

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLES BY MULTINATIONAL OIL FIRMS IN NIGER DELTA

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ABSTRACT: *This study ascertains the relationship between the use of integrating, dominating, obliging, avoiding, and compromising styles of managing conflicts and the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with host communities. A cross-sectional research design was adopted through the use of questionnaires to gather data from 200 top managers and personnel in the public relations department sampled from thirteen (13) multinational oil firms. Data generated were analysed using ANOVA and multiple regression. The results revealed that the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with host communities in Niger Delta is negative and significantly related to the use of dominating and compromising styles of handling conflict, but positive and significantly related to the use of integrating, obliging, and avoiding styles of handling conflict. The study recommends that multinational oil firms should change from the deployment of dominating style to integrating and obliging styles in handling conflict with host communities.*

KEYWORDS: *conflict, conflict management styles, host communities, Niger Delta, multinational oil firms.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *F50, F51, F53, M, M10.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The operation of foreign-owned oil and gas multinational firms in host communities in the Niger Delta with different beliefs, values and approaches have provoked unprecedented conflicts and long-drawn-out history of violence. In most cases, the nature of conflicts or disagreements between oil multinationals and host communities have hinged on how the oil should be explored, extracted, distributed, or managed.

Yuan (2010) argued that it is not these sources of conflict that usually destabilize oil multinational firms operating in the host communities, but rather the different

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approaches and assumptions emerging from the different cultures to conflict management and resolution.

Conflict is inevitable in organizational life. This is even more so when the organization is operating in a different cultural environment (Kim, Wang, Kondo & Kim, 2007). A major challenge oftentimes faced by multinational oil firms in the wake of the discovery of oil and subsequent oil exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, is the incessant conflicts with host communities (Nwagbara & Brown, 2014; Ako, Obokoh & Okonmah, 2009).

These conflicts have in many cases disrupted oil exploration of many multinational firms within the region. Despite these disruptions, not much attention has been paid to investigating the extent to which the conflict management styles deploy by multinational oil firms have helped them to develop a quality relationship with their host communities.

Besides, while several studies revealed that cultural dimensions of individualism-collectivism and small-larger power distance cultures exert substantial influence on conflict management styles of firms operating in different cultures around the globe (Kim, et al., 2007; Schalk, et al., 2010), little research effort has been made to validate the findings of these extant studies in the context of Nigeria to the best of the researchers' knowledge. Specifically, little research effort has been devoted to exploring how the different conflicts management styles deploy for managing conflict differ among the multinationals oil firms, which appear to have originated from different cultures. Moreover, not much attention has been paid to testing the effectiveness of Thomas' (1976) dual concern model of conflict-handling/conflict management styles in the context of multinational firms in Nigeria. This study is therefore motivated by these gaps in knowledge to examine conflict management styles by multinational oil firms in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to investigate conflict management styles by multinational oil firms in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- determine the relationship between the use of integrating style of conflict handling and the quality of relationship (trust) the multinational oil firms have with host communities in Niger Delta;
- ascertain how the use of dominating style of conflict handling influences the quality of relationship (trust) the multinational oil firms have with host communities in Niger Delta;
- find out the relationship between the use of obliging style of conflict handling and the quality of relationship (trust) the multinational oil firms have with host communities in Niger Delta;
- examine the relationship between the use of avoiding style of conflict handling and the quality of relationship (trust) the multinational oil firms have with host communities in Niger Delta host communities; and

- Ascertain the relationship between the use of compromising conflict-handling style and the quality of relationship (trust) the multinational oil firms have with host communities in Niger Delta.

1.2. Research Hypotheses

This study tests the following hypotheses stated in the null form.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between integrating style of handling conflict and the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with the host communities in the Niger Delta.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between dominating style of handling conflict and the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with the host communities in the Niger Delta.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between obliging style of handling conflict and the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with host communities in the Niger Delta.

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between avoiding style of handling conflict and the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with the host communities in the Niger Delta.

H₀₅: There is no significant relationship between compromising style of handling conflict and the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with the host communities in the Niger Delta.

2. CONCEPT OF CONFLICT

The term 'conflict' has been conceptualized as tension, crises, or discord among individuals or groups of individuals induced by the pursuing of different and incompatible goals, values, ideas, and needs (DeChurch, Hamilton & Haas, 2007).

