Original Article

Effects of Conflicts Between Political Leaders and Employees on the Performance of Local Government Authorities: A Survey of Kongwa District Council, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of conflict between political leaders and employees on the performance of local government authorities in Tanzania, based on the experience of Kongwa District Council. The study was conducted in 2021, involving the collection of both primary data through interviewing 5 key informants and through questionnaires from 72 respondents-; and secondary data through documentary review. Due to the mixed methods nature of the study, qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis and quantitative data were summarized using simple descriptive statistics and summarizing the data in frequency tables with the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings indicate that there are conflicts between political leaders (councillors) and council staff mainly as a result of improper use of authority (political interference in administrative functions), scarcity of resources and an education gap between councillors and staff. From the study findings, it is evident that the conflicts negatively impact the performance of the council as they lead to low achievement of goals, delays in project implementation, low staff morale and inefficient service provision among others. The study recommends intensive and regular training for the councillors on the laws, rules, regulations and procedures governing the operation of council activities to clearly understand their areas of jurisdiction, which will minimize the prevalence of conflicts in the council.

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INTRODUCTION

Local government authorities (LGAs) play a pivotal role in the provision of essential services, governance, and development at the grassroots level. In Tanzania, these entities serve as critical agents in the implementation of national policies and the realization of sustainable development goals within communities. However, the effectiveness of LGAs is often compromised by internal conflicts, particularly those arising between political leaders and administrative employees. Such conflicts may stem from divergent interests, overlapping roles, poor communication, or a lack of mutual respect and understanding of mandates (Warioba, 2008, Gisema, 2013, Kileo et al., 2015 & Saum, 2017).

Political leaders in LGAs, such as councillors and members of parliament, are primarily responsible for policy direction and oversight, while employees who comprise technical and administrative staff are tasked with the implementation of policies and day-to-day operations. Ideally, these two groups should collaborate closely to ensure efficient service delivery (Salum 2017). However, in practice, conflicts frequently arise, resulting in strained relationships, disrupted communication channels, and misalignment in the planning and execution of development activities. These tensions can negatively affect the morale of employees, delay project implementation, and ultimately hinder the overall performance of LGAs.

The Kongwa District Council in Tanzania offers a relevant context to explore these dynamics. Anecdotal and preliminary observations suggest that this district has experienced recurring tensions between its political and administrative arms, potentially affecting the quality and timeliness of service delivery. Despite the apparent impact of such conflicts, there is limited empirical research that systematically investigates their nature, causes, and implications on institutional performance in the Tanzanian context.

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the effects of conflicts between political leaders and employees on the performance of local government authorities, using the Kongwa District Council as a case study. The research aims to uncover the underlying causes of these conflicts, assess their impact on employee efficiency and institutional output, and propose viable strategies for conflict resolution and improved collaboration. By doing so, the study will contribute to the broader discourse on governance and institutional effectiveness within decentralized systems, with implications for policy and practice both in Kongwa and across other LGAs in Tanzania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Conflict

Conflict refers to the existence of opposition or dispute between persons, groups or organizations (Terry, 1983). As Fugate (2016) puts it, conflict is a phenomenon that occurs when one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party. In any organization or place with more than one person, conflicts are inevitable because people have different perceptions, ideas and needs. However, conflicts are not bad but rather phenomena which can have constructive or destructive effects depending on how they are managed. Jantjies (2016) argued that conflict is not always visible: Conflict is always present, although it might sometimes seem that there is no conflict. Considering the latter, Anstey (1991) argues that the fact that conflict is not always

visible is simply the potential for conflict to develop.

Causes of Conflicts

Whenever people are closely associated and particularly in pursuit of common goals, it is reasonable to assume that given sufficient time, differences will occur among them (Terry, 1983). Causes of conflict from different authors can be described as follows:

Competition for Resources

The scarcer the supply of resources relative to the amount needed by rival parties, and the more important the resources are to them, the greater the likelihood of a conflict developing and its intensity to increase. In Tanzania, government scarcity of resources is a major source of conflict (Babyegeya, 2002).

Task Interdependence

When two individuals or two groups are in the same way depending upon each other for the successful performance of their tasks, conflict is likely to occur if the two parties have goals or priorities. For example, when Councilors suspend the general budget of the Council to be discussed and passed after the Finance and Planning Committee passes it, financial experts may be in confrontation with witness Finance Committee and full council representatives, hence in such circumstances, conflict becomes inevitable.

