

INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT AS A BARRIER TO JOB PERFORMANCE AMONG LIBRARIANS: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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ABSTRACT

This opinion based piece explores the critical role of emotional intelligence (EI) in managing conflict within library settings. Drawing a personal observations and theoretical insights, it argues that emotional intelligence is an indispensable tool for librarians to effectively handle interpersonal conflicts in libraries, enhance team works, and improve overall job performance. The discussion highlights common types of conflicts encountered in libraries, including those between staff and patrons, and how EI strategies such as empathy, active listening, and emotional regulation can address these challenges. By providing practical recommendations and illustrations of the benefits of EI through hypothetical scenarios, this article emphasizes the transformative potentials of emotional intelligence in resolving conflicts and fostering a positive library atmosphere for effective job performance among librarians. The piece recommends among others that EI training be integrated into professional development programmes of librarians, asserting that such initiatives can lead to more harmonious work environments, better job performance and better service delivery in libraries.

Keywords: Interpersonal conflict, job performance, emotional intelligence

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and often stress environment of libraries, managing interpersonal conflicts effectively is usually difficult. Due to increased competition brought about by the strong demand for services in the interconnected media, IT, and telecom sectors, employees in these industries are under pressure to perform effectively. These workers, in turn, typically deal with a lot of work and encounter many kinds of conflict at work (Yousaf et al., 2020). Maintaining harmonious workplace and maintenance of peaceful coexistence among staff in organizations such as academic libraries is very crucial in the achievement of efficient performance and productivity of staff. Librarians, who interact with a diverse range of patrons and colleagues, frequently encounter conflicts that can disrupt their work and impact their job performance. Disagreements between individuals and groups are a common occurrence in everything from world politics to routine issues of work and family life. Conflict is increasingly perceived as a two-edged sword (Carter & Phillips, 2017) and is described as a conflict between parties or a situation in which one party believes another party is harming its interests (Barmao, 2013). The expression of incompatibility, inconsistency, or disagreement between two or more interacting individuals is referred to as interpersonal conflict (Rahim, 2011). Anytime there are significant unresolved disputes between individuals, groups, or departments, there is a conflict. It is a conflict between ideas or interests and a relationship tension that accompanies intense emotion. Conflict is commonplace these days and is typically more noticeable in workplaces and organizations where employees openly and covertly advocate for management's favour, sometimes at the expense of their co-workers. Employers impose strict guidelines, requiring both quantitative and qualitative output, or services in this modern performance-based workplace, which frequently leads to conflict.

According to the body of research, interpersonal conflict at work is remarkably prevalent (Tremmel et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2019). It has been discovered that conflict can be both a significant disadvantage and an inspiration for work performance. The management procedures that are used will determine this. Sometimes conflict is latent, and other times it is visible. Most often individual compatibilities in organizations may not have surfaced or openly expressed, and the involved parties may not even be fully aware of such. Sometimes too, conflict could manifest in organizations as a result of individual differences in goals, values, or power imbalances that have the potential of causing open conflicts among individuals or group of persons in organizations such as libraries. Understanding these distinctions becomes very crucial in terms of proactive conflict management. Employee job attitudes, health and well-being, network life, and performance have all been found to suffer when there is interpersonal conflict (Bonaccio et al., 2019; Kuriakose et al., 2019; Notelaers et al., 2018; Ye et al., 2019). According to Zhou et al. (2019), interpersonal conflict at work can have detrimental effects on employees' poor work behaviours in addition to its detrimental effects on people's work and health-related outcomes. Academic libraries are hotbeds of conflict and dissatisfaction due to a combination of poor work environments, overcrowded library management, and a lack of resources to serve patrons. Conflicts within the library staff have the potential to either increase or decrease productivity (Ugwuanyi and Idoko, 2020). It could also result to a very negative impact or reduced job performance of library staff. Library managers, need to be aware of the signs of latent conflict and manifest conflict, in order to address them properly before they escalate among their staff. For instance, latent conflicts that are yet to be expressed could create an environment of underlying tension and unease among staff of libraries making them feel stressed or anxious about unresolved issues. This alone can distract them from work, reducing their focus and efficiency. They may also avoid working closely with colleagues.

This study therefore, suggests that emotional intelligence can play significant mediating roles in could enabling academic library staff to avoid or resolve conflicts amongst themselves, thereby protecting or enhancing their job performances. It also advocates for the integration of emotional intelligence into professional development programmes and provides practical recommendations for librarians and library management.