Similarly, it is explained as any form of disagreement between individuals or groups of individuals. Also, conflict is seen as the fallout of the inability of individuals or group members to agree on the actualization of the same goal, and differences in beliefs, values, and needs (Schalk, et al., 2010). During the interaction of interdependent people, conflict arises when the goals or aspiration of one party is perceived to hinder the attainment of the goals and objectives of another party (Schalk, et al., 2010).

2.1 Types of Conflict Management Styles

2.1.1. Integrating Style of Conflict Management

Integrating conflict management style also termed 'collaboration conflict management style' is deployed when the goals and interests of oneself and others are considered on an equal basis when dealing with conflicts (Cingöz-Ulu & Lalonde, 2007). It is the type of conflict management style where conflicting parties cooperate and work together in finding a solution that is mutually acceptable, beneficial, and satisfying (Darling & Fogliasso, 1999).

2.1.2. Dominating Style of Conflict Management

Dominating conflict management style is characterized by a high concern for self and low concern for others such that the dominant party places a premium on its objectives and goals while ignoring the needs of others through forceful behavior (Masood & Javed, 2016). Dominating style of conflict management tends toward self-concern given that the needs, goals, and expectations of one party are often ignored for the other party's interest (Kim, et al., 2007).

2.1.3. Obliging Style of Conflict Management

Obliging style of conflict management involves a low concern for one's goals and a high concern for others' goals when addressing conflict (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). It tends toward self-sacrifice by denying or neglecting one own needs or goals concerns and satisfying the needs, goals, and values of other parties.

Most studies often use terms like submitting, yielding, and accommodating and satisfying the concerns of the other party when defining or explaining the obliging style of conflict management (Darling & Walker, 2001; Jehn & Mannix, 2011). In essence, obliging style focuses on protecting the interest of other parties, with the primary aim of developing harmony and promoting a stable positive relationship.

2.1.4. Compromising Style of Conflict Management

The compromising style of conflict management focuses on showing moderate concern for the interests, goals, values, and needs of self and that of other parties when dealing with conflict (Yeung, Fung & Chan, 2015). Similarly, it is described as showing a modest interest in both parties in achieving a mutually acceptable solution (Özkalp, Sungur & Özdemir, 2009). In pursuing this style of conflict management, conflicting parties often involve a third-party or resolve to an external mediator in seeking a solution for the conflict (Thomas, 1992).

2.1.5. Avoiding Style of Conflict Management

Avoiding conflict management style is an unwillingness to cooperate or engage in action, but rather remaining passive in dealing with disagreements (Ma, 2007). Avoiding conflict management style is withdrawing from the scene of conflict with the expectation that the conflict will phase out on its own (Montes, Rodríguez & Serrano, 2012). The theorist of this conflict management style believes that conflict with other parties will be reduced, minimized, and overcome through avoidance behavior (Thomas, 1976).

Organizations usually adopt this form of conflict management style by relocating or withdrawing operations assets from highly violent and conflict-prone zones (Darling & Fogliasso, 1999). Organizations using avoiding conflict management style usually keep disagreement with other parties to themselves and avoiding the exchange of ideas with the parties (Thomas, 1976; Eng & Kuiken, 2006).

2.2. Conflict in the Niger Delta: The Multinational Oil Firms Dimension

Conflicts between oil multinationals and host communities have been linked with the issue of resource control, deprivation, beliefs, traditions, and societal values (Nwagbara & Brown, 2014). Also, perceived goal incompatibility has been identified as a major source of disagreements and conflict between multinational oil firms and the host communities, and which in most instances trigger incessant protests, fights, vandalism and other forms of destructive behavior with the result of halting operations of multinational oil firms operating in the Niger Delta (Mba, 2015; Osuoka, 2007).

In most cases, the nature of conflict appears to have been heightened with the prevalence of high-level poverty within the region, the insensitivity of the government to the yearning of the people and the lax in laws, rules, and regulations governing the behavior of individuals and organizations in the larger society (Osuoka, 2007).

Clarifying the source of conflicts in the Niger Delta, several studies concurred that multinationals laxity and institutional weakness have resulted in host communities' perception that realization of societal needs, developmental goals and aspirations may never be actualized if they fail to act by engaging in destructive behavior in order to attract the attention of the oil multinationals operating in their communities (Aaron, 2008a; Obi, 2009). Ako, et al. (2009) opined that the behaviors of oil multinationals as determined by their organizational structures and culture have masterminded conflict generation through negative evaluations by host communities.

Agagu and Adu (2008) opined that most of the agenda, goals, and value implemented by multinational oil firms have often triggered more harm than good in the Niger Delta. Agagu and Adu (2008) further noted that in most instances only a handful of communities and individuals benefits from crude oil exploration while several others are left impoverished.

