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# EFFECT OF CONFLICT ON BUSINESS STRATEGY

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**Abstract**
Conflict is often described as unwanted, undesirable and malignant that must be avoided at work place. This position holds forth in numbers of researches conducted in top management echelon but with the advent of top management team heterogeneity, researchers were reviewing the situation. This research consists of 425 population from 5 different multinational corporations operating in Nigeria. A sample of 234 were selected from the population and questionnaires administered. The result shows that conflict is not only part of an organization but equally open ways to unravel salient issues that may be hidden under unwholesome consensus. Given level of prevailing consensus, conflict and other leverage items among team members, there is need to continuously appraise the desired effect of conflict among team members. Presence of conflict often brings about effective business strategic.

**Keywords: Consensus, Conflict, Affective holding, Top Management Team Heterogeneity (TMTH), Business strategy.**

## Introduction

Top management team heterogeneity utilizes power distribution in many ways among which are: resolution of power among the team, devolution of power among individual members of the team, power utilization for strategic deployment and change is necessitated on power distribution as a result of strategic resolution (Carmeli & Shteigman, 2010 and Brimah & Abdussalam, 2022).Also, power resolution among top management team heterogeneity can be identified in term of its scale of preference as to usage, consolidation and intra-conformity among membership (Simsek, Vega, Lubatkin & Dino, 2005 and Abdussalam, et.al., 2021a). The scale of preference to the attainment of organization objectives often brings about sharp divisions among top management team heterogeneity (Certo, Lester, Dalton & Dalton., 2006 and Abdussalam, et.al., 2021b). As effect of strategic resolution on power distribution is beyond the view of the immediate environment such that impact of remote environment though negligible on power distribution is wholesome (Smith, Houghton, Hood, & Ryman, 2006). Interestingly, strategy begets devolution of power and power often begets strategic resolution, thus, the circle is to no end (Lam, 1986, Lavie, 2006 and DeBode, 2014). It is the top echelon that devolves power into top management team heterogeneity (Carpenter, 2002 & Hambrick, 2007). The top executive willingness to share and devolve power into other members of top management team brings about top management team heterogeneity. Likewise, power devolution among individual membership of top management team heterogeneity is reflection of demographic proxies (Carpenter, 2002). What individual brings or contribute to team often single out such individual for attainment of certain position or license to certain authority beyond the capacity of assignment within the organization. However, this kind of inherent capacity to display power is beyond team assignment (Smith & Tushman, 2005). Hence, power utilization for strategic deployment and change usually reside within the entire team membership but often controlled by a section of the membership with the domain over the strategic formulation and deployment (Carmeli & Halevi, 2009). Thus, change in strategy may likely bring about shift in this type of power.

**Statement of the Problem**
Following the collapse of high-profile firms such as Enron in 2001 and WorldCom in 2002, good corporate governance practices have been considered crucial and are now recognized as being among the driving forces sustaining a firm's growth in the long run. The corporate collapses of the last decade happened due to a lack of corporate monitoring in the firms, which leads to significant agency problems in the management and the board of directors. This has resulted in an interest in looking at board composition in terms such as the percentage of independent directors, the diversity of the directors in terms of gender, education, experience, and age, and the networking of the directors. This is crucial as a better mix of directors offers greater perspective in decision-making processes (Randøy, Thomsen, & Oxelheim, 2006 and Abdussalam et.al., 2021a). In addition, Campbell and Minguez-Vera (2008) have also pointed out that ethnic and gender diversity among directors provides new and better perspectives and, hence, enhanced performance of the firm.

The cultural interplay, intrigues and high level of organizational diversity affects the operational effectiveness of multinational firms, as each group pursues its own interests at the expense of others and the growing organizational interactions among employees from different departments with different professional specializations lead to more complex and dynamic relationships within organizations (Zhu, 2013 and Abdussalam et.al., 2021b). The intricacies involve in top management team heterogeneity, strategic change and firms' operational performance bring about the connections. Similar results have been found by Fan (2012) for the firms listed on the main board of Singapore Exchange; Fan found that gender diversity increases the firm's value as measured by Tobin's Q. Nevertheless, Marimuthu and Kolandaisamy (2009) as well as Shukeri, Shin, and Shaari (2012) found no relationship between gender diversity and firm performance for 300 listed firms on Bursa Malaysia. Another source of worry is stem from reaching consensus among top executives in multinational organizations which often result into conflict among team members.

Though, it is a very good value addition for multinational organizations to have professionals from richly diverse educational background with different orientation and training. However, evidences have shown that these has come with its avalanche of challenges such as conflicting perspectives to issues, ego and unnecessary pride from these set of individuals trying to manoeuvre one another by making sure that their authority and orientation is accepted which does not avail consensus among team members. It shall also look into effect of consensus and resolving conflict among top management team heterogeneity (Brimah & Abdussalam, 2022).

**Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives are to be reviewed this study:

(i) To look into effect of maintaining consensus as against spreading conflict among top management team heterogeneity.

(ii) To examine issues that breed conflict as against spearheading consensus among top management team heterogeneity.

(iii) To assess to what extent organization strategy can be displaced by other fulcrum members among top management team heterogeneity.

**Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis are to be study using empirical analysis:

$H_{O1}$: Fulcrum leverage derivative does not have a moderating impact among top management team heterogeneity.

$H_{O2}$: Consensus and attaining consensus does not have effect on conflict among top management team heterogeneity.

**Literature Review**

Behaviour of organization or its compartment is the desire of every top echelon as they seek to ameliorate or consolidate holding on the organization (Carmeli & Halevi, 2009). Organization facilitation toward power consolidation depends often on the intricacies of strategic change formulation, adoption, implementation and outcomes (Jarzabkowski & Searle, 2004). Top management team heterogeneity had been greatly enhanced in decision quality from elements of job factors available to the team (Smith & Tushman, 2005). Perhaps, quality decision is associated with the availability and avalanche of decision makers. The availability of decision makers contributes to the enhancement of decision making (Carmeli et al., 2011). Nevertheless, decision quality has been consigned to background when discussing top management heterogeneity team especially, from the perspectives of demographic proxies which had been at the front burner before now, thus, decision quality and other cognitive factors were not given much prominence in discussion of top management heterogeneity team (Carpenter et al., 2004). Upper echelons research and reviews of team diversity have differentiated between two analytical perspectives, both of which have been applied to top management heterogeneity teams (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu & Homan., 2004;). The information/decision-making perspective on heterogeneity team, argues that teams with representatives from different categorical backgrounds potentially have access to a broader range of relevant knowledge than more homogeneous groups (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Heterogeneity teams are therefore better positioned to analyse the implications of environmental changes as well as develop more innovative responses, consequent to the integration of disparate knowledge ( DeDreu & West, 2001).

The alternative, social identity, perspective on team heterogeneity holds that differences and similarities between team members provides a basis for the process of categorising individuals into subgroups, represented on the basis of prototypical attributes that typify one subgroup and differentiate it from others (Lau & Bruton, 2011). Building on the similarity-attraction paradigm and theory of intergroup bias, the social identity perspective argues that members within a subgroup are likely to share positive relationships characterised by trust and knowledge sharing, while interaction across subgroups is typified by conflict and hostility (Tajfel, 1982; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). While top management might enhance capacity to sense opportunities because of increased access to knowledge (Certo, Lester, Dalton & Dalton, 2006), it has been argued that the direct effect of top management team heterogeneity may be mixed because of the potential for costs associated with conflict and associated tendency to withhold information (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). This situation, in which heterogeneity team may potentially generate positive, negative and no effect has been termed a 'dilemmatic structure' (Gebert, Boerner, & Kearney, 2006). This 'dilemmatic structure' suggests the benefit of examining moderating variables that enhance the likelihood of information sharing and utilization and minimize the negative impact of heterogeneity. The categorization elaboration model of diversity Van Knippenberg et al. (2004), which integrates both information/decision-making and social identity perspectives, suggests that the positive effects of diversity are contingent on team processes that engender team knowledge elaboration and integration.

**Method of Research**

This study employs empirical research methodology. A survey of 425 executives and management level staff of 5 multinational firms were administered questionnaires. 234 questionnaires were successfully filled and returned. It was the result from the questionnaire that was subjected to further test and analysis in the study. Likert's sample scale was used in the administered questionnaire. The administered questionnaires were tested using Pearson correlations, Kendal tau coefficient, mean square and ANOVA-F test. It was the tests that form the basis of findings and discussion of findings.

**Test of Hypothesis**

**Hypothesis I**:

$H_{O1}$: Fulcrum leverage derivative does not have a moderating impact among top management team heterogeneity.

**Test of Hypothesis I:**

Level of Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$

Decision rule: Reject $H_0$ if the p-value $\leq \alpha$ (0.05), otherwise do not reject.

