COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS BETWEEN STAFF UNIONS AND UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: A CASE OF UNIVERSITY OF ELDORET

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by the Candidate

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research thesis to my husband Christopher K. Kipketer and to my children Sharon, Shadrack, Mercy and Avidan Chislon Kigen for their love, care and patience during all the time that I undertook this study.

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts present significant challenges in organizational contexts, particularly within universities, where tensions frequently arise between management and staff unions. Effective communication strategies are essential for mitigating such conflicts and promoting a harmonious work environment**.** The existing gap is reviled by insufficient focus on communication strategies in resolving conflicts between university management and staff unions within the Kenyan universities. This study set out to investigate the problem of recurrent and often prolonged conflicts between university management and staff unions at the University of Eldoret, which have been worsened by fragmented and reactive communication practices. The research aimed to assess the effectiveness of communication in conflict resolution and to propose improved strategies for dispute management. The specific objectives were to identify the types of conflicts occurring between university management and staff unions, explore the factors contributing to conflict escalation, evaluate current communication strategies; and recommend enhancements for effective conflict resolution. The study was anchored in the Onion Theory of Conflict Management and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), both of which emphasize addressing surface issues and under lying interests to promote sustainable resolution and protect institutional reputation. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing a case study design with an explanatory sequential strategy. Purposive sampling was used during the qualitative data collection phase, while simple stratified sampling was applied in the quantitative phase. From a population of 1,500 university employees, a sample of 125 was selected using Yamane's formula, comprising representatives from University Management, the Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU), the Kenya University Staff Union (KUSU), and the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers (KUDHEIHA). Quantitative data were obtained from 105 survey respondents (84%), and qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussions with 20 participants (16%) Data analysis involved descriptive statistics using SPSS (Version 26.0) for quantitative data and thematic content analysis for qualitative responses. Findings indicated that clear communication channels (23.4%) and open communication (22.5%) were perceived as the most effective strategies. Major sources of conflict included disputes over resource allocation, policy implementation, and working conditions. These were exacerbated by inadequate communication, delayed stakeholder engagement, and misaligned expectations. Existing communication strategies were found to be fragmented and reactive, contributing to mistrust and prolonged disputes. The study underscores the importance of transparent, timely, and empathetic communication in managing institutional conflicts. It recommends the adoption of structured communication frameworks, such as the Integrated Layered Crisis Communication Model (ILCCM), to enhance dialogue and collaboration between management and staff unions. Implementation of such strategies by universities is crucial for fostering institutional stability, effective governance, and academic excellence.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CAT	Communication Accommodation Theory
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement.
CMC	Conflict Management Systems
CPM	Communication Procedure Manual
IPUCCF	Inter Public Universities Councils Consultative Forum
KUDHEIHA	Kenya Union of Domestic Educational Institutions Hospitals and Allied Workers
KUSU	Kenya University Staff Union
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation
SCCT	Situational Crisis Communication Theory
SPSS	Statistical Product and Service Solution
UASU	University Academic Staff Union
VFGD	Virtual Focus Group Discussion

OPERATIONALIZATION OF TERMS

Arbitration: A formal communication strategy used in conflict management where a neutral third party listens to the positions, evidence, and arguments of conflicting parties and then makes a binding or non-binding decision to resolve the dispute relying on structured communication.

Collective bargaining: Refers to a structured communication process in which employers and employees usually represented by unions engage in negotiations to determine working conditions, wages, benefits, and dispute-resolution mechanism.

Communication Strategy: Is an integrated plan that guides how an organization communicates internally and externally to achieve its mission, influence stakeholder behavious, and manage its public image.

Communication: Communication is the process of transmitting information, ideas, and emotions between individuals or groups through verbal or nonverbal means.

Conflict: Conflict is regarded as the presence of discord that occurs when goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and frustrate each other's attempt to achieve their objectives

Effectiveness: Refers to the degree to which communication strategies employed between university management and labour unions achieve their intended purpose of minimizing conflict escalation, strengthening mutual understanding, ensuring timely resolution of grievances, and fostering stable,

collaborative institutional relationships. It captures how well these strategies promote clarity, trust-building, and constructive engagement within the group conflict management process.

Group Conflicts: Refer to disagreements or tensions that arise between organized groups within the university, particularly labour unions and management, stemming from divergent interests, unmet expectations, communication breakdowns, or disputes over policies, welfare, and employment conditions.

Labour Union: An organization of workers formed to advance their common interests, primarily through collective bargaining with employers over wages, benefits, and other terms of employment condition.

Organization: An organization is a group with a name, purpose and a define membership. An organization has a clear boundary between its inside and outside.

University Management: Refers to the groups of governing and administrative bodies responsible for the strategic direction, policy formulation, leadership, and overall running of a university, It includes both governance organs which provide oversight and strategic guidance and executive organs which handle daily administration and implementation of policies.

Work environment: Refers to physical social, psychological, and cultural conditions within a workplace that influence how employees interact, share information and perform their duties.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

This chapter commences with a synopsis of effective communications strategies for managing groups conflicts in organizations. It outlines the existing gaps and challenges, background of the study, organizational performance, the statement of the problem, aim of the study, research questions, scope of the study, limitations of the study, justifications of the study, significance of the study and its summary.

University of Eldoret is a public institution situated in Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya. Like other Universities in Kenya, it has diverse categories of employees belonging to different labour unions, some of whom have had conflicts, which have often been on spotlight in Kenyan news media. Management of conflicts within and/or among labour unions and their employers have often been negotiated and resolved with the involvement of the Inter-University Council and government agencies.

Staff of the University of Eldoret are members of several labour unions; among them are Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU), Kenya Universities Staff Union (KUSU) and Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions and Hospital Workers (KUDHEIA). Each union has its own interests, sometimes competing with the interests of the other unions. If competing conflicts or interests of various labour unions are not properly managed, they may undermine management of the employing institution.

In the recent past, there have been industrial unrest in the higher education sector in Kenya, affecting management of public universities, which possibly reflect challenges in communication between the institutions and their labour unions, mainly with respect to signing/adoption of Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA). A challenge may be

due to Communication Procedure Manual (CPM) with respect to communication in handling grievances concerning CBA's and the members involved in developing and enforcing CBAs.

Satisfaction depends on the quality of organizational communication. Conflicts between labour unions and employers often impacts negatively on employers and members of labour unions. Some strikes among universities staff unions were related to communication strategies between universities and unions of employees of universities. Though good communication strategies promote harmonious living, it is often a complex issue because of the changing dynamics of communication and individual perception. Communication dynamics have contributed majorly to conflict.

Standards of service delivery and productivity remain a matter of concern to stakeholders. Differences such as social category elicit in-group/out-group comparisons that often escalate conflicts due to communication problems and resentment across different areas (Roberson, 2013).

Effective communication strategies are critical in managing group conflicts in organizations. Universities are complex organizations with diverse stakeholders, including students, faculty staff and other staff, who may have different needs, preferences, and perspectives. Therefore, universities need to develop and implement communication strategies that can address conflicts effectively and also promote a positive work or study environments. This study aims to identify existing challenges in communication strategies for group conflict management in universities and suggest ways to revitalize those strategies, such as face-to-face meetings, regular updates, feedback, recognition, collective bargaining agreements, assertive training, collaboration, mediation, open door communication, and open communication.

Management conflicts related to academic issues of universities involves (a) academic staff verses management (b) students verses academic staff, and (c) issues related to curricula development and delivery.

1.2 Background of the Study

This study investigates communication strategies for managing conflicts between labour unions and employers. The study seeks to understand the relationship between communication and conflict resolution as well as how to utilize communication in managing conflicts.

Many organizations in Kenya and the world at large are facing challenges of organizational conflict which eventually results in high employees' turnover, low productivity and unrealized organizational objectives and goals. Communication strategies enhance or focus on ways of communicating more effectively.

Organizations have varieties of conflicts including peaceful bargaining, grievance handling; boycotts, political action; restriction of output, sabotage, insubordination and physical attack, absenteeism, personnel turnover, and ban on overtime and strikes (Otobo, 2016).

Organizations have both external and internal sources of conflict. The external sources of conflict include: government's industrial, economic and educational policies, nature of labour legislation, unpatriotic and unethical behaviour of political class; economic mismanagement, and general distribution of wealth and power in society. Some of the external sources of conflict might not directly instigate industrial conflict but do influence general expectations, substantially determine nature of workers' demands, have a bearing on intensity of conflict, and set the whole tenor for the conduct of industrial relations (Otobo, 2016).

Internal sources of conflict include: style of management, nature of physical environment of the work-place, orientation of staff, conditions of service, efficacy or otherwise of the promotion system, cumbersomeness of grievance and disputes management procedure (Otobo, 2016).

1.2.1 Organizational Performance

Labour unionism has over the years been one of the most common and popular features of every organization's workforce. Labour unions seek to protect the rights and interests of employees from arbitrary economic exploitation and abuse of their rights/dignity (Collins, 2013). Labour unionism is seen as a fundamental tool and instrument used by workers.

Workers believe that, by binding or coming together as a team, they would be able to fight for their rights against any economic exploitation and social injustice by employers. For harmonious relationship to exist, workers expect their employers to give them reasonable compensations, and respect their dignity. However, employers give priority to their own interests against those of employees. The consequences are often expensive to not only employers but also to society in general. For example, employers would suffer the loss of good will during an industrial conflict, loss of materials, machines and customers.

A labour union, also referred to as trade union, is an association of workers, which consist of representatives that mediate between the workers and their employer in order to avoid any unfair treatment that could be meted on them by the employers and to conversely ensure commitment to work by its members in a way that would result in high level of productivity and organizational efficiency (Collins, 2013).

Labour unions have great influence on organizational performance, especially its roles, the influence being either positive or negative. Labour unions act as a link between the employer and employees intended to promote harmonious working relations. This aspect is realized through signing of collective agreements. The negative aspect is pronounced when labour unions do not agree with management, which results into a labour union calling upon its members to demonstrate or strike or engage in go-slows which would put the productivity of the organization at stake.

By negotiating and registering grievances of its members to the management, labour unions have ensured improved pay and improved working conditions. Betchoo (2014) states that unions still bear in mind that the emotional intelligence that they use in collective bargaining would bring them an opportunity to succeed in their tasks.

Most, if not all labour unions in Kenya have gone on strike due to unresolved conflicts emanating from issues concerning good employee and employer relations. The medical practitioners have severally been covered on media due to poor bargaining agreements. Teachers of both primary and post primary education level have gone on strike due to unresolved grievances. Another group of university workers went on strike and as much as their grievances were not resolved they had to engage into signing a Return-to-Work formular awaiting the government and unions leaders' resolution.

Some of the recent labour disputes in the higher education sector were experienced in 2013. The industrial unrest involved three unions: Universities Academic Staff Union (UASU), Kenya Universities Staff Union (KUSU) and Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals Allied Workers (KUDHEIHA). Due to unresolved grievances in 2017 -2018, lecturers went on strike three times, during which the Employment and Labour Relations Court blocked the public university lecturers

from going on strike. Judge Hellen Wasilwa issued orders against KUSU and UASU on 13th February, 2017 to give room for the Inter-Public Universities Councils Consultative Forum (IPUCCF) to hear and determine the case which they had already filed in court. On 19thJanuary, 2017, the lecturers refused to call off the strike despite the government releasing funds. UASU and KUSU declined to resume work until their demands were met by claiming that they had been underpaid for far too long and yet politicians earn a fortune. UASU Secretary General, Constantine Wasonga told the lecturers in a circular that the strike would continue until the CBA was negotiated, signed and implemented (Tuko 2017). The strike ended 54 days after Constantine Wasonga called it off and asked lecturers to resume work on Tuesday, 14th March 2017.

Trade unions majorly act as a communication agent between employees and employers, while concentrating their attention on achieving key objectives such as wages and salaries, working conditions, personnel policies, discipline, welfare, employee-employer relations, negotiating machinery, safeguard organizational health and the interest of industry.

Trade unions can play a crucial role as communication agents by advocating for effective communication strategies within the workplace. Effective communication strategies can help to build trust, foster collaboration, and ensure that workers' voices are heard in decision-making processes.

A study conducted in the United States (Daniel, 2020: Ify, 2024) found out that trade unions can advocate for the adoption of effective communication strategies within the workplace, such as regular team meetings, open-door policies and clear communication channels. The study found out that such strategies were associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, better employee engagement, and lower turnover rates.