Communication Barriers

Robbins (1983:146) contends that inadequate communication also has the potential to worsen conflict situations when either too little or too much communication takes place. Insufficient communication contributes to the development of pseudo-conflict by preventing agreement between two parties whose positions are essentially compatible. The absence of adequate channels of communication can also delay attempts to achieve coordination between parties with interdependent tasks.

Individual Traits

Behaviour is more likely when the parties are high in dogmatism and authorism and in self-esteem. Needs and values can also contribute to the development of conflict. For example, employees with a strong need for independence are likely to have a conflict with their boss if he /she is very authoritarian and supervises closely allowing little time for autonomy (Gupta, 1990).

Kondalkar (2007) advocates conflict can occur due to the introduction of change; change can generate inter-group conflict. For example, when the organization is merged into another; power; struggles are likely to cause competition and conflict between the acquiring and the acquired company.

Effects of Conflicts

Hotepo et al. (2010) contend that the negative effects of conflict on the organization are in terms of poor performance, lack of cooperation, waste of resources and productivity. Gupta (2001) provides the following negative effects of conflict on performance-; Conflict disturbs the equilibrium in the organization and affects the physical and mental health of people by creating tension and stress. Intensive conflict generates feelings of anxiety, guilt, frustration and hostility. Cooperation and coordination between individuals and groups become difficult due to a climate of suspicion and distrust. Conflict may be a source of dissatisfaction for the losing party.

Wood (2003) mentioned that conflict can lead to fear, mistrust, anger and dislikes among two groups or persons, due to the fact that dysfunctional conflict involves personnel in an organization and affects their relationships, hence interpersonal difficulties arise.

Conflicts Management Techniques

The concept of conflict resolution/management implies the reduction, elimination, or termination of conflict. There are various conflict strategies or styles which various scholars have identified. Rahim et al (2001) identified five styles which are the most common in solving conflict within individuals, groups and communities. These are;

Meetings

This refers to a gathering involving two or more parties where specific issues are discussed with the aim of reaching a resolution. According to Wasrioba (2008), this technique was successfully used to manage conflicts in Iringa and Tanga municipal councils. This observation is consonant with Salum (2017) who noted that 10 respondents (20% of the total) identified this as one of the methods used for conflict resolution at Bukoba municipal council in Tanzania. During these meetings, actors such as employees and councillors expressed their concerns and were able to reach mutual agreements. Meetings were found to contribute to improved relationships between the parties involved. The study also revealed that meetings are among the most commonly used approaches by the council, as they are a quick and straightforward method for resolving conflicts.

Accommodating Conflict Style

Accommodating conflict styles are characterized by a high concern for others while having a low concern for one's self. When faced with conflict, individuals with an accommodating conflict style tend to give in to others' demands out of respect for the social relationship (for example to maintain group unity) because they believe being "agreeable may be more important than winning". Some Tanzanian LGAs have successfully managed conflicts using this technique. For instance, Salum (2017) found that this method was used to solve conflict between councillors and employees in the Bukoba municipal council; where the actors in friction had to put aside any conflict in order to continue with the activities facing them and later solve their conflicts for the benefit of all groups in the council.

Mediation

Mediation is a voluntary approach where a neutral third party (the mediator) facilitates communication and encourages reconciliation between conflicting parties, helping them reach a mutually agreeable solution. It is often used when negotiation fails to resolve the issue. In Tanzania, this method has been used to handle conflicts in Iringa and Tanga municipal councils (Warioba 2008) and Bukoba municipal councils (Salum 2017). In his study, Salum (2017) found that 17 respondents (34% of the total) identified mediation as a method used for conflict resolution. This process involves a third party who assists disputing sides in finding common ground on the issues causing conflict. The mediator encourages the parties to consider alternative perspectives and explore a wider range of possible solutions.

Cooperation Conflict Style

The style is characterized by an active concern for both pro-social and pro-self behaviour-; The cooperation conflict style is typically used when an individual has elevated interests in their outcomes as well as in the outcomes of others. During the conflict, cooperators collaborate with others in an effort to find an amicable solution that satisfies all parties involved in the conflict. Individuals with this type of conflict style tend to be highly assertive and highly empathetic at the same time. By seeing conflict as a creative opportunity, collaborators willingly invest time and resources into finding a "win-win" solution.