The consequences of such injustice, lack of equity, and insensitivity of oil multinationals to the plight of the host communities is the incessant conflict in the Niger Delta. Hence, stakeholders are quick to point to the several years of injustices, inequity, and neglects as the major source of incessant conflicts between oil multinational firms and host communities (Aaron & Patrick, 2008b; Ojaborotu, 2008; Saiyou, 2016).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study builds on face negotiation theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Applying the theory in an organization, Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998) postulated that organizations can be concerned with the protection of their face needs, social self-worth, or other face needs during conflict management episodes. They opined that during conflict management, organizations or individuals are usually faced with three face concerns. They are self-face, which is the concern for one's image; other-face, which is the concern for another's image, and mutual-face which is a concern for both parties' images and/or the "image" of the relationship.

Ting-Toomey and Takai (2006) further suggested that these three face concerns are culturally determined as people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures have different types of face needs, which leads to preferences for different facework. In the

theory, facework and conflict management styles are closely related as facework reflects self-face (concern for one's image, interest, needs), other-face (concern for other's image, needs, interest), and mutual-face (concern for both parties' image, interests, and needs) which are dominating style, obliging style and compromising -integrating styles of conflict management respectively.

4. METHODOLOGY

A cross-sectional research design was adopted through the use of the questionnaire to gather the needed data for the study. The study's population consists of multinational oil firms operating in the Niger Delta. A sample size of 23 multinational oil firms was determined from a possible twenty-four (24) oil multinationals operating in Nigeria using Yamane (1967) statistical formula. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(0.05)^2}$$

where: n = Sample size, 1 = Constant value, N = Population size, e = Level of precision or acceptable sample error (0.05).

Among these firms, a simple random sampling (by lottery form) was undertaken to selected thirteen (13) multinational oil firms in the Niger Delta. These firms include four Europeans oil giants (Italian Agip oil firm, Netherland's Royal Dutch Shell, French's Total oil firm, and Norwegian Statoil multinationals), five American oil giants (Chevron, Star deep water, Exxon Mobil, Syntroleum and Conoco Phillips), Chinese' Addax-Sinopec oil firm, British Hardy oil firm, Canadian Nexen oil company, Brazilian Petróleo Brasileiro (Petrobras). The justification for using random sampling (by lottery form) was to ensure the fair selection of the multinational oil firms.

Two hundred (200) copies of the questionnaire were sent to managers and personnel in the public relations department of the thirteen (13) multinational oil firms. Some of the questionnaires were given to general managers of each oil firm after establishing a rapport with them to help distribute to the managers and other personnel in public relationship departments who normally go out to negotiate with host communities. The researchers collected the contacts of these managers and personnel and followed them up with calls and text messages.

This study adapts Rahim's (1983) Organizational Conflict Inventory scale to measure five types of conflict management styles: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising styles. The integrating style has seven (7) items, obliging has six (6) items, dominating has five (5) items, avoiding has six (6) items while compromising has four (4) items with reliability estimates (coefficients) of 0.890, 0.918, 0.844, 0.869 and 0.813 respectively. The quality of relationship with host communities is measured with four items, with reliability coefficients of 0.831.

The following model was formulated to estimate the relationship between oil multinationals' styles of conflict management (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising) and the quality of relationship with host communities.

$$aQLHC = f(ITG, OBL, DMT, AVD, CPM) \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

In this study, the long-run equation is specified as follow:

$$QLHC = \beta_0 + \beta_1ITG + \beta_2OBL + \beta_3 DMT + \beta_4 AVD + \beta_5CPM + U \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

Where:

- QLHC = Quality of relationship with host communities
- ITG = Integrating
- OBL = Obliging
- DMT = Dominating
- AVD = Avoiding
- CPM = Compromising
- β_0 = constant
- $\beta_1- \beta_5$ = coefficients of the independent variables
- U = Error term

The Apriori expectations for our variables are $\beta_1, \beta_2 > 0, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5 < 0$. This means that integrating and obliging will have a positive with the quality of relationship multinational oil firms develop with host communities, while other styles of conflict management will have a negative relationship with the quality of relationship multinational oil firms develop with host communities.