A study conducted in Australia (Rai et.al, 2021) found out that trade unions can advocate for the adoption of effective communication strategies as part of broader efforts to promote workplace health and safety. The study found out that effective communication between workers and management was essential for identifying and addressing workplace hazards, and that trade unions could play an important role in advocating the adoption of such strategies.

In addition to advocating for effective communication strategies, trade unions can also provide training and support to workers on communication skills. Studies conducted in Norway (Meindinyo, 2024: Goddeeris, Johannessen & Mygind, 2020) found out that trade unions played an important role in providing training and support to workers on communication skills, such as active listening and conflict resolution. The study found out that such training was associated with better communication between workers and management, as well as lower levels of workplace conflicts and stress.

Overall, trade unions can play an important role in advocating for effective communication strategies in the workplaces. In so doing, they can help build trust, foster collaboration, and ensure that workers' voices are heard in decision-making processes. In addition, trade unions can support or provide training and support to workers on communication skills, which can help them communicate more effectively and consequentially reduce workplace conflicts and stress.

Trade unions can act as effective communication agents between workers and management, as well as between workers and the wider community. They can provide a platform for workers to voice their concerns and grievances, as well as ensure that workers' perspectives are taken into account in decision-making processes. Additionally, trade unions can serve as a channel for information dissemination,

keeping workers informed about important developments and changes in the workplace.

Another study conducted in South Africa (Tando, 2025) found out that trade unions play an important role in promoting communication and dialogue between workers and the wider community. The study found out that trade unions helped raise awareness about social issues and promoted social justice in a community. The study also found out that trade unions were effective in building alliances with other social movements and civil society organizations, which helped to amplify their message and promote greater social change.

In addition to promoting communication between workers and management and between workers and the wider community, trade unions can also serve as a platform for inter-worker communication and collaboration. A study conducted in Sweden (Rönnmar &Iossa, 2022) found out that trade unions play an important role in promoting social cohesion and collaboration among workers and helped to build a sense of community among workers, which in turn led to more effective teamwork and greater job satisfaction.

Overall, trade unions can serve as effective communication agents in the workplace and beyond. They can help to facilitate communication and dialogue between workers and management, promote social justice and awareness about important issues in the community as well as promote social cohesion and collaboration among workers. As such, trade unions are an important component of any democratic society that values open communication and transparency in the workplace and beyond.

1.2.2 Existing Gaps and Challenges

The existing gap is revealed by insufficient focus on communication strategies in resolving conflicts between university management and staff unions within the Kenyan universities. Despite the availability of various communication strategies for managing group conflicts in universities, there are still significant challenges that need to be +addressed. A major challenge among universities stakeholders is the lack of awareness or understanding of available communication strategies. For instance, some stakeholders may not be aware of the benefits of arbitration, which is a form of conflict resolution where a neutral third party makes a binding decision on the conflict. Lack of awareness can hinder the adoption of effective communication strategies. According to Nwoke *et al.* (2019), lack of awareness of arbitration as a conflict resolution strategy among faculty members in Nigerian universities was a significant barrier to its adoption. The study suggested that universities should provide awareness campaigns and training programs to promote the adoption of effective communication strategies.

Another challenge is poor collaboration and trust among university stakeholders. Collaborative communication strategies, such as collective bargaining agreements, which involve negotiating terms and conditions of employment or study, can be effective in managing conflicts. However, lack of trust or willingness to collaborate can hinder the adoption of such strategies. According to Asante *et. al.* (2017), lack of trust between faculty and administration in Ghanaian universities was a significant barrier to adoption of collective bargaining agreements. The study suggested that universities should promote trust-building activities and dialogue to foster collaboration among stakeholders.

Furthermore, lack of open communication channels can hinder effective conflict management. Open communication strategies, such as open-door communication, which allows stakeholders to communicate directly with their superiors, can be effective in resolving conflicts. However, lack of open communication channels can lead to conflicts being unresolved or escalating. Deoughy et. al. (2013), says lack of open communication channels in universities has been a significant barrier in resolving conflicts between faculty and administration in American universities. The study suggested that universities should prioritize use of open communication channels to promote effective conflict management.

In conclusion, effective communication strategies are critical in managing group conflicts in universities. However, there are still significant gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. By revitalizing communication strategies such as arbitration, collective bargaining agreements, collaboration, mediation, open-door communication, and open communication, universities can create a positive and productive work environment that fosters effective conflict management. Addressing the challenges mentioned above, requires a multifaceted approach, including training programs, trust-building activities, and prioritizing use of open communication channels.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Group conflicts in universities is a complex issue that can have a significant impact on the work environment and productivity of an institution. Unionized workers, including faculty and other staff, may experience conflicts with each other, with management, or with other stakeholders, such as students or external organizations. These conflicts can arise from a range of factors, including job insecurity, inadequate compensation, disagreements over work conditions, or differing opinions on institutional policies and

practices. The problem is further exacerbated by poor or ineffective communication strategies to manage these conflicts. In some cases, conflicts may escalate and lead to strikes, work stoppages, or other disruptive actions that affect quality of education and services of the institution. Furthermore, conflicts can result in strained relationships between unionized workers and the institution, leading to a negative work culture and potentially reducing an institution's reputation.

This study was set to investigate recurrent and often prolonged conflicts between university management and staff unions at the University of Eldoret, which have been worsened by fragmented and reactive communication practices.

To address this problem, it was necessary to adopt or develop and use more effective communication strategies needed to manage group conflicts in universities unions. This study intended to identify the most effective communication strategies for different types of conflicts, as well as the underlying factors that contribute to conflict escalation.

1.4 Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of communication strategies used in managing group conflicts between university management and labour unions, with a specific focus on the University of Eldoret. By identifying existing communication gaps and evaluating current practices, the study seeks to propose evidence-based, revitalized communication approaches that can strengthen collaborative relations and enhance institutional stability.

1.4.1 Objectives of the study

1. To investigate types of group conflicts experienced between university unions and management.
2. To examine factors that contribute to escalation of conflicts.
3. To assess effectiveness of existing communication strategies.
4. To recommend improved strategies for conflict resolution.

1.4.2 Research questions:

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What types of conflicts are experienced in the university of Eldoret?
2. What factors contribute to escalation of group conflicts University of Eldoret?
3. How effective are current communications strategies?
4. Which communications strategies are recommended for group management of conflicts between university management and university unions?

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study can be defined in terms of content, geographical scope, and methodology.

This study focuses on investigating the role of communication strategies in resolving group conflicts between university unions and university management, with focus on the University of Eldoret, Main Campus.

The scope encompasses the identification of common types of conflicts between university unions and university management as well as an analysis of the factors contributing to their escalation. Additionally, the study assesses current communication strategies employed by unions and explores the role of education and training in enhancing communication and conflict management skills among unionized workers. The study aims to recommend evidence-based communication strategies that are effective in preventing and resolving conflicts within university settings.

The study focuses on the problem of group conflicts between management of universities and universities' workers unions, specifically related to job insecurity, inadequate compensation, disagreements over work conditions, and differing opinions on institutional policies and practices. The study aims to identify effective

communication strategies for managing these conflicts and to investigate the role of training and education in improving communication and conflict management skills.

The nature of communication in organizations majorly happens within defined structures and an organizational communication style adopted. Within individuals or group levels, group members communicate within a group designed way.

The study assesses the types of communication strategies adopted and used by universities and labour unions in managing conflicts and eventually recommend communication strategies that need to be adopted in managing group conflicts.

The study is limited to communication strategies, organizational communication and group conflicts.

The study used mixed Methods approach with case study method of inquiry, using an Explanatory Sequential design.

A mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques, will be utilized. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the issue by integrating insights from interviews, virtual focus group discussions, and questionnaires. The target population for the study includes 105 individuals from various university unions, with purposive sampling used for qualitative data and stratified sampling for quantitative data.

This study is particularly relevant given the growing complexities of group dynamics in academic institutions, where effective communication is critical for maintaining harmony and achieving organizational goals. The study's findings are expected to contribute to the development of best practices in communication and conflict management within university unions (Ochola, 2024).

1.6 Limitation of the Study

The study is limited to communication strategies, organizational communication and group conflicts.

This study has various limitations. First, data was acquired from one institution. Questionnaires filled by individuals and information interview may not give more room for explaining more details. Some interviewees may participate with fear of potential of being exposed to institutional management, who may thereafter lack confidence in him/her. The limitations include issues such as:

a) *Sample Size:* The study was limited to 120 participants, whereas the staff population is 1500. This was informed by the challenge to gather data from a large number of unionized workers and management in university unions as posited by Simmons & Nelson (2019). The small sample size may not be representative of the larger population of university unions.

b) *Self-report Bias:* The study may be subject to self-report bias, where participants may not accurately report their experiences and behaviors due to social desirability or memory recall biases (Teh et al., 2023) hence affecting validity and reliability of the data.

c) *Time Constraints:* Data collection and analysis took long since most of the respondents were on recess due to long holiday as posited by Dawadi (2021). Time constraints may limit the depth of the study's analysis or the number of communication strategies that can be investigated.

d) *Cultural Factors:* The study did not take into account cultural factors that may influence communication and conflict management in university unions, as these factors may vary across different contexts (Gudykunst & Kim, 2017).

e) *Selection Bias:* Participants may be self-selected or chosen based on convenience, which may not be representative of the larger population of university unions (Bryman, 2018). This bias may affect the generalizability of the study's findings.

f) *Bias in Data Collection:* The data collected from focus group discussions, interviews, and other methods may be subject to bias, such as social desirability bias, where participants may provide socially desirable responses rather than their true opinions or experiences.

Although the study aims to provide valuable insights into revitalized communication strategies for managing group conflicts in university unions, the above potential limitations were considered in the interpretation of the study's findings.

1.7 Justification of the Study

Revitalized communication is essential with respect to promoting successful union-management relations and improved organizational outcomes (Sharma, 2016). There is no sufficient evidence of research on communication strategies in university unions. Consequently, this study aims to contribute to the development of effective communication practices in university unions (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2019). This study's findings can be applied to other unions outside universities, emphasizing the importance of effective communication strategies (Strawser et. al., 2021).

The following reasons justify the need for the study:

a) *Impact on Productivity:* Group conflicts involving university unions can have a significant impact on the productivity and functioning of any university. The negative effects of these conflicts can include work stoppages, strikes, and disruptions to educational services, which can have long-lasting consequences.

Development of effective communication strategies for managing union conflicts can contribute to a more positive work culture and improved productivity for an institution.

b) *Importance of Unions:* Unions play a critical role in protecting the rights and interests of workers, including faculty, technical and administrative staff in universities. Understanding the dynamics of group conflicts and revitalizing communication strategies is essential in ensuring that unions can continue to fulfill this role and improve the working conditions of their members.

c) *Relevance to Broader Society*: The study has relevance beyond universities, as conflicts in a workplace are common in many industries and can have far-reaching consequences for employees, employers, and the broader community. Developing communication strategies for managing conflicts in university unions can provide valuable insights that can be applied to other industries and contexts.

d) *Evidence-based Recommendations:* The study is intended to develop evidence-based revitalized communication strategies for managing group conflicts in university unions. The study recommendations are intended to facilitate development of policies and practices that promote a positive work culture and improved productivity, benefiting both workers and the institution as a whole.

Overall, the study is justified by its potential to improve the working environment in university unions, protect the rights and interests of workers and provide valuable insights for managing conflicts in the workplace.

Communication is used to transfer information to the audience about an organizations' mission and vision, policies, and procedures, tasks and duties, and various activities

(Musheke & Phiri, 2021: Farmer, Slater, & Wright, 1998). A good communication strategy is, therefore, essential for a business to survive while contributing to enhanced work performance, organizational relationship, minimizes strikes and lockouts. Organizational purposes and goals at times fail due to gaps in communication, resulting to wastes and costly mistakes. Route & Omiko (2007) stated that communication is the foundation of all functioning groups. Thus; it is the lifeblood of any group's effectiveness. Within organizations, communication flow can be downwards, where organizational policies, goals, objectives, amongst others, flow down to the bottom ranks of an organization's hierarchy. Upwards communication is where information flows from the lowest to the higher levels as in the case of reports, suggestions, grievances. On the other hand, horizontal communication is a process that reaches all units or members at the organizational level as in committee meetings of departmental heads and diagonal between individuals across different levels without direct superior or subordinate relationships. Communication flow is outward when an organization gets to relate to its customers, suppliers, social and political systems, not only to monitor information but also to disseminate information and establish liaison with them.

An effective group communication requires in essence: planned process of decision making; a regularly scheduled forum for members to discuss management issues, evaluate and discuss team functions and development and to address related interpersonal issues, a mechanism for communication with external systems within which the team operates.