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**Table 1: Pearson Correlations coefficient between the variables.**

| | | Consensus | Affective holding | Conflict | Organization strategy | Operational effectiveness |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Profitability | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .441** | .539** | .358** | .525** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 | .000 | .002 | .000 |
| | N | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 |
| Consensus | Pearson Correlation | .441** | 1 | .531** | .515** | .611** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | | .000 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 |
| Affective holding | Pearson Correlation | .539** | .531** | 1 | .547** | .680** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 |
| Conflict | Pearson Correlation | .358** | .515** | .547** | 1 | .668** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .002 | .000 | .000 | | .000 |
| | N | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 |
| Organization strategy | Pearson Correlation | .525** | .611** | .680** | .668** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 | .000 | .000 | |
| | N | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 | 75 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From Table 1, since the p=0.000 is less 0.05 for all the variables, hence $H_0$ is rejected and this implies that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant. The Pearson correlation coefficient shows that there is linear and direct (i.e. positive) relationship between the variables. The degree of relationship between affective holding and profitability is 0.441 which is fair; the degree of relationship between affective holding and consensus is 0.539 which is moderate; the degree of relationship between conflict and consensus is 0.358 which is weak; the degree of relationship between organization strategy and consensus is 0.525 which is also moderate. Similarly, the degree of relationship between organization strategy and affective holding is 0.611 which is strong; the degree of relationship between affective holding and conflict is 0.515 which is moderate; the degree of relationship between consensus and operational effectiveness is 0.611 which is strong. Also, the degree of relationship between affective holding and organization strategy is 0.547 which is moderate; the degree of relationship between affective holding and operational effectiveness is 0.680 which is strong. Finally, the degree of relationship between conflict and operational effectiveness is 0.668 which is also strong.

**Table 3: Model 1 Summary for Conflict against Consensus and Affective holding**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .674[a] | .454 | .439 | 8.749 | 1.135 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Consensus, Affective holding
b. Dependent Variable: Conflict

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the variables**

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| Operational effectiveness | 95.39 | 16.856 | 75 |
| Consensus | 94.63 | 17.032 | 75 |
| Affective holding | 92.44 | 14.653 | 75 |
| Conflict | 93.63 | 14.504 | 75 |
| Organization strategy | 98.21 | 11.683 | 75 |

From Table 2, organization strategy has the highest mean value while the conflict has the least value. The variability in the organization strategy is the lowest indicates that the responses are closely related when compared with the rest while consensus responses have the highest dispersion which implies that the responses from affective holding are not very close when compare with rest.

**Hypothesis II**:
$H_{O2}$: Consensus and affective holding does not have effect on conflict among top management team heterogeneity.

**Test of Hypothesis II:**

Level of Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$

Decision rule: Reject $H_0$ if the p-value $\leq \alpha$ (0.05), otherwise do not reject.

**Model 1-To access the impact of consensus and affective holding on conflict**

Model specification:

Conflict = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$* Consensus + $\beta_2$*Affective holding

Where $\beta_0$= constant

$\beta_1$= coefficient of Consensus

$\beta_2$= coefficient of Affective holding

From Table 3, the table shows the multiple linear regression model summary and overall fit statistics for Conflict when Consensus and Affective holding are predictors. We find that the adjusted $R^2$ of our model is .439 with the $R^2$ = .454. This means that the model explains 45.4% of the variance in the data.

**Table 4: ANOVA –F-test for the Model 1**

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Regression | 4589.869 | 2 | 2294.934 | 29.984 | .000[b] |
| | Residual | 5510.718 | 72 | 76.538 | | |
| | Total | 10100.587 | 74 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Conflict

b. Predictors: (Constant), Consensus, Affective holding

From Table 4, the model 1's F-test has the null hypothesis that the model explains zero variance in the dependent variable (i.e. $\beta_1=\beta_2 = 0$). The F-test is highly significant; thus, we can assume that the model 1 explains a significant amount of the variance in Conflict appraisal.

**Result of Findings**

The result shows that both consensus and conflict can bring out operational effectiveness, thus, a creative approach to operational may not necessarily evolved from only consenting individuals but contributions from dissent team members can evolve better organization strategy. The moderate relationship displayed by consensus to organization strategy and weak relationship displayed by conflict to organization strategy means that affective holding is best suited to consensus and as such consensus displayed a much stronger disposition toward operational effectiveness and profitability. The study reveals that the mean score from consensus is the highest while the means score from the conflict is lowest. Likewise, the dispersion from the affective holding is lowest while the dispersion from consensus is the highest. The interpretation from the aforementioned is that there will be strong binding in an organization that team members willingly agree on maters and support one another whereas, much cannot be attained in an organization whereby conflict run through and efforts are being made to resolve differences.

**Conclusion**

Chief executive officer may operate in environment devoid of conflict and enjoy total acquiescence in decision making and use of authority. However, team member share from diverse background and different outlook which often and usually create conflict among members. Such conflicts must be harnessed to create conducive atmosphere for creativity at work place. The perception from different fields enables creativity and innovation in a work place.

**Recommendations**

The need for organization to recognize conflict associated with growth of team and embraced it must be stressed. Likewise, formation of team in an organization may bring conflict and development of team is pertinent to conflict as view shall definitely differ. Business strategy often evolve from conflict idea and perception among members but an innovation can only be evolved after thorough trashing of issues among members. Creativity is known to herald the situation of turmoil accompany by conflict, however, for this to materialized to innovation definitely understanding must prevail.

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