Conflict and Conflicts in Libraries

Conflict is a term that describes a situation where there is a perceived incompatibility or disagreement between two or more parties. These disagreements can arise over interests, values, actions, or directions, and can occur at various levels, including, interpersonal, organizational, and international. It is a multifaceted concept that has been extensively studied across various disciplines. Conflict is as old as humanity itself. It is a prominent feature connected to human social cohabitation. It manifests as rage, arguments, hatred, miscommunication, conflict, murder, devastation, etc. Conflict is likely to arise from any thought or viewpoint that tends to add tension to a calm setting. Conflict-inclined behaviours include jealousy, dissatisfaction, impunity, hubris, and greed that have the potential to undermine law and order in interpersonal relationships (Nwofor, Atamu, and Aghauche, 2024). According to Deutsch, Coleman, and Marcus (2018), it is a process that starts when a person or group feels that they and another person or group have different interests, viewpoints, or values. They emphasize that conflict arises from perceived incompatibilities, suggesting that recognition of difference is a critical starting point for conflict. They also argued that understanding these perceptions is essential for conflict resolution. Coleman and Kugler (2018) also defined conflict as a dynamic process that involves interaction between parties that perceives their goals, needs, or value to be contradictory or mutually exclusive. They highlighted the dynamic nature of conflict, focusing on the interaction between conflicting parties. They suggest that conflicts evolve over time and can

change in intensity and scope depending on the interactions and responses of the involved parties. Rahim (2018) explores that conflict is any situation in which there is an opposing demand, desires, ideas, or goals, leading to a disruption in harmony between individuals or groups. In this definition, Rahim focuses on the disruptive nature of conflict, describing it as a condition that disrupts harmony and balance within groups or between individuals. He stresses the importance of managing these disruptions to restore harmony and improve group functioning. Conflict is a socially constructed process that emerges from the interaction of parties with differing interests, perceptions, and cultural backgrounds (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2019) while Kriesberg and Dayton, (2020), views it as a simultaneous occurrence of competitive and cooperative behaviours between individuals or groups, resulting from their interdependence and pursuit of differing goals. They suggest that understanding this duality is key to effective conflict management. According to Deutsch, Coleman, and Marcus (2018), it is a process that starts when a person or group feels that they and another person or group have different interests, viewpoints, or values. This definition emphasizes the perpetual aspect of conflict, highlighting that conflicts are often rooted in individual or group perceptions and interpretations of actions and intentions. Conflict is actually, a common occurrence in organizations due to the complex interplay of diverse individuals, resources, and goals.

Understanding the causes of conflict in organizations is crucial for enveloping effective strategies to manage and resolve it. According to Kazimoto (2013), conflicts in organizations, including libraries, can be caused by a variety of factors, including diverse perceptions, opinions, personalities, communication styles, values, backgrounds, interests, wants, needs, preferences, or goals; a lack of trust and understanding; personality conflicts; hostility; opposing interests; poor communication; personal issues; and frustration. Other authors such as Omisore and Abiodun (2014), Robbins and Judge (2019), Jehn and Bendersky (2018), Ayoko, Coallan, and Hartel

(2021), explore that competition for limited resources, miscommunication, information overload or deficit, interpersonal difference, cultural differences, role ambiguity, and hierarchy and power struggles, conflicting goals, prioritization disputes work style differences work load distribution, change and uncertainty, differences in leadership styles in consistent policies and some external factors, such as economic pressure and regulatory changes are some of the causes of conflicts in most organizations. Human interaction inherently involves conflict, which frequently emerges when people or organizations believe that their objectives, passions, or values are irreconcilable.

In the context of academic libraries, conflict can arise from various factors, including resources limitations, interpersonal dynamics, organizational structure, and external pressures, difference in personality, values, and work styles among library staff can lead to interpersonal conflicts. To effectively address and manage conflict, it is essential to understand its conceptual underpinnings and the factors that contribute to its occurrence. Ayoko Callan and Hartel (2021), asserts that interpersonal conflicts in libraries often stem from differences in personality and work styles among staff members. Also, misunderstanding and miscommunication between library staff and users, are some of the common causes of conflict in most academic libraries.