Route & Omiko (2007) states that organization conflict may occur at structural level because of cross-functional departmental differences over goals, time horizons, rewards, authority, line and staff activities, status and resources. Teams and groups use

communication to resolve essential problems within those groups. Leaders must empower and support employees to solve problems and to control quality (Field, 2021).

The development of a strategic communication strategy and its implementation will provide a number of benefits to organizations, such as keeping employees motivated and engaged, and sharing clear, consistent messages with employees in a timely manner that in turn help organizational productivity (Bell et. al, 2019).

1.8 Significance of the Study

Group conflicts in university unions can have significant negative impacts on the institution, including reduced productivity, damaged relationships between unionized workers and the institution management, and potentially leading to work stoppages, strikes, or other disruptive actions.

Research has shown that effective communication is essential for managing conflicts in a workplace (Carsten et. al, 2013). In the context of university unions, effective communication can help to build trust and understanding between management and unionized workers, leading to a more positive work culture and improved productivity.

Additionally, research has shown that training and education can improve communication and conflict management skills among workers and management (Algert et. al, 2021). Therefore, investigating the role of training and education in improving communication and conflict management skills among unionized workers and management can provide valuable insights for developing effective training programs for conflict management in a university management and its workers unions. Research would investigate the role of training and education in improving communication and conflict management skills among unionized workers and institutional management.

Moreover, the study has broader societal relevance beyond the university context, as conflicts in the workplace are common in many industries and can have far-reaching consequences for employees, employers, policy-makers and the broader community aided by the government agencies. This study will provide valuable insights that can be applied to other industries and contexts, benefiting both workers and employers.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of evidence-based effective communication strategies and training programs for managing group conflicts in a university and its workers unions. These recommendations will inform the development of policies and practices that promote a positive work culture and improve productivity amongst various stakeholders.

The study is expected to offer an insight on how to cultivate an effective and efficient communication strategy or strategies towards resolving or managing conflict(s) for the purpose of promoting healthy organizational relationships. It is expected that universities would appreciate the importance of managing conflict(s) for the purpose of promoting good working relationship for the benefit of an institution, workers and stakeholders. Organizational stability would reduce rates of staff turnover, industrial unrest, time wastage and poor productivity amongst others which will result into organizational goals attainment.

This study is also significant to communication and anthropology students. The study will serve as a source of reference in organizational communication, conflict management and development of theories for scholars in the field of communication and anthropology as an academic reference tool. Through this study, they will realize the importance of communication and how this can help them in analyzing and describing diversity of the human experience and cultural creativity across time and

space. It will also enhance understanding of social issues and problems, and sources of stress and change in contemporary and historical societies.

The research findings are intended to contribute to the development of evidence-based recommendations for revitalized communication strategies to manage group conflicts between a university and its workers unions, for the purpose of developing positive working environments and improved productivity for the institution.

1.9 Summary

This chapter discussed communication issues and strategies for addressing group conflicts in organizations. It presents communication as a key factor in managing group conflicts and management. It also discusses the problem of group conflicts in university unions, the lack of effective communication strategies for managing conflict, and the need for research on effective communication strategies for managing conflicts. The aim and objectives of the study are also presented, including identifying the most effective communication strategies for different types of conflicts, investigating the role of training and education in improving communication and conflict management skills, and developing evidence-based recommendations for effective communication strategies to manage group conflicts between a university management and unions of its workers.

The scope of the study is discussed, including the content, geographical, and methodological scope. The mixed-method approach is chosen for the study, which involves both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. The limitation of the study is also presented, including potential bias and limitations of the sample size.

The justification of the study is provided, highlighting the negative impacts of group conflict between a university and its workers unions and the potential benefits of effective communication strategies and training programs for managing conflicts. The significance of the study is discussed, including its potential to inform the development of policies and practices that promote a positive work culture and improve productivity, benefiting both workers and the institution as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses literature relevant to communication strategies used in resolving conflicts between university unions and management, with the goal of identifying effective practices that can foster a more harmonious and productive environment.

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction and is an integral part of organizational management. In organizations, communication is essential with respect to decision-making, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. Effective communication strategies are necessary for managing conflicts in higher learning institutions. This review will examine the communication process, theories of communication, development and conflict management, role of communication in organizations, communication strategies used to manage conflicts, factors that trigger conflicts between an organization and its staff, contribution of communication strategies in managing conflicts between management of organizations and labour unions, how labour unions affect communication between them and universities management, effective communication strategies for managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions, and the system theory of communication within the mirror of Onion theory of conflict management and situational crisis communication theory.

This chapter presents issues of communication with respect to group conflicts management in organizational communication. The literature reviewed explores communication channels, specifically analyzing any links between the communication process used by a university and perceptions held by staff towards group conflict. This review has identified existing gap(s) in knowledge on strategic communication, which is essential in managing conflict.

2.2 Definition of Key Concepts

2.2.1 Communication

Communication is the process of transmitting information, ideas, and emotions between individuals or groups through verbal or nonverbal means (Hartley et. al, 2023). According to Borg, communication involves exchange of messages through various channels, such as spoken or written language, body language, and facial expressions. Communication can occur between two or more individuals or within a group, and it can be used for a variety of purposes, such as conveying information, persuading others, building relationships, and expressing emotions. Littlejohn and Foss (2014), defines communication as "the process by which people create and share meaning through the use of symbols" (p. 4). In this definition, communication is seen as a process of creating and interpreting symbols, such as words, gestures, and images, in order to convey meaning. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2014) communication is "the process by which people share, create, and exchange information, ideas, and feelings through various channels of communication" (p. 6); they posit that communication involves not only the transmission of information but also the creation and exchange of new ideas and feelings. Communication is a complex and multifaceted process that involves the exchange of information, ideas, and emotions through various channels and symbols. Communication is essential for human interaction and plays a crucial role in various aspects of our lives, such as work, relationships, and personal development. Communication can further be defined as; communication between two or more individuals and is characterized by its personal and immediate nature (DeVito, 2019).

Intrapersonal communication, on the other hand, refers to communication that occurs within an individual, such as self-talk or mental reflection (Kaur, 2024). Group communication involves communication among a group of individuals who share a

common goal or interest, and can take place in various settings, such as meetings, classes, or social gatherings (Hartley & Bruckmann, 2008).

Public communication involves communication that is intended for a large audience, such as speeches, presentations, or performances (Beebe & Masterson, 2020). Organizational communication is a type of communication that occurs within an organization and involves the exchange of information, ideas, and messages among its members (Kreps, 1990). Mass communication refers to communication that is delivered to a large and diverse audience through various forms of media, such as television, radio, newspapers, and the internet (McQuail, 2010). Online or machine-assisted communication involves the use of digital technologies and online platforms to exchange information and messages (Putro, 2023). Online or machine-assisted communication includes email, instant messaging, social media, and other forms of online interaction.

Verbal and nonverbal communication play a critical role in conflict management in universities. Effective communication strategies can help prevent conflicts from escalating and facilitate the resolution of conflicts when they do arise. In their study of conflict management in higher education, Uzun (2020) emphasize the importance of active listening, a key component of verbal communication, in resolving conflicts between students, faculty and management. Uzun (2020), state that nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions and body language, can be used to signal emotions and intentions during conflict interactions, and can be an effective tool for managing conflict in a positive way. In their study of workplace conflict in academia, Adhams (2023) highlight the importance of clear and direct verbal communication in addressing conflict and avoiding misunderstandings. Gustafsson (2021), says cultural differences in nonverbal communication styles can sometimes contribute to

misunderstandings and conflict in diverse university settings, highlighting the need for cross-cultural communication training. Finally, Salamondra (2021) emphasize the importance of both verbal and nonverbal communication in building trust and fostering positive relationships among department members.

Communication is the prime means for devising and promoting organizational goals. Organizational Communication comprises a systemic study of symbols embedded in discourses, interactions, media networks, persuasive campaigns and boarder discourse within an organization. It has been noted that blockages in communication, faulty structures of intra-organizational communication may lead to disasters. Poor or lack of effective communication have led to the development of a gamut of problems comprising 'at one end of the continuum, job dissatisfaction and stress, through' to damaging strikes, operating losses, bankruptcies, production line injuries, shipwrecks, plan crashes, at the extreme, mass slaughter in the field of battle (Bharadwaj, 2014). Communication plays a vital role by management listening to views of employees and by employees listening to recommendations of management.

2.2.2 Organization

According to Lune (2010), an organization is a group with a name, purpose and a define membership. An organization has a clear boundary between its inside and outside. It can be more or less formally organized. A formal organization tends to have roles or jobs or ranks within it and guidelines, rules or by-laws defining how things get done within it. Other scholars have defined it as a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. All organizations have a management structure that determines relationships between the different activities and the members, and subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry

out different tasks. Organizations are open systems; they affect and are affected by their environment.

2.2.3 Conflict

Conflict is regarded as the presence of discord that occurs when goals, interests or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and frustrate each other's attempt to achieve their objectives (Aleke et. al, 2020). Conflict in organizations occurs when interests and activities of individuals or groups within an organization confront each other and present attainment of each member's/group's objectives (Adu et al, 2015). Thus, conflict is unavoidable part of organizational life since the purpose of diverse stakeholders such as managers and staff are often unharmonious. Undoubtedly, within every human relation where there is competition of jobs, resources, power, recognition and security conflict is always present (Adu et al, 2015). Conflict is an overt expression of tensions between the goals or concerns of one party and those of another. Conflict is a condition in which individuals or groups engage in actions or express emotions that indicate disagreement or incompatibility in goals, interests, or expectations (Adomi & Anie (2005).

2.2.4 Group/Team conflict

Group conflict can either be intra-group or inter-group conflict (Route & Omiko 2007). Intra-group conflict refers to the incompatibility, incongruence or disagreement among members of a group or its subgroups regarding goals, functions or activities of the group. Unless the majority of a group or its subgroups are involved in conflict, it is not classified as intra-group conflict. Issues of group cohesion, leadership and status, power or influence and limited resources are often the sources of intra-group conflict. The causes of intra-group conflict may be ego, clash, overstepping authority, individual dominion over others, not treating colleagues equally, failure of duties, wrong decision

-making due to a person's preconceived notions, lack of loyalty, failing to act on sensitive issues, not open, hidden agenda among others. Intra-group conflict is classified into two kinds, namely task conflict and relationship conflict. Task conflict (Route & Omiko, 2007) is a perception of disagreement among group members about content of decision and involves differences in viewpoints, ideas and opinions about procedures or guidelines and about the interpretation of facts. Relationship conflict is a perception of interpersonal incompatibility and includes annoyance and animosity among members, for example, disagreement about values, personal or family norms, or about personal taste. Organizational causes of conflict are consequence of the characteristics of organizational design, limited resources and characteristics of organizational systems, such as: compensation, decision-making, planning and budgeting (Spaho, 2013 & Petkovic` et al, 2008). Group/team conflicts could also be due to:

a) *Dependence in Work Activities:* when a member of an organization cannot start his/her job, since another member has not finished his/her job, or if an individual significantly influences a colleague's job, then this might cause conflict.
b) *Differentiation of Organizational units and Incompatibility of Operating Goals:* The specialization of organizational units (manufacturing, purchasing, finance, sales, etc.) manifests in everyday work as differences in working manners, goals and culture. These differences, as well as difference in their operative goals create a potential for emergence of horizontal conflict.
c) *Sharing Limited Resources:* Resources in an organization are related to power and influence, with each department trying to obtain a larger share. These resources are not only financial, but are also related to information technology,

human resources, redistribution of employees etc. The insufficiency of resources can also be a foundation for a potential conflict.

d) *Compensation System:* The compensation system has a direct influence on people's behavior, their satisfaction and feeling for justice and equality. In this situation, conflict can start because of inconsistencies, which means that the employees in different departments might be rewarded by using different criteria. Salaries of employees will always be a cause of dissatisfaction of individuals, because it is difficult to be objective and measure all the employees' achievements and contributions at their workplaces. However, it is possible to standardize the criteria for awarding compensation, in order to make the differences rational and acceptable.

e) *Organizational Indistinctness and Neglect:* Unclear organizational work or delegation of authority can cause conflict. If obligations and responsibilities of employees are not clearly determined, conflicts are unavoidable. Low level of formalization stimulates conflicts, especially in a small and mid-sized enterprise, where there is no specialization of employees, or delegation of authority among managers.