In analysing the data collected, descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed. The descriptive statistics include means and standard deviations, while inferential statistics to be used include ANOVA and multiple regression techniques. The inferential statistics (ANOVA and multiple regression techniques) were used to test the hypotheses of the study. The tests were conducted at 5% level of significance. All tests were done with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Descriptive Analysis of Variables

Table 1: Description of Variables

S/n	Scale	Mean
Dependent Variable		
1	Quality of Relationship	2.36
Independent Variables		
2	Integrating	3.31
3	Obliging	2.56
4	Dominating	4.12
5	Avoiding	2.05
6	Compromising	3.84

Table 1 revealed that the quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with host communities is low with a mean score of 2.36 which is below the mid-point of 3.00. Similarly, the mean scores for the independent variables of obliging (Mean = 2.56) and avoiding (Mean = 2.05) are below the mid-point of 3.00 indicating that the multinational oil firms barely deploy these conflict management styles, that is, obliging, and avoiding in managing conflicts with host communities.

However, the mean scores for integrating (Mean = 3.31), dominating (Mean = 4.12, SD = 0.81) and compromising (Mean = 3.84, SD = 0.92) are greater than the mean criterion of 3.00. By implication, these conflict management styles are common among the multinational oil firms in handling conflicts with host communities. Dominating styles appears to be the most frequently used conflict management styles with a mean score of 4.12

4.2 Testing for model specification and interpretation

The relationship between conflict management styles (integrating (ITG), obliging (OBL), dominating (DMT), avoiding (AVD), and compromising and the quality of relationship with host communities were empirically established in this section. The regression results are shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
0.738 ^a	0.545	0.522	0.445	1.881

a. Predictors: (Constant), ITG, OBL, DMT, AVD, and CPM

Table 2 indicates that the adjusted (R^2) of 0.522 or 52.2% for the regression model entails that the explanatory variables explain 52.2% of changes in the dependent variable. The Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.881 reveals the absence of first-order serial correlation which further confirms no presence of multi-collinearity in the model (see Table 2). This suggests that the model is fit to be used without re-specification in developing formulating policy addressing the current challenges faced by multinational oil firms operating in the Niger Delta.

Table 3: ANOVA^a for the regression model

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1					
Regression	22.816	5	4.563	23.024	0.000 ^b
Residual	19.027	96	0.198		
Total	41.843	101			

a. Dependent Variable: QLHC

b. Predictors: (Constant), ITG, OBL, DMT, AVD, and CPM

Table 3 shows that when grouped the independent variables have an F-statistic of 23.024 at Prob (F-statistic) value of 0.00000 which is less than 5%.

These results suggest that overall there exists a significant relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable.

Table 4: The Coefficients of correlation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.796	0.485		1.644	0.104
Intergrating	0.560	0.084	0.514	6.662	0.000
Obliging	0.329	0.057	0.415	5.769	0.000
Dominating	-0.169	0.073	-0.159	-2.313	0.023
Avoiding	0.296	0.090	0.236	3.297	0.001
Compromising	-0.271	0.086	-0.244	-3.163	0.002

a. *Dependent Variable: ITG, OBL, DMT, AVD, and CPM*

Table 4 shows that there is a significant relationship between individual independent variables (integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising) and quality of relationship multinational oil firms have with the host communities. The regression results showed that each of the styles of managing conflict: integrating (ITG) (t= 6.662; p<0.05), obliging (OBL) (t=5.769; p<0.05), dominating (DMT) (t= -2.313; p<0.05), avoiding (AVD) t=3.297; p<0.05 and compromising (CPM) t= -3.163; p<0.05) are significant at 0.05.

Except for dominating and compromising styles of managing conflict that have negative relationships with quality of relationship with host communities, other conflict management styles, that is, integrating, obliging, and avoiding have a positive and significant relationship with quality of relationship with host communities.

This suggests that dominating and compromising, which are the most common styles in managing conflicts with the oil communities have over the years be reasons multinational oil firms have a low-quality relationship with host communities. This is unlike the use of integrating, obliging, and avoiding styles, which tend to the less frequent styles deploy by multinational oil firms in managing conflict with host communities but tend to stimulate positive higher cordial/quality relationship with the host communities. The study specifically observes that the use of integrating, obliging, and avoiding styles though tends to be used less frequently in managing conflicts with the oil the host communities.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first findings of the study revealed that dominating (high concern for self and low concern for others involved in the conflict in such that the dominant party places a premium on its objectives and goals but ignoring the needs of others) is the most common styles multinational oil firms deploy in managing conflict with host communities.

This finding confirms the assertion of Mba (2015) and Osuoka (2007) that members of host communities have over the years evaluated and raised their voices that

the multinational oil firms operating in the region are mainly concerned with self-face or interest with little effort to work with the host communities' interests.