Competitive Conflict Style

Competitive or "fighting" conflict style maximizes an individual's assertiveness (that is concern for self) and minimizes empathy (i.e., concern for others). Groups consisting of competitive members generally enjoy seeking domination over others and

typically see conflict as a "win or lose" situation. It is also called a forcing conflict style. Hellriegel and Slocum (2011) justified some of the mechanisms for conflict resolution such as compromising, confrontation, forcing, collaborating and avoidance. Also, he emphasized that; the method to apply in a certain conflict will be guided by the source/type of conflict and the ability of the manager in solving the problem.

Kondalkar (2007) described that conflict between parties can be resolved by five different modes which are Accommodating, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Competing. A conflicting mediator may adopt any of the mentioned modes.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a survey design to investigate the research problem with both quantitative and qualitative designs so as to gain a greater understanding of respondents' perspectives on the effects of conflicts on the performance of LGAs. In contrast to quantitative research designs, which primarily rely on measurements of number or amount, qualitative research designs are used to ascertain how individuals feel or what they think about a given subject or organization (Kothari, 2004). Thus, the simple percentage and respondent count were determined using a quantitative research design. Thus, this study design is a mixture, including both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

The target population of the study involved employees (particularly heads of departments and units) of the Kongwa District Council, the District Executive Director (DED), the Council Chairperson and councillors who made up 77 respondents.

The study employed purposive sampling to select the DED, Council Chairperson, 13 department heads, 20 councillors and 22 Ward Executive Officers (WEOs) and their backgrounds in decision-making in situations involving conflicting relationships. The researchers believed that this set of informants could be able to offer pertinent information regarding the impact of disputes between political figures and staff on Kongwa DC's performance. Simple random sampling was used to select 10 Ward Education Coordinators (WECs) and 10 Community Development Officers (CDOs) serving at ward offices.

Data Collection Methods

This study collected both primary and secondary data. The collection of primary data involved interviews and questionnaires. Interviews involved direct consultation with the District Executive Director (DED), Council Chairperson and three heads of department in order to collect profound information about the effects of conflict between political leaders and employees on the performance of the council. An interview guide was designed in order to maintain consistency in asking the questions. On the other hand, a semi-structured questionnaire with items containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions was administered to a sample of respondents. This made it possible to collect views from a substantial number of respondents on the subject. Electronic documents and other documents obtained in the study council were used to obtain secondary data on the subject matter.

Data Analysis

The study made use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Qualitative data obtained from interviews were subjected to content analysis, while analysis of quantitative data entailed the use of simple descriptive statistics with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate authorities prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confirming their understanding of the purpose of the

study, securing their voluntary participation in the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were highly observed, and data were securely stored to ensure maximum privacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Conflicts at Kongwa District Council

LGAs in Tanzania are run by two groups of people with different statuses; the councillors who are the decision-makers on issues pertaining to the management of the councils and the permanent public officials (staff) who are technocrats implement the decisions made by the councillors. The conflict between the two groups has been in existence in various councils in Tanzania (Kileo, 2013). The first objective of the study was to identify the types of conflicts prevalent in KDC.

Findings from one of the interviewed respondents showed that KDC is also faced with conflicts, this was shown when the interviewee said;

"Generally, the conflicts existing in this council are both structural and role conflicts"

Another interviewee said;

"We have conflicts but they are not easily noticed because some of the public employees originate from here (Kongwa). So some councillors feel shame to confront them"

Questionnaire findings revealed that; 04 respondents which is 5.6% mentioned structural conflicts, 27 respondents which is 37.5% mentioned role conflicts and 41 respondents which is 56.9% mentioned structural and role conflicts as illustrated in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Types of Conflicts Prevalent in Kongwa District Council

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Structural Conflict	04	5.6
Role Conflict	27	37.5
Existence of Both	41	56.9
Total	**72**	**100.0**

Source: Field data, 2021

This implies that Kongwa DC is often faced with structural and role conflicts. The findings are inconsistent with Kileo (2013) who identified the types of conflict to be scarce resources conflict supported by 38 respondents (52%) of the respondents, followed by affective conflict; by 19 respondents (26%) and Authority conflicts ranked by 16 respondents (22%). This proves that the allocation of resources is the most causative agent of conflict in local government authorities in Tanzania, the reason for the delay in the implementation of government priorities and programmes. On the other hand, Gisema (2013) noted the four types of conflict existing in Bunda District Council to be goal conflict, scarce resource conflict, authority conflict and procedural conflict.