2.2.5 Conflict Communication

Communication conception is notably present in Conflict Management System (CMS). Communication focuses on specific existing facts, while leaders are the primary architects of meaning (Spaho, 2013). Studies have revealed various communication related organizational and personality disorders that can cause conflict in universities.

a) Organizational Disorders:

(i) *Lack of Clear Communication Channels:* When communication channels are not well defined, it can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. This can occur

when there are too many levels of communication or when there is a lack of transparency and openness in communication (Bharain, 2023). Inefficient communication channels can lead to conflicts, as important information may not be communicated effectively or misunderstandings may occur.

(ii) *Inefficient Leadership:* Inefficient leadership can lead to conflicts, as leaders may not be able to provide direction or may make decisions that are not in the best interests of the organization (Oni, 2016).

(iii)*Bureaucratic Structures:* Bureaucratic structures can lead to conflicts, as they can slow down decision-making processes and make it difficult for individuals to take action (Kivunja, 2013).

(iv)*Lack of Accountability:* When there is a lack of accountability, it can lead to conflicts, as individuals may not take responsibility for their actions or may blame others for problems (Buru &Simatwa, 2018).

(v) *Inefficient Communication Channels*: Inefficient communication channels can lead to conflicts, as important information may not be communicated effectively or misunderstandings may occur. (Ombiro, 2017)

(b) Personality Disorders:

(i) *Narcissistic personality disorder:* Individuals with narcissistic personality disorder often have an inflated sense of self-importance and may be preoccupied with fantasies of success and power. This can lead to conflicts, as they may not be able to work effectively with others or may demand excessive attention and recognition. (Udegbe & Udegbe, 2015; Musau, 2020)

(ii) *Borderline Personality Disorder:* Individuals with borderline personality disorder may have unstable moods, behavior and relationships. This can lead to conflicts, as they may be prone to emotional outbursts or may have difficulty

regulating their emotions. (Akinsulore et al., 2020; Makokha et al., 2013; Bhardwaj & Sharma, 2024).

(iii) *Antisocial Personality Disorder:* Individuals with antisocial personality disorder may engage in behavior that is harmful to others and may violate social norms and laws. This can lead to conflicts, as they may engage in aggressive or manipulative behavior that harms others. (Ohaeri et al., 2013).

(iv) *Paranoid Personality Disorder:* Individuals with paranoid personality disorder may be suspicious and distrustful of others, which can lead to conflicts, as they may perceive threats where there are none or may be unwilling to cooperate with others (Kihara, 2017; Bhardwaj & Sharma, 2024).

2.2.6 Communication Process

Communication is a process of exchanging information, ideas, and messages between two or more individuals or groups. The communication process consists of several elements, including sender, message, channel, receiver, feedback and noise. A sender is a person who initiates communication, while receiver is a person who receives the message. A message is information that a sender intends to communicate, while the channel is the medium through which a message is transmitted. Feedback is the response of the receiver to the message, while noise refers to any factor that can interfere with transmission or reception of a message (Umanzor, 2020).

The communication process entails the process between the sender and the receiver that results in the transference and comprehension of the intended meaning (Umanzor, 2020). For communication to take place, first, there is need to be clear on the purpose and the message should be relayed between the sender and the receiver (Robbins & Judge, 2013; Robbins, 1993). For one to be an effective communicator and to communicate without creating misunderstanding and confusion to the intended

recipients, the aim at each stage of communication must be to make the message clear, concise and accurate.

Communication is established on perception, which calls for the sender to disseminate the message to the recipient who then decodes the message. Thus, for communication to take place, there must be at least two actors (Nwagbara & Brown, 2014). Ivancevich (2000) conceptualizes communication using the encoder/decoder paradigm in which communication occurs through dissemination of information through a code, through which the communicator and the audience have an understanding of each other through common communicative cues. However, when the common code lacks, conflict erupts (Nwagbara & Brown, 2014). To Robbins (1993), communication process involves the "sender" who initiates, encodes and transmits the "message" (what is being communicated) over a selected "channel" (the medium through which the communication message travels) to the "receiver" (the object to whom the message is being directed), who then decodes (retranslates) the sender's message. The communication process ends with the "feedback loop" which puts the message back through the process to check against misunderstanding.

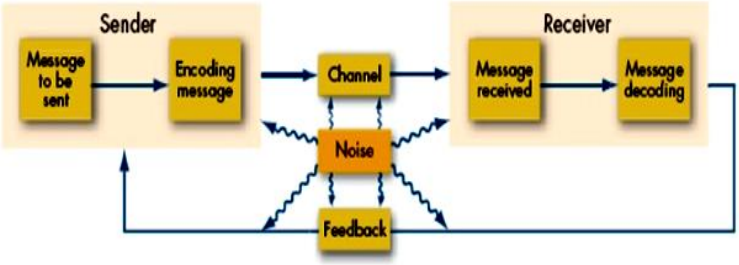


Figure 1: The communication model
Source: Robbins & Judge (2013): *Essentials of Organizational Behavior* (11th Ed): Pearson education Limited.

However, communication can be interrupted by "noise". Noise is anything that could be emanating from the sender, the channel or the receiver. The "noise" obstructs communication and hinders the message from being effectively understood (Could,

2022). Communication is the gateway that facilitates the interaction of the organization and its environment. It is the process of this interaction that the managers become cognizant with the needs of their customers, the availability of the suppliers and the needs of the community that they can address during corporate social responsibility (Spaho, 2013; Aula &Siira, 2010; Kehinde & Osibanjo, 2011). According to GTZ Rioplus (2006), communication is dialogue that enhances understanding of the people on key factors of their physical, social, economic and political environment and the interdependence of these environments so that emergent problems can be solved. Communication is different from information in that communication is a two-way process that has feedback that lacks in information, whereas information is logical and does not involve mutuality (Drucker, 2007). Kehinde & Osibanjo, (2011) view communication as a process through which structures, relationships and meaning are created through the designing and exchanging of a message. They view organizational communication as a process that involves an exchange to enable structure facilitation, establishment of working relationships, and creation of shared meaning among members of an organization. The key purpose of communication in an organization is to keep the organization up to date, to freshen up the common organizational beliefs, synthesize and make meaning out of the complex meaning-making structures (Weick, 1995). However, communication can also break the existent cognitive organizational structures thereby causing deliberate disintegration, which can give rise to emergent organizational issues (Aula &Siira, 2010). Aula (1996) bases this notion of the dual function of organizational communication on the perspective that organizational communication entails both the integrative and disintegrative constructs with which one can create or dissipate the diversity of the existent meaning-making structures and thus heighten the chances of derivation of new meanings in ensuring interaction. This dual

function of organizational communication presents a challenge in management of conflict in an organization since interaction is drawn in two separate directions. This gives the interacting parties the chance to influence the process of the conflict and gives the conflict an indeterminate nature (Aula & Siira, 2010).

Communication in an organization takes place in communicative avenues that Stacey (1999) calls arenas, to mean the environment in which the communicators create, exchange meanings and make sense of their experiences. These arenas include surroundings that are both inside and outside the organization. Communication arenas can either be institutional or spontaneous (Aula &Siira, 2010). These are the same arenas where communication is managed. Institutional arenas are intentionally constructed and derive their appearance from the organization's formal structure, rules and processes. In an organizational set up, institutional arenas may take the form of manuals, codes, notices and reports, whereas in personal context, they may be in form of board meetings, briefings and project assemblies. The distinctive characteristic of institutional arenas is that the communication process takes the top-down format and is controlled, regulated and literal. Conflict management systems (CMS) fall within this category (Aula &Siira, 2010, p.132)

On the other hand, spontaneous arenas are free in both their means and form. Examples of these arenas are work groups and corridor talks. Spontaneous arenas enhance the use of disintegrative communication where communication is not tied to hierarchy and there are minimal chances of conflict arising (Aula, 2000). The sensitive nature of spontaneous arenas to context makes them popular in organizations (Aula &Siira, 2010).

2.2.7 Flow of Communication

Flow of communication can be vertical, horizontal, or diagonal. Vertical communication flows up and down the hierarchical structure of an organization and includes communication between superiors and subordinates. Horizontal communication flows between individuals at the same hierarchical level, while diagonal communication flows between individuals at different hierarchical levels (Ghasabeh & Amiri, 2016). Effective communication strategies should consider the flow of communication within an organization.

In an organization, communication can flow vertically, laterally, horizontally and also diagonally. The vertical flow can be further subdivided into upward and downward movement (Babatunde, 2015; Robbins & Judge, 2013; Spaho, 2013; Kehinde & Osibanjo, 2011; Robbins, 1993).

2.2.7.1 Downward Communication

This is the communication that flows from a higher level of a group or organization to a lower level. It could be flowing from the top management to other levels down the hierarchical arrangement of the organization. Downward communication is mostly used by managers to give instructions, assign goals, communicate policy and procedures, point out problems and offer feedback.

2.2.7.2 Upward Communication

Upward communication flows from the lower hierarchy upwards. It is mostly used to relay feedback to the managers. It keeps the managers abreast on how the employees perceive their jobs, their colleagues and the organization in general. Upward communication could be in form of performance reports, employee feedback surveys, and suggestion boxes.

2.2.7.3 Lateral /Horizontal Communication.

Lateral communication normally occurs among members of the same work group, managers of the same level or among any horizontally equivalent personnel. Lateral relationships are oftentimes necessary to save time and also for co-ordination. However, they can be a source of conflict when they breach the formal vertical channels, especially when employees superseded their managers to get things done (Robbins, 1993).

2.2.7.4 Diagonal Communication

Spaho (2013) explains that diagonal communication "flows from people who are not on the same organizational levels and are not in a direct relationship in the organizational hierarchy". Diagonal communication could, for example, be used when labour unions organize meetings between the top-level management and the employees, surpassing the middle level management.

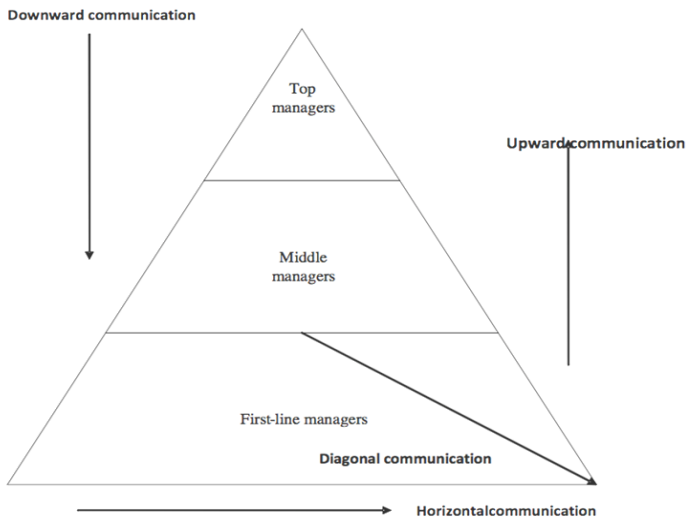


Figure 2: The organizational flow of communication.
Source: Spaho, K. (2013). *Organization Communication & Conflict Management* (p.103).

2.2.8 Communication Networks in an Organization

Communication networks in an organization can either be formal or informal, internal or external. Internal communication is the communication directed to the employees while external communication targets other actors within the business environment. Formal communication sends information through officially designated channels through various organization positions. A good example of this is upward, downward and horizontal communication. On the other hand, informal communication entails the sessions of interaction that do not follow the officially designated channels of communication, for example grapevine (Hener, 2010; Robbins, 1993).

2.2.9 Barriers to Effective Communication

Barriers to effective communication can arise from different sources. They could be from the sender of the message who could be unable or unwilling to communicate the requisite message with clarity, or the receiver who may be unwilling to comprehend the sent message or other environmental factors under which the message is sent, for example noise (Could, 2022) he then classifies these barriers on the four levels of communication; Sender's levels, Transmission/channel levels, Receiver's levels and Feedback levels.

2.2.9.1 Sender's levels

Barriers from the sender's end could be as a result of the sender having poor communication skills, giving scanty information such that the receiver cannot give feedback, information overload or where the sender and the receiver don't like the other.

2.2.9.2 Transmission Levels

Barriers associated with transmission levels could be as a result of physical noise, the message having to go through many channels before being delivered or poor selection of a channel.

2.2.9.3 Receiver's Levels

On the receiver's levels, the barriers could be due to failure to understand the message, the receiver's perception of the message as threatening, impatience when receiving the message, the receiver having negative attitude towards the message or when the receiver fails to decode the message.

2.2.9.4 Feedback Levels

Barriers arising on the feedback levels could either be resulting from failure to give feedback or delayed feedback.

The study is centered around organizational communication owing to the fact that a university is an institution of higher learning with management structure that determines responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks.