The finding is also in corroboration with the work of Agagu and Adu (2008) that multinational oil firms protect their interest with little attempt to compensate many host communities and villagers whose lands, farms and other sources of livelihood including fish have been affected negatively by the oil spillage and other activities of the multinational oil firms operating in the region.

The second findings of this study reveal that integrating (ITG), obliging (OBL) and avoiding (AVD) has a positive and significant relationship with the quality relationship multinational oil firms have with host communities while dominating (DMT) and compromising (CPM) styles of managing conflict has a negative and significant relationship with the quality relationship multinational oil firms have with host communities. This finding is consistent with our *Apriori* expectations (theoretical framework), and most extant studies.

Empirically, the findings of this study that deployment of integrating (ITG) and obliging styles in managing conflict have the greatest positive and significant relationship with the quality relationship the multinational oil firms have with the host communities support the empirical position of Masood and Javed (2016) that deployment of integrating styles have a significant impact on affective and cognitive trust in Pakistan. It also supports the Oetzel (1999) study cooperation including satisfying the relational and situational expectations of their partner is one of the most useful key concepts in reducing conflict and building a strong relationship with other partners in cultures such as Nigeria that is characterized high power distance and collectivism.

Oetzel (1999) observed that integrating (problem-solving), obliging, and cooperative styles are the most helpful tools in dealing with the conflict-related crisis in a collectivist culture. The findings of this study also support the study of Friedman, Chi and Liu (2006) that concur different conflict styles should be used for addressing different conflict situations but in high power distance culture and collectivism, cooperating, integrating and obliging styles seem to be more effective styles of conflict management. Our findings further confirm with the position of Ohbuchi and Takahashi (1994) that integrating and obliging are the most effective styles of managing conflict especially in high power distance and collectivistic cultures, suggesting that that effort to protect and value interest, goals, and needs of stakeholders such as host communities as well as cooperate with them and work together with stakeholders enhance trust and relationship among the conflicting parties.

Moreover, the empirical findings of this study that obliging (OBL) styles of managing conflict have a positive and significant relationship with the quality relationship multinational oil firms have with the host communities agreed with the position of Knutson, Hwang, and Deng (2000) and Chin and Liu (2015) that ability of firms to adjust and adapt the styles that are closely linked with host cultures to be most effective ways to handle and resolve conflicts.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion derived from this study is that multinational oil firms tend to be preoccupied with the use of dominating styles in handling conflict with host communities. However, this current style (dominating) is ineffective in minimizing the conflict with host communities rather it aggravates it is associated with the low quality of relationship the multinational oil firms have with host communities.

The study further concluded that the use of integrating styles followed by obliging tend to be the most effective style to resolve conflict with host communities that have over the years increased the transactional costs including the cost of safeguard production operations, contracting of oil operations, monitoring of oil operations and enforcement of contract in upstream sectors. The study also concluded that failure to deploy integrating and obliging styles in resolving conflict with host communities will continually induce repeated vandalism of oil pipelines, vandalism of assets of oil firms, and stealing of crude oil of multinationals and thus created uncertainties and ambiguities on oil investment returns.

The study recommends that multinational oil firms should jettison the use of dominating style in resolving conflicts with host communities. This can be done by ending the frequent use of money, power, influence, and government security agencies to force their ideas, interest, and goals to be accepted by the host communities. It can also be done by abolishing the use of court, expertise, and high profile individuals to influence and force its ideas and goals to the host communities to win a competitive situation with the host communities.

Multinational oil firms should instead deploy integrating styles in managing conflict with host communities. This can be done by collaborating with host communities in investigating the peculiar problems the region faced to proffer a lasting solution that is acceptable to both parties. It can also be done by working closely with host communities to get a proper understanding of problems affecting the region and finding solutions to the problems that satisfy the expectations of the host communities. In doing this, the multinational oil firms should exchange accurate information and bring all concerns of the host communities out in open discussion.

Multinational oil firms could also deploy obliging style in managing conflict with host communities. This can be done by being firm in working with the suggestions of host communities or pursuing, addressing, accommodating, and satisfying the expectations, wishes, and needs of host communities.

7. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This study recommends that future studies should examine host communities' perceptions of the conflict management styles adopted by multinational oil firms. The study also recommends the need for future studies to use qualitative or interview methods to investigate the degree to which host communities are satisfied with conflict management styles deploy by multinational firms in managing conflict arising from oil exploration in the region. Objective of the study is to investigate conflict management styles by multinational oil firms in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

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