Effects of Conflicts on the Job Performance of Librarians

Conflicts in the workplace are an inevitable part of organizational life and can arise from a variety of sources, including interpersonal disagreements, poor communication, role ambiguity, limited resources, and organizational changes. In the library environment, where teamwork, collaboration, and effective communication are essential, the presence of conflicts can significantly affect job performance. According to Thomas (2020), conflict is inherently negative and destructive, something to be avoided or suppressed. For librarians, conflicts may emerge between colleagues, between staff and management, or even between staff and users. These

conflicts can lead to stress, low morale, reduced motivation, and a lack of job satisfaction. When not properly managed, conflict can disrupt workflows, hinder cooperation among staff, and impair the quality of services delivered to library users. Furthermore, unresolved conflicts may result in absenteeism, high turnover rates, and a decline in productivity. Librarians who are preoccupied with conflict may find it difficult to focus on their core responsibilities such as cataloging, user assistance, information literacy training, and other essential services. This ultimately affects the overall efficiency and reputation of the library. In the words of Robbins and Judge (2019), unresolved conflicts can lead to job dissatisfaction, which in turn affects overall job performance. Abiodun, (2014) asserts that workplace conflict contributes to higher absenteeism and turnover, as employees attempt to escape stressful environment. Conflicts amongst librarians could also impair collaboration, making it difficult for them to work together effectively. The stress and distractions caused by conflict may lead to errors, reduced attention to detail, and ultimately a decline in the quality of work in libraries. Academic library environment is a crucial component of the services provided by academic institutions. It is the tool used to actualize the research, teaching, learning, and community service duties of the institutions. Since this is the case, conflicts in academic libraries must be handled skilfully.

However, it is important to note that not all conflicts have negative consequences. Most conflict can enhance problem-solving and innovation within organizations such as libraries bringing diverse perspectives to the forefront. Conflicts can also bring about improved communication and relationships and trust among staff members of organizations, ultimately enhancing teamwork and job performance. To balance the positive and negative impacts of conflict on job performance in libraries, it is crucial to adopt effective conflict management strategies such as emotional intelligence.

Mediating Roles of Emotional Intelligence on Conflicts and Job performances of Academic Library Staff

In an era where emotional competencies are increasingly valued, understanding and applying emotional intelligence in libraries amidst conflicts are not just beneficial but necessary for creating a well-functioning and positive work environment for resolving conflicts among library staff. So many authors have defined emotional intelligence differently. Emotional intelligence (EI), according to Schutte and Malouff (2019), is the capacity to identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions as well as those of others, hence promoting interpersonal and personal functioning. According to other authors like Mayer, Casruso, and Salovey (2016), emotional intelligence is the ability to use emotions to improve thinking and to reason about them. Accurately detecting emotions, accessing and producing emotions to support thought, comprehending emotions and emotional knowledge, and reflectively regulating emotions to foster emotional and intellectual development are all part of it. Zeidner, Mathews, and Roberts (2018), described it as a set of abilities related to the understanding, processing, and managing of emotion as it relates to oneself and others. Goleman and Boyatzis (2018), defined EI in the context of leadership, stating that it involves self-awareness, and leadership management skills that are critical for effective leadership. Schutte and Malouff (2019), on their own, described it as the ability to understand and ones' emotions and manage as well the emotions of others, facilitating personal and interpersonal functioning. According to Bar-On (2020), our ability to comprehend and communicate oneself, relate to others, and handle everyday obligations is determined by a variety of emotional and social abilities. The practical application of EI was also emphasized by Goleman, Boytzis, and McKee (2023), who defined it as the capacity to identify our own emotions as well as those of others, to inspire oneself, and to effectively manage emotions in both our relationships and ourselves.

Emotional intelligence actually refers to the capacity to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others. The concept has evolved over time, but it generally encompasses the following core abilities, self-awareness which is an attitude of recognizing one's emotions and weaknesses, self-regulation, the ability of managing and controlling one's own emotional responses and adapting to changing circumstances. Prior studies have investigated the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the associations between various variables, including personality and creativity (Jafri, 2020), perceived stress and suicidal ideation (Abdollahi et al., 2016), and perceived threat of terrorism and workplace deviance (Shah et al., 2020). Because they are better at self-control, emotionally intelligent people are more likely to refrain from engaging in bad habits that could endanger their companies (Ugwu et al., 2017). The significance of emotional intelligence for people coping with stressful conditions has been emphasized by research (Abdollahi et al., 2016). For example, Sharma et al. (2016) contended that the relationship between workplace conflict and people's emotional and behavioural responses to it is moderated by emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence plays a critical role in managing interpersonal dynamics, facilitating resolutions, and enhancing job performance in academic libraries. EI, plays a pivotal role in conflict management in organizations such as libraries. It enables library staff to empathize with patrons and colleagues, improving communication by understanding and addressing their needs and concerns. Goleman (2020) emphasizes that empathy is a key component of EL, which helps in building strong interpersonal relationships and improving communication skills. Managing emotional intelligence can help librarians to remain calm focus during conflicts. Calmness in work places is often over looked as a factor that can significantly influence job performance. However, a calm environment is characterized by reduced stress, effective communication and a supportive atmosphere, all of which contribute to job satisfaction. Mayer and Salovey (2016),

asserts that managing emotions is crucial for maintaining composure and effectively resolving conflicts. Library administrators with high EI can inspire and motivate their staff by understanding their needs and providing appropriate support and recognition. Mayer and Salovey also emphasized that emotional intelligence in leadership facilitates smoother change management process by addressing emotional responses to change. According to Jordan and Troth (2020), training in emotional intelligence not only addresses immediate conflicts but also contributes to a supportive and collaborative work culture. Librarians with high emotional intelligence can easily identify early signs of conflict and address them proactively before they escalate into larger issues.