2.3 Situating the study to the Field of Communication Studies:

In contemporary higher education institutions, effective conflict management is crucial for maintaining a conducive learning and working environment. Universities, being diverse communities of students, faculty, and administrative staff, often encounter various forms of group conflicts that can affect academic and operational functions. These conflicts may arise from differences in interests, values, or expectations, often between faculty and management, students and administration, or among student groups. The study on the "Evaluation of Communication Strategies Used in Group Conflict Management in Universities: A Case of University of Eldoret" is situated

within the broader field of communication studies, particularly focusing on organizational communication and conflict management.

Communication plays a pivotal role in conflict management within organizations. Effective communication strategies can mitigate conflict, facilitate resolution, and promote a culture of understanding. Conversely, poor communication often exacerbates conflicts, leading to prolonged disputes and disruptions. Therefore, understanding how communication strategies are employed in managing group conflicts within a university setting is essential for promoting harmonious interactions and effective governance in academic institutions.

The study on the "Investigating the Role of Communication Strategies in Resolving Group Conflict between university unions and management: A Case of University of Eldoret" is firmly situated within the field of communication studies. It draws on the Onion Theory of Conflict Management to explore how communication strategies address the different layers of conflict in a university setting. By focusing on a real-world problem that affects the functioning of higher education institutions, the study is highly relevant and contributes to the broader literature on organizational communication and conflict management. The findings of the study have potential to inform best practices in conflict management in universities, not only in Kenya but also in other similar contexts.

2.4 Theories of Communication for Conflict Management

Several theories explain communication and conflict management in organizations. The study majorly applies Onion Theory of Conflict Management and Situational Crisis Communication Theory model (SCCT) from the lens of System theory of

communication, and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) to understand communication strategies for group conflict management in universities.

2.4.1 System Theory of Communication

The study employed System Theory, Communication Accommodation Theory, Situational Crisis Communication Theory, and Onion Theory of Conflict as frameworks for analyzing and understanding the dynamics of communication and conflict management.

System Theory of Communication is a useful approach for studying complex communication processes in organizations and social systems. It offers a holistic view of communication that considers how messages are exchanged among different actors within a system, and how these exchanges are influenced by the system's structure and environment (Pace, 2018, Stohl & Cheney, 2018). In the context of this study, with respect to revitalizing communication strategies for group conflict management in universities, system theory of communication has been applied in view of the fact that the university is a complex system, with respect to analyzing its communication processes and managing conflicts. One way to apply system theory of communication is to conduct a systemic analysis of the university's communication processes in conflict management. This involves identifying the different actors involved in conflict management (e.g., students, faculty, administration, staff, and community members), and examining how their communication exchanges are shaped by the university's structure, culture, and environment. By adopting a systemic perspective, researchers can identify how communication breakdowns occur within a system and develop strategies to overcome them. Another way to apply system theory of communication is to analyze the feedback loops within the university system that impact conflict management. This involves examining how feedback loops are created and maintained

within the system and how they influence the communication processes. For example, a feedback loop could be created between the university administration and students, where the administration's response to conflicts is influenced by student feedback. By analyzing feedback loops, researchers can identify the points of intervention that can be used to revitalize communication strategies for effective conflict management. Finally, system theory of communication was applied in this study with respect to examining the role of communication in shaping the university's culture and structure. This involves analyzing how communication processes contribute to the development of shared values, norms, and beliefs that influence conflict management. By examining the role of communication in shaping a university's culture and structure, researchers can identify the communication strategies that can promote a positive conflict management culture and improve a university's overall performance. In conclusion, System Theory of Communication offers a useful framework for comprehensively studying communication processes in the context of managing conflicts in universities. By adopting a systemic perspective, analyzing feedback loops, and examining the role of communication in shaping a university's culture and structure, researchers can develop effective communication strategies for revitalizing conflict management in universities.

System theory of communication explains how communication functions are influenced by various elements and factors. According to this theory, communication is a complex and dynamic process that involves interaction of different components within a system (Littlejohn & Foss, 2018). The system theory of communication was developed in the mid-20th century by communication scholars (Shannon & Weaver, 2018). In recent years, the system theory of communication has continued to be relevant in the study of communication. One of the key tenets of the system theory of

communication is that communication involves the transmission of messages between a sender and a receiver. However, this transmission is not a linear process but rather a circular one, where the sender and receiver both play active roles in the process (Littlejohn & Foss, 2018). Another key aspect of the system theory of communication is that it emphasizes the importance of context in shaping communication. The context includes the environment, culture, and social norms that influence communication. The system theory of communication also suggests that communication is influenced by feedback. Feedback refers to the response of the receiver of the message, which in turn affects the sender's subsequent messages. Feedback can either be positive or negative, and it plays a critical role in the communication process (Littlejohn & Foss, 2018). Moreover, the system theory of communication posits that communication involves both content and relational aspects. Content refers to the actual message being transmitted, while the relational aspect refers to the relationship between the sender and receiver, as well as the way the message is perceived and interpreted (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 2019).

In conclusion, the system theory of communication is a relevant communication theory that explains how communication functions as a complex system influenced by various elements and factors. It emphasizes the importance of context, feedback, and the relational aspect of communication. By understanding the system theory of communication, scholars and practitioners can develop more effective communication strategies and approaches.

2.4.2 Situational Crisis Communication Theory

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) model is a well-established and widely used communication model that is focused on managing communication during

a crisis. It was developed by W. Timothy Coombs in 2007 and has been applied in various contexts, including universities (Coombs, 2019). This model provides a framework for understanding the impact of a crisis on an organization's reputation and provides guidelines for crafting effective crisis communication strategies.

The SCCT model has four main components: the crisis type, crisis history, stakeholder reputations, and crisis response strategies (Coombs, 2019). In the case of university conflicts, the crisis type may include conflicts between students, conflicts between faculty and administration, or conflicts between the university and the surrounding community. The crisis history component may consider the university's past experiences with similar conflicts and how they were handled. Stakeholder reputations component may involve assessing how a conflict is perceived by different stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the media. Finally, crisis response strategies component may involve developing and implementing effective communication strategies to manage a conflict and mitigate its impact on a university's reputation.

The SCCT model's strength is its ability to provide a systematic approach to managing communication during a crisis. By applying this model in the study, researchers can develop a comprehensive understanding of how communication strategies can be developed and implemented to effectively manage conflicts in universities. Additionally, the model's emphasis on reputation management can help universities identify and address potential reputational risks associated with conflict management.

SCCT explains how organizations can effectively manage crises through communication strategies. It emphasizes the importance of effective communication during crises to minimize damage to an organization's reputation (Coombs, 2021). This

theory is relevant to the study because conflicts can be considered a type of crisis that requires effective communication strategies to manage.

In conclusion, the SCCT model is a communication model that can be applied comprehensively in the study of "Investigating the role of communication strategies in resolving group conflicts between university unions and management." Its framework provides guidelines for understanding the impact of a crisis on an organization's reputation and for crafting effective crisis communication strategies.

2.4.3 Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), developed by Howard Giles, provides a framework for understanding how individuals adjust their communication styles during interactions, particularly in conflict settings. The theory explains that people modify their speech, tone, and nonverbal cues to either converge (adapt to the other's communication style) or diverge (emphasize differences) depending on relational, contextual, and identity-related factors (Giles et al., 2021).

Tenets of CAT in Conflict Management

a) **Convergence**: This tenet involves adapting one's communication style to become more similar to the other party. In conflict management, convergence is used to build rapport and reduce tension by displaying empathy and understanding (Zhang et al., 2023). For instance, in negotiations, adopting a cooperative tone and using shared language can promote a sense of solidarity and minimize hostility.

b) **Divergence**: Divergence is the strategy of accentuating differences in communication style, often used to assert authority or emphasize one's position in a conflict (Jones & Williams, 2022). While this may be perceived as

negative, it can be effective when setting boundaries or clarifying misunderstandings, especially when one party needs to assert their stance clearly.

c) **Maintenance**: Maintenance refers to retaining one's original communication style without significant adjustments, even in a conflict scenario (Wu & Chen, 2021). This may occur when an individual wants to signal consistency and strength, especially if changing communication patterns could undermine their credibility.

d) **Over-Accommodation**: This happens when an individual's attempts to converge are perceived as patronizing or insincere (Ng & Wang, 2022). In conflict management, over-accommodation can backfire, leading to increased resistance from the other party, especially if it is seen as undermining their identity or agency.

CAT's application in conflict management reveals that effective communication strategies require a balance between convergence and divergence based on context and relational goals. By using convergence to foster understanding and selectively using divergence to clarify positions, conflict managers can navigate disputes more successfully.

In group conflict settings, such as those found in organizational environments like university unions, CAT helps explain how group members adjust their communication to either foster collaboration or emphasize their group identities. For example, a union leader might use convergence to align with group members' concerns but employ divergence when negotiating with the administration. Understanding these dynamics allows for more strategic use of communication styles to manage conflicts constructively.

2.4.4 Onion Theory of Conflict

The Onion Theory of Conflict, also known as the Layered Model of Conflict, suggests that conflicts can be understood and addressed at multiple levels, akin to peeling layers of an onion. This theory is particularly useful in developing communication strategies for conflict management as it provides a structured approach to identify and address the root causes of conflicts.

2.4.4.1 Layers of the Onion Theory of Conflict

a) *Surface Issues (Symptoms):* These are the visible expressions of conflict, such as disagreements, complaints, and overt hostility. Communication strategies at this level involve addressing the immediate and apparent issues to prevent escalation.

b) *Intermediate Issues (Positions):* These are the stated demands or positions of the conflicting parties. Communication strategies focus on negotiating and finding common ground among the stated positions.

c) *Deep Issues (Interests):* These represent the underlying interests, needs, and motivations behind the positions. Communication strategies aim to uncover and address these deeper interests to achieve more sustainable conflict resolution.

d) *Core Issues (Values and Identity):* These are the fundamental values, beliefs, and identity-related aspects at the root of the conflict. Communication strategies at this level involve addressing the core values and identities to resolve the conflict comprehensively and prevent recurrence.

2.4.4.2 Applying Communication Strategies in Conflict Management

a) *Addressing Surface Issues:* Immediate and transparent communication is essential to address visible symptoms of conflict. This involves acknowledging the conflict, providing information, and clarifying

misunderstandings. For example, in a university setting, when a conflict arises over resource allocation, clear and timely communication about the decision-making process can address immediate concerns and reduce tensions.

b) *Negotiating Intermediate Issues:* Effective negotiation and mediation strategies are crucial to address the stated positions of conflicting parties. This includes facilitating discussions, finding common ground, and developing mutually acceptable solutions. For instance, university administrators can organize mediated discussions between faculty and students to address specific demands related to academic policies or resource distribution.

c) *Uncovering Deep Issues:* To address underlying interests, communication strategies should focus on active listening and empathy. This involves understanding the deeper needs and motivations of the parties involved and finding ways to meet these needs. In a conflict involving faculty workload, understanding the underlying concerns about job satisfaction, professional growth, and work-life balance can help in developing more effective and acceptable solutions.

d) *Aligning Core Issues***:** Resolving conflicts at the core level requires addressing fundamental values and identity-related aspects. Communication strategies should focus on fostering mutual respect, recognizing diverse values, and promoting inclusivity. University conflict management programs can incorporate training on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity to address core values and identities, thereby preventing conflicts related to diversity and inclusion.

2.4.4.3 Theoretical Integration and Practical Application

The Onion Theory of Conflict can be integrated with these three theories of communication to enhance its practical application in conflict management:

(a) *Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT):* SCCT can guide the development of specific communication strategies to address surface issues and manage stakeholder perceptions during conflicts. Using SCCT, university administrators/management can craft messages that address stakeholders' immediate concerns and protect an institution's reputation (Coombs, 2021).

(b) *Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT):* CAT emphasizes adjusting communication styles to align with the preferences and needs of different parties, which can help in addressing intermediate and deep issues. Faculty and students can be trained to adapt their communication styles to be more inclusive and empathetic, thereby addressing deeper interests and preventing conflicts (Giles & Ogay, 2021).

(c) *System Communication Theory (SCT):* SCT focuses on the design and effectiveness of communication systems within organizations, which can support the overall conflict management strategy. Implementing robust feedback mechanisms and transparent communication channels can help in addressing conflicts at all levels, from surface symptoms to core values (Barge & Little, 2020).

2.4.5 Conclusion

The Onion Theory of Conflict provides a comprehensive framework for developing effective communication strategies for conflict management. By addressing conflicts at multiple levels, surface issues, intermediate positions, deep interests, and core values so that organizations can achieve more sustainable and holistic conflict resolution.