Causes of Conflicts between Political Leaders and Employees of Kongwa District Council

Terry (1983) argued that whenever people are closely associated and particularly in pursuit of common goals, it is reasonable to assume that given sufficient time, differences will occur among them. The second objective was to determine the causes of conflicts between Political Leaders and employees of Kongwa District Council. One of the interviewees said;

"The conflicts we face are caused by improper use of authority and the knowledge gap between Political Leaders and employees"

Another respondent said;

"Most of the conflicts are caused by failure of political leaders and employees to use properly

their authorities, unawareness of duties and responsibilities and role ambiguity"

Questionnaire findings showed that; 33 respondents which is 45.8% mentioned a cause of conflicts to be improper use of authority, 10 respondents which is 13.9% mentioned the education gap as a cause of conflict, 04 respondents which is 5.6% mentioned Ignorance of Project Fund Expenditure, 05 respondents which is 6.9% mentioned Unawareness of Duties and Responsibilities, 04 respondents which 5.6% mentioned individual preferences, 04 respondents which 5.6% mentioned negative attitude, 01 respondent which is 1.4% mentioned role ambiguity, 03 respondents which is 4.2% mentioned personal interests, 03 respondent which is 4.2% mentioned communication breakdown, 02 respondents which is 2.8% mentioned noncompliance with rules and regulations, 03 respondents which is 4.2% mentioned favouritism is the cause of conflicts as shown on Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Causes of Conflicts between Political Leaders and Employees of Kongwa District Council

Cause	Frequency	Percentage
Improper Use of Authority	33	45.8
Education Gap	10	13.9
Ignorance of Project Fund Expenditure	04	5.6
Unawareness of Duties And Responsibilities	05	6.9
Individual Preferences	04	5.6
Negative Attitude	04	5.6
Favouritism	03	4.2
Personal Interest	03	4.2
Communication Breakdown	03	4.2
Non-Compliance with Rules and Regulations	02	2.8
Role Ambiguity	01	1.4
Total	**72**	**100**

Source: Field data, 2021

The findings revealed that the majority of respondents mentioned improper use of authority as the main cause of conflicts between Political Leaders and employees of Kongwa District Council. This is a tendency where some political leaders misuse their power, position, or influence for personal gain, to manipulate others, or to enforce control in unethical, unfair, or abusive ways which often undermines trust, damages morale, and violates professional or legal standards. These findings are in line with Massawe (2009) who conducted a research at Mpwapwa District Council in Dodoma. The study revealed that conflict between councillors and permanent public officials is brought about due to economic factors, political factors, power struggles, conflict of intellectualism and a lack of confidence among councillors. On the other hand, Nchimbi (2004) described the major causes of conflict between councillors and permanent public officials; like the barrier of communication and scarcity of resources as among the factors contributing to the conflict between the two groups. Similarly, the study by Kigwagilo (2016) found that 22.8% of respondents described personal interest as one of the factors contributing to conflict, 22.8% of the respondents described allowance as another factor, 3.5% of respondents mentioned allowance as a factor contributing to the conflict between councillors and permanent public officials, 14 .0% of the respondents agreed that different priorities contribute to conflict between councillors and permanent public officials, 5.3% of the respondents supporting that level of education contributing to the conflict between councillors and permanent public officials, 2% of respondents mentioned other reasons while majority 28.1% of

the respondents agreed that power struggle contribute to conflict between councillors and permanent public officials and 3.3% of respondents mentioned other factors like lack of transparent to the public officials and lack of trust between these two groups is among the causes of conflict. Hence, the study revealed power fighting as the major contributing factor to conflict between councillors and permanent public officials.

Effects of Conflicts between Political Leaders and Employees of the Kongwa District Council

Several scholars have explained the effects of conflicts to be both positive and negative. However, Gupta (1990) tried to discuss that the positive impacts of conflicts are few and limited while the negative impacts are many and serious. Researchers were interested in knowing the effects of the prevailing conflicts.

Table 4.3: Effects of Conflicts Between Political Leaders and Employees of Kongwa District Council

Effect	Frequency	Percentage
Decrease in Productivity	19	26.4
In-Efficient Service Provision	09	12.5
Demotivation and Demoralization	06	8.3
Negative Relationship Between Council Staff and Citizens	01	1.4
Employee Turnover	04	5.6
Poor Work Relationship	01	1.4
Loss of Council's Financial and Non-Financial Resources	01	1.4
Low Goal Achievement	26	36.1
Non-Compliance of Rules and Regulations	02	2.8
Delay in Project Implementation	03	4.2
Total	**72**	**100.0**

Source: Field data, 2021

Loss of Focus on Organisational Goals

The findings showed that the majority of respondents-29 respondents (40.3%) commented that the prevailing conflicts in their council result in a loss of focus on organisational goals. The time, effort and resources that should be focused on pursuing organisational goals are wasted in dealing with conflict handling. This is impeding the extent of accomplishment of council goals as employees spend much time dealing with conflicts and focus less on the achievement of goals at hand. Similar findings were observed by Kigwagilo (2016) who found that 63.2% of respondents were aware of the effects of the conflicts such as loss of resources and wastage of time in handling conflicts and endless project accomplishment.