THEORETICAL MODELS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Ability model

Several models provide frameworks for understanding emotional intelligence EI. First, is the ‘Ability model’ proposed by Mayer and Salovey (1997). According to this paradigm, emotional intelligence (EI) is a collection of skills linked to processing emotional data. There are four parts to it:

1. having the ability to see emotions in order to correctly identify them in oneself and others;
2. understanding emotions to appreciate complex relationships and understand emotional language;
3. managing emotions to regulate emotions in oneself and others to promote emotional and intellectual growth;
4. Using emotions to harness emotions to facilitate various cognitive activities, such as thinking and problem-solving;

In this regard, emotionally intelligent librarians can accurately perceive the emotions of others (perceiving emotions), use emotional information to guide their focus and decision-making (using emotions to facilitate thought), recognize early signs of interpersonal conflict and understand emotional dynamics (understanding emotions), and effectively manage emotions to resolve conflicts calmly and timely (managing emotions). These abilities enhance creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving within library environments.

Mixed Model

Second, is the Mixed Model, developed by Goleman (1995).

Goleman's Mixed Model includes five major components:

1. awareness – Recognizing one's emotions and their effects.
2. Self-regulation – Managing emotions in healthy ways.
3. Motivation – Using emotions to remain focused on goals.
4. Empathy – Understanding others' emotions and perspectives.
5. Social skills – Managing relationships, influencing, and resolving conflict.

Goleman asserts that this model integrates EI with personality traits and competencies with components such as:

- Self-awareness which is the ability to recognize one's emotions and their impact. Librarians who demonstrates high emotional intelligence based on Goleman's mixed model would understand their emotional triggers during difficult interactions with users or colleagues and this will invariably enhance their overall job performance.

- Self-regulation is the ability to control impulses and adapt to changing circumstances. Librarians who demonstrate high emotional intelligence based on Goleman's mixed model would always stay calm and composed during tense meetings or user complaints.
- A high level of motivation which is the ability to harness emotions to achieve goals, can drive librarians to remain committed to maintaining a positive library environment, even under stress, thereby achieving their objectives and sustaining high performance standards.
- Empathy which is the ability to understand and respond to others' emotions and sharing the feelings of others, can help librarians to recognize and respond to emotional distress in users or their fellow staff members. According to Bradbery and Greaves (2021), empathy enables individuals to understand the emotions and viewpoints of others, facilitating more effective conflict resolutions. Using empathy to understand the emotions and perspectives of all parties involved in conflict can help in finding lasting and mutually accepted solutions. For instance, a librarian who empathizes with both student complaints about resource availability and staff concerns about workload can mediate a fair resolution.
- Social skills: Social skills are competencies that enable individuals to interact effectively and harmoniously with others. They play a critical role in both personal relationships and professional settings, including libraries, where teamwork, communication, and collaboration are essential for success. For instance, clear verbal communication helps in articulating ideas, sharing information, and fostering productive conversations among library staff and patrons. Non-verbal communication—such as body language, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact—also contributes to professionalism in interpersonal interactions. A library staff member with strong social skills can effectively communicate with patrons, mediate disputes between staff and users, understand users'

needs, and provide relevant assistance to ensure their satisfaction. Therefore, the application of social skills can have a direct impact on librarians' job performance.

CONCLUSION

Emotional intelligence is a powerful tool for enhancing interpersonal relationships, resolving conflicts, and improving job performance in academic libraries. By investing in emotional intelligence, development among library staff and administrators, libraries can create a more effective and supportive work environment for more effective job performance

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this conclusion, it is then recommended that:

- i. Library administrators should offer emotional intelligence training programs for library staff to enhance their competencies. This can include workshops on self-awareness, empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution.
- ii. That the governing bodies of academic libraries should organize leadership development sections focused on developing emotional intelligence to improve team dynamics, conflict management, and organizational change.
- iii. Regular meetings and discussion section be held among academic library staff to promote a culture of openness. This is to encourage a culture that values open communication and feedback, enabling staff to express issues constructively.

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