Integrating this theory with other communication theories further enhances its practical application, ensuring that conflicts are managed effectively and constructively.

2.5 Role of Effective Communication in Organizations

Communication plays a crucial role in organizational management. Effective communication strategies facilitate decision-making, conflict resolution, and problem-solving. In contrast, poor communication can result in misunderstandings, conflicts, and a breakdown of relationships (Ahmad, Yousuf, & Zia-ur-Rehman, 2017).

No matter how brilliant and invaluable your idea is, it is worthless unless you share it with others-Argawal & Garg (2012)

Communication is key to the growth of any organization. Consequently, organizations need to create and understand employee-management relations so as to enhance performance of those involved in the communication chain (Nebo *et al.*, 2015). Stephen (2011) opines that communication is critical, especially in directing and mobilizing employees towards successfully meeting organizational goals. Nebo et al (2015) and Mckinney et al., (2014) compare communication in an organization with blood in the human body. Like blood in a human body, communication ensures smooth coordination of the requisite factors of production in an organization, especially the human and material factors. Furthermore, organizational communication is becoming increasingly important especially as the reality of McLuhan's concept of global village becomes more imminent by the day.

Nwagbara and Brown (2014), state that for communication in an organization to be effective and shared within and outside the organization for conflict management, the views of stakeholders must be taken into consideration so as to create mutuality (Argawal & Garg, 2012).

Nwagbara and Brown (2014) and Drucker (2007) presents four variables upon which the essentials of communication are based, namely: Communication perception, Communication expectation, Communication demands, and Communication/ information relationship.

According to Drucker (2007, p.18) communication perception is concerned with how the receiver of a message understands or sees the message. Communication expectation involves the extent to which a message meets the recipient's expectation. Communication demand is determined by what the receiver does with the message, while communication/information relationship involves the relationship that is built and sustained as a consequence. According to Nwagbara and Brown (2014), a communicator is a person disseminating information. For good understanding between the communicator and the intended recipient of the message, the communicator should speak within the conversational cues of the recipient. They further argue that human beings are inherently expectative of what they perceive. As such, recipients demarcate what they see and what they hear selectively in regards to what they want to see and what they want to hear. The challenge in communication then arises when there is no congruency between what we see or hear and our anticipation. Kelvin-Iloafu (2016) points out that effective communication is essential in enhancement of organizational relationships and also in minimizing strikes and lockouts. Otherwise, ineffective communication is defeatist to the organizational goals and purposes, and results to the organizational stakeholders being uncertain, apprehensive and dissatisfied. It is a ripple effect that eventually leads to poor productivity. In an organization, communication is particularly important for the following purposes:

(a) Setting and executing organizational goals.

(b) Conceptualizing organizational plans and planning their realization.

(c) Management of human and other management resources in a way that is most appropriate.

(d) Choosing, progressing and appraising performance of members of the organization.

(e) Management, guidance, motivation and creation of conducive climate that encourages people to contribute (Turkalj & Fosic, 2009:34, citing Weihrich & Koontz, 1994).

The challenge to organizations therefore, is to establish communicative commonalities (Argawal & Garg, 2012) so as to communicate effectively on account of mitigating the chances of conflict occurring. Johns and Saks (2014; 2011; 2001) point out that effective communication in an organization can be enhanced in the following ways:

a) Choosing the correct medium that has the right information-carrying capacity.

b) Enacting 360-degree feedback to enhance a two-way performance appraisal and from both employee and organizational development.

c) Taking employee survey and giving survey feedback to enhance both upward and downward communication.

d) Establishing suggestion and query systems to solicit ideas from the employees for the improvement of work operations.

e) Improving the skills of managers through training.

2.6 Communication Strategies used to Manage Conflicts

Several communication strategies can be used to manage conflicts in organizations. These include active listening, assertiveness, mediation, negotiation, and compromise. Active listening involves giving the speaker your full attention and seeking to understand their perspective. Assertiveness involves expressing your own needs and concerns in a respectful and clear manner. Mediation involves using a neutral third party

to help resolve the conflict, while negotiation involves finding a mutually beneficial solution. Compromise involves finding a middle ground between conflicting parties (Certo, 2018).

Conflict is part of human interaction. In the interaction process, there will always be divergent views, different interests and behaviors of the interacting parties. As such, conflict is inevitable. As Omisore and Abiodun (2014) put it, "conflict is a part inseparable from people's lives. It is a perpetual gift of life".

2.6.1 Communication Strategies for Managing Conflicts

Different scholars have identified some of the following communication strategies as effective in managing conflicts in higher learning institutions:

a) *Active Listening*: According to Smithey and Starks (2011), active listening involves giving full attention to the speaker, understanding their message, and providing feedback. Active listening can help to clarify misunderstandings and resolve conflicts by creating a conducive environment for effective communication.

b) *Open Communication*: As noted by Agolla and Osodo (2015), open communication involves creating an environment where staff and students feel comfortable expressing their opinions, ideas, and concerns. This can help to prevent conflicts by addressing issues before they escalate.

c) *Mediation*: According to Ross and LaCroix (2012), mediation involves using a neutral third party to help resolve conflicts between individuals or groups. Mediation can help to facilitate communication and understanding between conflicting parties, leading to more constructive solutions.

d) *Conflict Resolution Training*: Conflict resolution training can help staff and students to develop skills and knowledge needed to manage conflicts effectively. As noted by Wasike and Ombui (2016), conflict resolution training can improve communication, promote understanding, and lead to more effective conflict management.

e) *Collaborative Problem-Solving*: Collaborative problem-solving involves working together to identify and resolve issues. According to Kipsang and Kibet (2018), collaborative problem-solving can help to promote open communication, build trust, and develop mutually beneficial solutions.

f) *Use of Technology*: According to Waweru and Mwai (2019), technology can be used to enhance communication and conflict management in higher learning institutions. For example, online platforms can be used to facilitate communication and collaboration among staff and students, while conflict resolution software can help to identify and resolve conflicts more efficiently.

2.6.2 Effective Communication Strategies for Resolving Conflicts

Use of effective communication strategies can help to manage conflicts in higher learning institutions, promote a positive learning environment, and improve staff and student satisfaction. There are various communication strategies that may be used to manage and/or resolve conflicts between individuals, departments, labour unions and within organizations, including collective bargaining agreements, arbitration, mediation, negotiation, and assertiveness training.

a) *Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)* is an important tool for managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions. It is a contract that outlines the terms and conditions of employment for unionized workers, negotiated between the union and the employer. The negotiation process is a form of

communication that involves various strategies to manage conflicts and reach a mutually beneficial agreement. One such strategy is interest-based bargaining, which focuses on identifying common interests and finding solutions that benefit both parties (Honeycutt, 2013). CBAs have been widely used to manage conflicts between labour unions and organizations. CBAs outline the terms and conditions of employment, including wages, benefits, and working conditions. By negotiating and agreeing on these terms, labour unions and organizations can avoid conflicts related to compensation and working conditions.

b) *Arbitration:* Another important strategy for managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions is arbitration. This involves a neutral third party who makes a binding decision on the terms of the CBA if the parties are unable to reach an agreement through negotiation. Communication is also crucial in the arbitration process, as the arbitrator must have a clear understanding of each party's position and arguments. Effective communication can ensure that the arbitrator makes a fair and informed decision (Compa, 2013). Research has shown that effective communication is crucial for successful collective bargaining. Effective communication must be clear and concise communication of each party's position, interests, and priorities (Alkadry & Tower, 2014). It also involves active listening and an understanding of the other party's concerns and needs. Strategies such as joint problem-solving and brainstorming can facilitate effective communication and lead to more successful outcomes (Barrett & Martin, 2012).

c) *Mediation*: Mediation is a process where a neutral third party helps individuals or groups in a conflict to find a solution. This strategy can help parties to a conflict communicate effectively and reach an agreement that satisfies both

parties. Mediation can be particularly effective when conflicts arise due to misunderstandings or miscommunication. Negotiation involves two or more parties working together to reach an agreement. This strategy can be used to resolve conflicts related to compensation, working conditions, or other issues.

d) *Negotiation*: Negotiation can be effective when both parties are willing to compromise and find a mutually acceptable solution.

e) *Assertiveness Training:* Assertiveness training is another communication strategy used to manage conflicts. Assertiveness training can help individuals to communicate their needs and desires clearly and confidently, without being aggressive or passive. This strategy can be particularly effective when conflicts arise due to differences in communication styles or personalities.

f) *Conciliation:* Conciliation is similar to mediation but involves a more active role for the neutral third party, who helps resolve misunderstandings and facilitates communication between disputing parties. The conciliator may suggest solutions and offer compromises, although the final decision is still left to the parties involved. Conciliation is commonly used in labour disputes, workplace conflicts, and international negotiations where maintaining long-term relationships is crucial. By fostering open communication and guiding the parties toward reconciliation. Conciliation helps prevent the escalation of conflicts and promotes a collaborative resolution process (Goldsmith, 2022).

Communication strategies are important tools for managing conflicts in organizations. By using these strategies, individuals and organizations can effectively communicate and resolve conflicts in a way that is fair and equitable for all parties involved.

Clear and transparent communication throughout the arbitration process can increase the likelihood of a successful outcome. This includes clear communication of the

arbitration process, the evidence that will be presented, and the factors that arbitrator(s) consider in making a decision (Trebilcock, 2014).

Effective communication is essential in managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions. Strategies such as interest-based bargaining, joint problem-solving, arbitration, collaboration, and mediation can facilitate effective communication and lead to more successful outcomes. CBA and arbitration, in particular, are important tools for managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions, and clear communication is crucial for their success.

2.7 Factors that Trigger Conflicts Between an Organization and Staff

Several factors can trigger conflicts between an organization and staff, including poor communication, inadequate compensation and benefits, unfair treatment, work overload, lack of job security, poor work conditions and unfulfilled expectations. These factors can lead to misunderstandings, low morale, and decreased productivity (Alfandi, 2016).

i. *Poor communication:* Poor communication has been identified as one of the leading causes of conflicts in organizations. This includes unclear expectations, lack of feedback, and inadequate information sharing (Adebayo & Adebayo, 2021).

ii. *Inadequate Compensation and Benefits:* Inadequate compensation and benefits, including salaries, pensions, health insurance, and retirement benefits, can lead to dissatisfaction among employees and result in conflicts with the organization (Egwunyenga & Nwachukwu, 2018).

iii. *Unfair Treatment:* Employees who feel they are being treated unfairly, such as being discriminated, unfairly dismissed, or not given the opportunity for

promotion, are more likely to contribute to conflict with the organization (Kougiannou & Mastrojianni, 2014).

iv. *Work Overload:* When employees are given too much work to do, without sufficient resources and support, they may feel overwhelmed and stressed, leading to conflicts with the organization (Egwunyenga & Nwachukwu, 2018).

v. *Lack of Job Security:* Employees who feel insecure about their job status, such as being laid off or not having a permanent position, may engage in conflicts with the organization (Kougiannou & Mastrojianni, 2014).

vi. *Poor Working Conditions:* Poor working conditions, including inadequate facilities, equipment, and safety measures, can lead to conflicts between employees and the organization (Adebayo & Adebayo, 2021).

vii. *Unfulfilled Expectations:* Employees may have expectations of their job, but if their organization does not meet their expectations, this may lead to conflicts (Egwunyeng & Nwachukwu, 2018).

Effective communication and conflict management strategies can help organizations prevent and/or resolve conflicts with their employees.

2.8 Labour Union Conflict

A labour union is an organized association of workers often in trade or profession, formed to protect and further their rights and interests. Skripak (2016) defines a labour union as an organized group of workers that bargains with employers to improve its members' pay, job security and working conditions. Shrestha (2012) defines labour union as "an organization of workers or employees who have combined together to achieve common goals in areas such as working conditions, protecting and promoting their mutual interest through collective action."

According to Zhou et al (2017), labour relations conflict occurs when the employer and the employees' goals are incompatible. They add that when this kind of conflict happens, it leads to reduced production, reduced wages and employment, unwillingness by the management to resolve the conflict with employees and a high rate of layoffs and dismissals.

Zhou et. al. (2017) state that labour conflict can either be interest-based, emotions-based or rights-based. They posit that interest-based conflict occurs when the terms of employment and working conditions are violated. This could be as a result of unfair salaries, poor wages and unfair compensation. Emotion-based conflict emerges when there is no respect for the human dignity of employees or there is an issue with interpersonal relations in the organization. Zhou et al (2017) point out that when the employees' human dignity is not respected, they will be more reluctant to work, have increased turnover intentions and even portray counter-productive behaviour. Rights-based conflict emerges when the established laws and regulations are violated. If an organization violates the employees' rights, they will portray more negative behaviour and their attitude towards their work and the organization will be affected.

