practices significantly predicted the future effectiveness of Human Resource Management in Nigeria ($\beta = 0.325$, $t = 6.607$, $p < .001$). The model explained approximately **10.6%** of the variance in future HRM effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.106$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.103$). This finding suggests that conflict management contributes positively to the ability of HR systems to support digital HR capability, employee relations sustainability, adaptability, workforce inclusion, conflict prevention systems, and strategic HR decision-making. Nevertheless, the relatively low R^2 value indicates that conflict management alone explains only a limited proportion of future HR effectiveness. Other variables such as organizational leadership, technological infrastructure, AI adoption, strategic workforce planning, employee well-being programmes, organizational culture, communication systems, and HR analytics capability are likely to contribute substantially to future HR outcomes. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

5.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding of the study revealed that conflict management strategies had a significant effect on employee productivity in organizations in Nigeria. The result indicated that effective conflict management enhances employee commitment, reduces workplace tension, and improves overall productivity within organizations. This finding is consistent with Lazarus (2014), who found that conflict management strategies significantly improved employees' productivity in the Nigerian state civil service by creating a conducive work environment for employees to perform effectively. The finding also agrees with Aruoren and Okeke (2025), who reported that integrating conflict management strategies with organizational processes enhanced employee productivity among workers of Premium Steel and Mines Limited in Delta State, Nigeria.



Similarly, Kabbani and Dalati (2025) observed that effective conflict management styles positively influenced organizational performance and employee effectiveness. The implication of this finding is that organizations that adopt proactive conflict management mechanisms are likely to experience higher employee productivity and improved organizational outcomes.

The study further found that conflict management had a significant influence on employee job satisfaction in organizations in Nigeria. This suggests that employees tend to be more satisfied with their jobs when conflicts are properly managed through fairness, communication, and collaboration. This finding corroborates the study of Kinontao et al. (2025), who found that conflict management styles significantly influenced employees' job satisfaction by promoting positive workplace relationships and reducing interpersonal tensions. The finding is also in agreement with Chika-Anyanwu and Oparanma (2020), who reported that unresolved workplace conflicts negatively affected workers' morale in manufacturing companies in Rivers State, while effective conflict management improved employee motivation and satisfaction. In addition, the finding supports the Human Relations Movement discussed by EBSCO (2018), which emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships, employee welfare, and harmonious workplace interactions in enhancing workers' satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. The finding therefore implies that organizations should prioritize effective conflict management practices to improve employees' morale and job satisfaction.

The finding of the study also revealed that conflict management significantly promoted organizational harmony and effective employee relations in organizations in Nigeria. The result showed that effective conflict resolution mechanisms foster teamwork, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence among employees. This finding is in line with Igbinoba et al. (2023), who found that conflict management strategies strengthened sustainable commitment and harmonious relationships among academic staff in selected public universities. The finding also agrees with Mills and Mene (2020), who noted that effective conflict management contributes to organizational stability, cooperation, and improved interpersonal relations among workers. Furthermore, Kabbani and Dalati (2025) observed that collaborative conflict management styles promote organizational harmony and enhance team effectiveness. This finding implies that effective conflict management remains a critical strategy for maintaining peaceful work environments and positive employee relations in Nigerian organizations.

Finally, the study found that conflict management significantly predicted the future effectiveness of human resource management in Nigeria. This indicates that organizations that effectively manage workplace conflicts are more likely to achieve sustainable HR outcomes, organizational adaptability, and improved workforce relations in the future. The finding agrees with Adias (2025), who observed that digital human resource management transformation in Nigeria significantly improved talent management, workforce performance, and employee well-being through modern HR practices and workplace collaboration. The finding also aligns with Amoako et al. (2023), who found that effective implementation of electronic human resource management systems enhanced organizational efficiency, communication, and strategic workforce management in public organizations. Similarly, the finding corroborates the Human Relations Movement discussed by EBSCO (2018), which emphasized that effective management of workplace relationships and employee interactions is essential for organizational sustainability and future HR effectiveness. The implication of this finding is that modern



organizations in Nigeria must integrate strategic conflict management into their HR policies to strengthen future organizational resilience and workforce effectiveness.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that conflict management is a significant determinant of effective human resource management and organizational sustainability in Nigeria. The findings revealed that effective conflict management strategies positively influence employee productivity, job satisfaction, organizational harmony, and the future effectiveness of human resource management. The study further established that organizations that adopt proactive and collaborative conflict management approaches are more likely to experience improved workplace relationships, enhanced employee commitment, and sustainable organizational growth. Therefore, effective conflict management remains an essential managerial strategy for achieving organizational effectiveness and strengthening the future of human resource management in Nigeria, particularly in the face of changing workplace dynamics and digital transformation.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Organizations in Nigeria should establish effective conflict management policies and mechanisms that encourage open communication, fairness, and timely resolution of workplace disputes.
2. Human resource managers should be provided with regular training on modern conflict management strategies, negotiation skills, and employee relations practices to improve organizational effectiveness.
3. Organizations should promote collaborative conflict resolution approaches that enhance employee job satisfaction, teamwork, and organizational harmony.
4. Management of organizations should integrate conflict management practices into human resource management policies to strengthen employee productivity and future workforce effectiveness.

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