Delay in Project Implementation

Conflicts between political leaders and council staff negatively impact project accomplishment. Several projects are not implemented in a timely manner due to disputes in the council as pointed out by 19 respondents equal to 26.4%. This observation was also noted by one of the interviewees who asserted that:

> *"Conflicts bring about delays in the implementation of different projects in our council. When conflicts occur, they lead to low cooperation among us, and we use a lot of time and resources to settle disputes. This reduces our ability to complete projects on time. When a councillor is in conflict with some heads of department it delays decision-making. Therefore, projects cannot be implemented as planned".*

These findings confirm the argument put forward by Gupta (1990) that conflicts result in many negative effects on the performance of the organisation.

Inefficient Service Provision

Inefficient service provision was cited by 9 respondents (12.5%). This implies that as employees are preoccupied with conflicts with political leaders they may become less focused on their work responsibilities, leading to low-quality service provision to the citizens. The conflicts produce stress and tension among employees which leads to poor services due low level of focus on duties as a result of misunderstandings between employees and staff. The findings of this study are consistent with Warioba's (2008) study in Iringa and Tanga municipal councils which portrayed that conflicts between political leaders and technocrats resulted in inefficient delivery of services in the municipalities. The results are also in line with Salum's (2017) study in Bukoba municipal council which revealed that there was poor quality of service delivery in the council attributed to the prevalence of conflicts. This asserts that conflicts in the councils negatively affect the quality of services to the citizens.

Demotivation and Demoralization

This study noted that conflicts between employees and councillors contributed to low work morale. For instance, when councillors interfered in employees' daily activities, it demotivated them to work more effectively. Employees become frustrated with the conflicts with the political leaders. This was reiterated by 6 respondents which is 8.3%. This finding confirms the study by Gisema (2013) who found that conflicts bring about the downfall of teamwork, a reduction of work morale, an increase in labour turnover, lack of essential information and poor productivity. This finding has been echoed by author studies on the effects of workplace conflicts. For instance, Warioba (2008) confirms that conflicts between political leaders and staff in Iringa and Tanga municipal councils had several effects on performance including staff disappointment or dissatisfaction.

Employee Turnover

Employee turnover was affirmed by 4 respondents equal to (5.6%) as one of the negative effects resulting from conflict between councillors and staff. Some staff resigned from their jobs due to misunderstandings with political leaders. Probably, this could lead to a loss of talent in the council, which might hinder the council's ability to accomplish its objectives, as one senior leader of the council commented:

"*You know these politicians sometimes make our employees request to leave the council due to their personal interests. A few years ago for instance one of our heads of unit had to leave the council due to a dispute between him and one of the political leaders. In fact, the conflict was very personal resulting from personal interests. But at the end of the we lost the employee*".

Moreover, the council may incur recruitment costs and loss of organisational memory as some heads of departments may leave due to frustration from the conflicts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that persistent conflicts between political leaders and employees within the Kongwa District Council significantly undermine the performance of local government authorities. The conflicts manifest through multiple sources such as scarcity of resources and improper use of authority (political interference in administrative functions), ultimately impairing the council's performance by reducing staff morale, resulting in loss of focus on organisational goals, delay of projects, and poor service delivery to citizens.

Recommendations

This study recommends thorough and ongoing training and orientation for councillors regarding the laws, rules, regulations, and procedures that govern the operation of council activities as soon as they are sworn in to prevent unnecessary conflicts with technocrats. The council should monitor the

relationship between councillors and employees in the wards to detect various conflict issues and enhance accountability and openness in the execution of various council plans. This will make it easier for the council to recognize issues early and take appropriate action before they escalate. To prevent disputes about the allocation of council funds for various purposes, there should be an appropriate flow of information sharing within the council. Moreover, there is a pressing need for policy reforms that clarify and enforce the separation of powers and responsibilities between political leaders and administrative employees. Legal frameworks, such as the Local Government (District Authorities) Act, should be reviewed to reduce overlaps and ensure that each actor operates within well-defined boundaries.

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