Ratih (2016) views industry or company as "a combination of capital, management and workers," all of which are a separate entity from the other and have different motivation. Investors focus on investing in their company to attain maximum benefit, while the management concerns itself with protecting the interests of the investors. In the process, the company workers are exploited. As a result, they try to push for justice to gain their rights back. However, Ratih (2016) argues that as much as a company workers have the capacity to end organizational problems, they cannot push for justice individually. This then calls for the workers to organize themselves so as to hold their human dignity, first as individuals and then together as workers. The differing interests of both the

employer and the employees instigate conflict, which then compel the employees to join a labour union (Skripak, 2016) for collective bargaining, which is essential in addressing vital and collective employee concerns like pension, lighting in the office and others. In addition, trade unions act as a shield of freedom to speech where employees feel that they will be terminated when they express themselves individually (Mash & Kremer, 2016; citing Freeman &Medoff, 1984:169).

According to Skripak (2016), labour unions have a pyramidal structure. At the bottom are the *locals* who serve workers in given geographical areas. Then follows the *Shop Stewards* who bridge disputes between workers and supervisors. The *Locals* then converge into *National Unions.* At this level, the union is tasked with assisting local contract negotiations, organizing new locals, negotiating contracts for the industries and lobbying the government on pertinent issues of organized labour. The top most is the *Labour Federation* which serves as the umbrella body of the other unions and assists member unions in the push for organized labour.

Employees join labour unions for varying reasons. One reason is the "psychological distance" where some employees feel that they are not sufficiently involved in the organization and they see the union as their "mouthpiece" that gives them identity. The second reason could be due to power and status. This is likely to come from the junior workers who could be feeling powerless and excluded from issues critical to them like salaries and thirdly, when employee and manager ideologies differ (Mash & Kremer, 2016). Shrestha (2012) opines that employees join trade unions for bargaining power, minimizing discrimination and sense of security.

2.9 Effective communication strategies for managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions and also within organizations

Effective communication strategies are crucial for managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions. Communication can help build trust, increase understanding, and facilitate negotiation and compromise. Effective communication strategies play a significant role in managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions. Some of the contributions of communication strategies in managing conflicts are; Building Trust and Mutual Understanding, Communication strategies such as face-to-face meetings, negotiation, and its labour union(s). Effective communication helps to establish a positive relationship between parties and can prevent escalation of conflicts. Dullien (2013) in addressing issues and concerns of both parties. Having open and honest communication by both parties can identify the root cause of a/the conflict and work towards finding a mutually acceptable solution(s) (Harms, 2017). Communication strategies such as collaboration and compromise can help in creating win-win solutions for both an organization and a labour union. Through effective communication, both parties can identify their interests and work towards finding a solution that meets the needs of both parties (Bacal, 2014). Effective communication can prevent misunderstandings between an organization and a labour union. Misunderstandings can lead to conflicts, but effective communication can help clarify expectations, responsibilities, and objectives (Brown, 2019). In maintaining positive employee relations, communication strategies such as regular updates, feedback, and recognition can help in maintaining positive employee/employer relations. This can prevent conflicts from arising, in the first place, and create a positive work environment (Robinson, 2020).

In conflict management, communication deals with exploring the facts, while leaders derive the meaning (Aula &Siira, 2010). Fletwood (1987) and Abdilahi (2015) postulate that communication and conflict are intertwined in three ways: "communication behaviour often creates conflict, communication behavior reflects conflict and communication is the vehicle for productive or destructive management of conflict.

2.10 How Labour Unions Affect Communication between Them and University Management.

Labour unions can have a positive impact on communication and cooperation in the workplace by creating a structured platform for dialogue and negotiation (Thompson & DeCelles, 2021). Johnson (2019) highlights the importance of effective communication strategies during collective bargaining between workers unions and employers in achieving successful bargaining outcomes. A good instance is the historical role of teacher trade unions in improving the work performance of their members by highlighting the importance of union advocacy for professional development opportunities.

Industrial disputes are disorders arising between employees and employers on any given ground which cause harm to either an employer and the employee or both parties. For instance, a strike by the academic staff Union in Nigeria in 2013 led to disruption of the academic calendar, wastage of man-hours which had to be compensated and also affected the country's economy (John, 2015).

Mash and Kreme (2016) are of the view that the extent to which trade unions are perceived to have negative or positive effects depends on how the employer responds. They view the negative and positive effects of trade unions through the *monopoly face*

and *the collective voice* approaches. In the monopoly face, unions have negative effects on productivity and affects recruitment of new employees in the organized sector. However, according to the collective voice theory, unions impart positive effects on both political and economic environments and drive for good management practices so as to boost productivity. In addition, unions can increase development and retention of skills and also lead to improvement of how pressure and morals are managed towards operational efficiency. (Freeman & Medoff, 1984). The pluralist perspective brings out the positive side of unions (Lewin, 2005). According to pluralist perspective, trade unions have potential to improve work place efficiency by mediating conflicts like strikes, sabotage and replacing them with more peaceful grievance-handling processes. Through collective bargaining, unions enhance power equity and cushion employees from always being at a disadvantage of the decisions made by the employer (Lewin, 2005). On the negative side, unions have the capability to engineer a conflict so as to validate their existence (Lewin, 2005). Although collective bargaining is said to be one of the peaceful and professional ways of resolving union conflict, conflicts between a worker's union and an employer have potential to create an adversarial approach of "we versus them", which essentially has no resolution (Lewin, 2005).

2.11 Types of Conflicts between Workers Union and Employer

According to Shrestha (2012), industrial conflicts are mainly strikes and lock-outs. These are normally the formal ways of expression. Shrestha (2012) posits that strikes can be divided into primary and secondary (figure 3). Primary strikes involve employees and employer(s), while secondary strikes are between employees and a third party. According to Shreshta (2012) lock-outs involve closure of an industry or industries and suspension of employment as long as the employer(s) has/have agreed not to come into agreement with the employees/workers union.

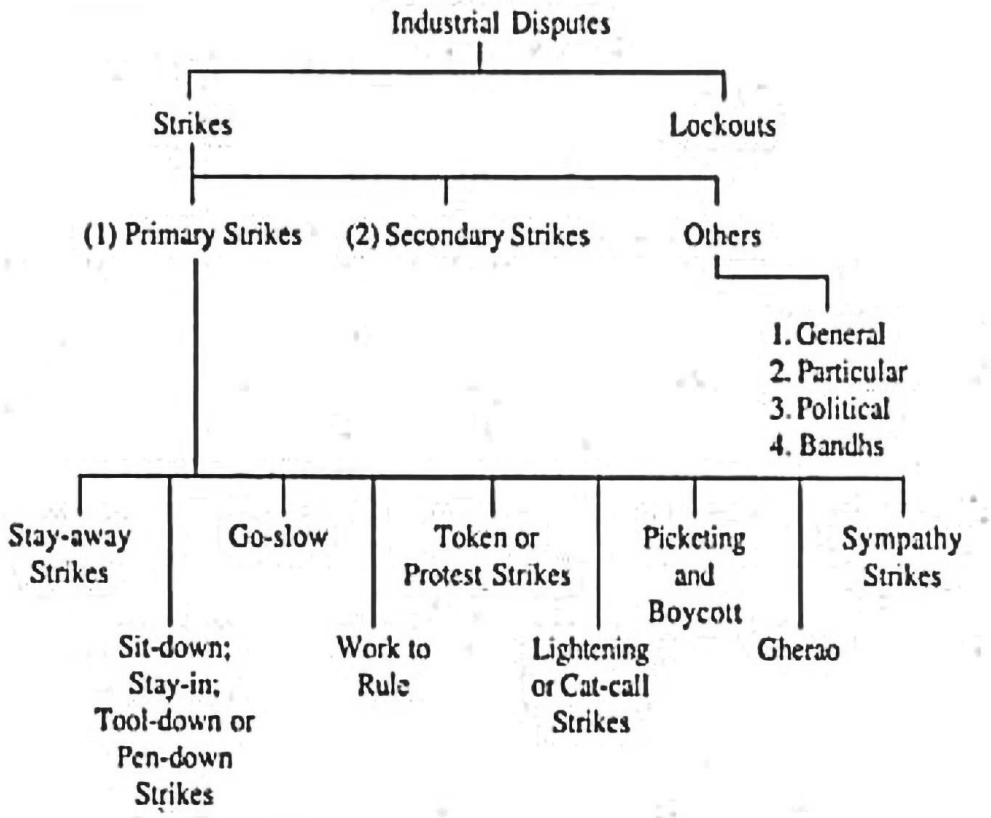


Figure 3: Types of union conflict
Adapted from: Shrestha (2012:45)

2.12 Effective Communication Strategies for Managing Conflicts Between Organizations and Labour Unions and also Within Organizations

Effective communication strategies for managing conflict(s) between organizations and labour unions, or within an organization include; open and transparent communication, active listening, empathy, compromise and negotiations and respectful communication.

a) *Open and Transparent Communication:* Open and transparent communication can foster trust and mutual understanding between organizations and labour unions, as well as within organizations. Organizations should be open and honest about their intentions and decisions, while labour unions should be transparent about their demands and concerns (Pahlberg & Johansson, 2017);

b) *Active Listening*: Active listening involves paying close attention to what the other party is saying and trying to understand their perspective. Active listening can help organizations and labour unions to identify areas of agreement and to work towards common goals (Coetzer & Van Vuuren, 2019);

c) *Empathy:* Empathy involves putting oneself in the shoes of the other party and trying to understand their feelings and needs. Empathy can help organizations and labour unions to build trust and to find mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts (Vakola & Petridou, 2020);

d) *Compromise and Negotiation:* Compromise and negotiation involve finding solutions that meet the needs of both organizations and labour unions. This can involve making concessions on both sides and finding creative solutions to complex problems (Wang & Kim, 2021); and

e) *Respectful communication:* Respectful communication involves treating others with dignity and showing respect for their opinions and perspectives. Respectful communication can help to build trust and to create a positive working relationship between organizations and labour unions (Pahlberg & Johansson, 2017).

These communication strategies have been found to be effective in managing conflicts between organizations and labour unions, as well as within organizations such as universities. However, it is important to note that communication strategies should be tailored to the specific context and needs of each situation.

2.13 Review of System Theory of Communication

System theory of communication, is a complex and dynamic process that involves interaction of various components within a system (Kweyu & Ogutu, 2021). In the

context of conflict management, the system theory of communication highlights the importance of understanding the interdependence of different elements within the system, such as the parties involved, the communication channels and the external environment. The study found out that effective conflict management in universities requires a systemic approach that takes into account the various components of the communication system, including understanding the perspectives and needs of all parties involved in a conflict, as well as the role of external factors such as cultural and institutional norms (Littlejohn & Foss, 2019).

The system theory of communication is among the most critical theories for a public relations practitioner to understand if they desire to meet the goals of their organization. System theory explains that all things need to be evaluated as part of a larger whole, that ought to be evaluated if it is of interest to many stakeholders and their constituents in the community for success (Gassmann, 2016). The relevance of applying this theory is the use of self-correcting feedback loop which can enhance the results of any output from a public relations team.

According to Kristen Davis (2013) system theory is an open system of interdependent elements, employing input variables and process variables to yield output. System theory provides the mechanism for use strategically in examining groups in terms of what they do, how they do it and why they do it (McClellan, 2012). Group members will gravitate towards roles based on background, experience or interests. It is rare for all members of a group to share a single attitude on any topic equifinality, two groups may have different members, leadership styles, methods, etc. However, they may arrive at the same solution to given problem feedback.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the usefulness of system theory of communication in managing conflicts in organizational settings. The study highlights the importance of understanding the different components of communication system and using effective communication strategies to manage conflicts effectively.

2.14 Approaches and Challenges to Communication and Public Relations in Conflict Management

Effective communication and public relations (PR) strategies are critical in conflict management across organizations, communities, and other entities. Conflict is inevitable in any group setting, and how it is managed often depends on the communication channels employed. In conflict situations, communication serves as both a preventive measure and a tool for resolution. Public relations, on the other hand, shapes the narrative, influences perceptions, and plays a key role in maintaining relationships and trust during and after conflicts. Despite their importance, communication and PR face numerous challenges in conflict management that require careful consideration and strategic planning.

One of the primary approaches to conflict management through communication is proactive communication. Proactive communication involves addressing potential sources of conflict before they escalate by fostering open and transparent dialogue among stakeholders. Regular updates, feedback mechanisms, and open channels for concerns to be expressed help reduce misunderstandings and prevent conflicts from arising. Proactive communication builds trust and ensures that all parties feel heard and respected (Thompson & Anderson, 2021). This approach also emphasizes the importance of internal communication networks, which ensure that information flows

smoothly and effectively within organizations. Strengthened internal networks prevent miscommunication, which is often a leading cause of conflict (Harris & Green, 2022).

Another critical approach is crisis communication and PR strategies. Crisis communication involves managing how information is disseminated during a conflict, especially in situations where the conflict has escalated to a public level. Effective crisis communication involves transparency, speed, and accuracy in the delivery of messages, which can help minimize damage to an organization's reputation and mitigate the impact of the conflict on stakeholders (Jones et al., 2023). PR plays a key role here by crafting messages that align with an organization's values, managing media relations, and shaping public perception during a crisis. A well-managed PR strategy during a conflict can help maintain an organization's image and facilitate smoother conflict resolution.

Mediation and facilitation are other effective communication approaches in conflict management. Mediation involves the use of a neutral third party to guide the conflicting parties through dialogue, helping them find common ground and reach an agreement. Facilitation, on the other hand, involves managing discussions to ensure that all participants can contribute effectively. Both mediation and facilitation rely heavily on communication skills such as active listening, empathy, and negotiation (White & Grey, 2022). These approaches provide a structured environment for conflict resolution, allowing parties to express their concerns openly while working toward a mutually acceptable solution.

The rise of digital communication platforms has also introduced virtual communication as an important tool in conflict management. Virtual focus groups, online forums, and social media allow broader participation and engagement, making it easier to reach

stakeholders who may be geographically dispersed (Brown & Thompson, 2021). PR professionals must also be vigilant in monitoring digital spaces, as conflicts can quickly escalate online. Virtual communication tools enable real-time responses and provide platforms for airing grievances, which can be addressed before they grow into larger conflicts.

However, despite these effective approaches, several challenges remain in using communication and PR for conflict management. One of the biggest challenges is misinformation and miscommunication. In any conflict, there is a high risk of misinformation spreading, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Poorly communicated messages can exacerbate conflicts by fueling rumours, creating confusion, or misrepresenting the facts. Miscommunication may occur due to language barriers, cultural differences, or even technological issues in virtual communication settings (Jones & Miller, 2023). Misinformation, especially in the digital age, can spread rapidly and undermine conflict resolution efforts.

Another challenge is the lack of transparency during conflict situations. When stakeholders perceive that information is being withheld or that communication is not transparent, it can lead to a breakdown in trust. Without transparency, parties involved in a conflict may become suspicious, feel sidelined, or disengage from the resolution process. This challenge is particularly significant in crisis communication, where managing information flow must be balanced with maintaining openness and honesty (Thompson & Anderson, 2021).

Emotional reactions also pose a significant challenge to communication in conflict management. Conflicts often involve heightened emotions, which can make rational and constructive communication difficult. Emotional outbursts or defensive

communication can derail productive discussions and prevent conflict resolution (White & Grey, 2022). Managing emotions through communication requires skillful negotiation and the ability to remain calm and focused on finding a solution, even when emotions are running high.

Power dynamics present another obstacle in conflict communication. In many conflicts, there are imbalances of power between the parties involved. This can lead to one party dominating the conversation or decision-making process, while the other party may feel marginalized or powerless. Addressing power imbalances is crucial for effective conflict management, as all parties must feel that their voices are heard and respected for the conflict to be resolved equitably (Brown & Thompson, 2021).

Furthermore, cultural and contextual differences can complicate communication during conflicts. In multicultural organizations or settings, differing cultural norms and values can lead to misinterpretations of communication styles and messages. What may be considered an acceptable form of communication in one culture might be seen as inappropriate or even offensive in another. Understanding and addressing these cultural differences is essential to prevent misunderstandings and to facilitate effective communication during conflicts (Harris & Green, 2022).

Finally, resource limitations pose a challenge to both communication and PR strategies in conflict management. Effective communication, particularly during a crisis, requires time, personnel, and financial resources. Organizations facing resource constraints may struggle to implement comprehensive communication strategies, which can hinder conflict resolution efforts (Jones et al., 2023). Limited resources may result in insufficient communication efforts, leaving conflicts unresolved or improperly managed.

In conclusion, communication and PR are vital components of conflict management, offering proactive, crisis, and mediated approaches to resolving conflicts. However, challenges such as misinformation, lack of transparency, emotional reactions, power dynamics, cultural differences, and resource limitations can complicate these efforts. Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, flexibility, and an understanding of the diverse contexts in which conflicts occur. As organizations continue to navigate increasingly complex environments, the role of communication and PR in conflict management will only grow in importance.

2.15 Existing Gaps in the Study on Conflict Management in Universities

Despite significant advancements in research on conflict management in organizational and educational settings, several gaps remain in the existing literature, particularly in the application of the Systems Approach, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and the Onion Theory of Conflict. These gaps highlight areas where further exploration is necessary to enhance understanding and develop more effective conflict resolution strategies.

(i) ***Incomplete Integration of Systems Approach in University Conflict Management:*** Although the Systems Approach offers a comprehensive framework for understanding conflicts as part of a larger system, the literature has yet to fully explore its practical implementation in university settings. Many studies focus on the theoretical benefits of a holistic approach, but there is a lack of empirical research examining how this approach can be operationalized in the context of higher education institutions (Wang, 2022). The complexities of university environments, where multiple subsystems such as administration, faculty, and students interact, require detailed case studies that show how

systems theory can be applied to prevent and resolve conflicts. Additionally, more research is needed to assess the long-term outcomes of using a systems approach in universities, particularly in terms of sustainability and the ability to address conflicts at their root.

(ii) ***Limited Application of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in University Conflicts****:*

While CAT has been widely applied in various fields, such as intercultural communication and healthcare, its application in university conflict management remains underexplored. Most studies focus on interpersonal communication adjustments in one-on-one interactions, with little attention given to how CAT can be applied in group dynamics, such as those found in university settings (Hewett et al., 2020). Specifically, there is a need for more research on how communication accommodation can be strategically used by university leaders to manage conflicts among diverse groups with varying communication styles. For example, understanding how different cultural backgrounds influence communication accommodation in conflicts could provide valuable insights for universities with increasingly diverse student populations.

(iii) ***Lack of Cultural Sensitivity in Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT):***

SCCT has made significant contributions to crisis communication, particularly in helping organizations manage reputational risks during conflicts. However, recent studies suggest that SCCT does not fully account for cultural variations in communication styles and crisis perception (Coombs, 2021). This gap is particularly relevant in university settings, where conflicts often involve

individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. The literature has identified the need for more research on how cultural factors influence crisis communication strategies in universities, especially in multicultural environments where miscommunication can exacerbate conflicts (Goby & Nickerson, 2020). Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical studies that test the effectiveness of culturally adaptive SCCT strategies in real-world university conflicts.

(iv) ***Superficial Application of the Onion Theory of Conflict***:

The Onion Theory of Conflict, which emphasizes addressing the deeper layers of conflict, has been acknowledged for its potential to create lasting conflict resolution. However, much of the current research remains theoretical, with insufficient empirical studies demonstrating its application in university conflict management. Recent studies suggest that many conflict resolution efforts in universities still focus on surface-level issues without delving into the underlying causes, such as historical grievances or unmet needs (Meyer, 2021). There is a significant gap in the literature regarding practical methodologies for "peeling back the layers" of conflicts in educational settings. More research is needed to develop tools and techniques that university leaders can use to address the deeper emotional and psychological aspects of conflicts.

(v) ***Insufficient Focus on Power Dynamics and Intersectionality in Conflict Management:***

While the Systems Approach, CAT, SCCT and Onion Theory provide valuable frameworks for understanding and resolving conflicts, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the role of power dynamics and intersectionality in conflict management within universities. Power imbalances between administration, faculty, and students often play a critical role in escalating

conflicts, yet these dynamics are not adequately addressed in existing research (Zhao & Lee, 2022). Additionally, intersectionality considering the overlapping identities of individuals, such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status remains an underexplored area in university conflict management. There is a need for more studies that incorporate intersectional perspectives to understand how these factors influence the emergence and resolution of conflicts.

(vi) ***Insufficient Longitudinal Studies on Conflict Resolution Outcomes***: Lastly, there is a gap in longitudinal research that tracks the long-term outcomes of conflict resolution strategies in universities. While many studies provide insights into immediate conflict resolution outcomes, there is limited research on the sustainability of these solutions over time. Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess whether the application of theories such as the Systems Approach, CAT, SCCT, and Onion Theory leads to lasting peace and improved relationships within university communities (Jones et al., 2021). These studies could also help identify any unintended consequences of conflict resolution strategies, providing valuable feedback for refining these approaches in the future.

The existing gaps in the study of conflict management in universities highlight the need for further research that goes beyond theoretical discussions and explores practical applications. By addressing these gaps, future studies can contribute to the development of more effective and culturally sensitive conflict resolution strategies that would account for the complexities of university environments. Expanding the scope of research to include power dynamics, intersectionality, and long-term outcomes will be essential in creating sustainable solutions to conflicts in higher education settings.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter describes the research methodology used to conduct the study on the role of communication strategies for managing group conflict in higher learning institutions in Kenya, University of Eldoret as a case study. The methodology encompasses the research design, sampling techniques, data generation techniques, data analysis, ethical consideration and summary.

Methodology in research refers to systematic ways of gathering data from a given population so as to understand a phenomenon and to generalize facts obtained from a larger population (Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p44). Methodology embraces the research design, population, instruments used to collect data, ethical considerations, data analysis and its interpretation.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The study was grounded in the pragmatist philosophical worldview, which emphasizes practical solutions and contextual relevance in addressing complex social phenomena. Pragmatism aligns effectively with the mixed methods approach, as it accommodates both quantitative and qualitative paradigms to generate comprehensive and actionable insights. This philosophy prioritizes the research problem over methodological rigidity, allowing the integration of multiple forms of data to enhance understanding and applicability of findings (Biesta, 2020; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2020). Within this study, pragmatism provided a flexible and problem-solving orientation, guiding the researcher to combine statistical analyses with thematic interpretations to explore conflict management between university management and labour unions. By focusing on

practical outcomes and contextual interpretation, the pragmatic stance ensured that the research produced both empirically valid and contextually meaningful conclusions.

3.3 Research Approach

This study adopted a mixed methods research approach, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative techniques within a single investigation to provide a comprehensive understanding of a research problem. Mixed methods allow the researcher to collect, analyze, and merge numerical data with detailed narratives to strengthen the validity and depth of the findings (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, as cited in Baran, 2016), mixed methods research is considered practical because it enables the use of multiple strategies to address complex research questions. This practicality stems from its combination of inductive and deductive reasoning, allowing researchers to draw on numerical patterns as well as contextual, descriptive insights. Such an approach is particularly valuable in studies involving human communication and organizational dynamics, where both statistical trends and lived experiences are essential for interpretation.

The rationale for using mixed methods in this study was to achieve triangulation, enhance validity, and generate a more holistic understanding of conflict management in universities. Creswell (2009) notes, integrating quantitative trends with qualitative depth produces a richer and more credible account of the phenomenon under investigation. Through triangulation, data from different sources were compared and corroborated to strengthen the reliability of the study's conclusions.

Mixed methods also allowed for a systematic procedure that included sampling, securing permissions, collecting and recording data, and managing data sets in

accordance with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) guidelines for mixed methods research. By employing both quantitative and qualitative strands, the study captured the complexity of communication strategies in conflict management more effectively than either method could alone.

The mixed methods approach generally, provided a nuanced and multidimensional perspective on how communication strategies influence conflict management between university management and labour unions, ensuring that the findings reflect both measurable patterns and rich experiential insights.

3.4 Research Method

The study adopted a mixed methods research approach, specifically employing an Explanatory Sequential Design. This design was appropriate as it aligned with the study's objective of evaluating how communication strategies can be effectively used for managing group conflict in organizations. According to Ivankova and Wingo (2022), the explanatory sequential design involves two distinct phases: the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative data. The qualitative phase is used to explain, elaborate, or build upon the initial quantitative findings. This approach was suitable for the current study as it allowed the researcher to first identify general patterns and relationships quantitatively and then explore underlying reasons or contextual explanations qualitatively.

The quantitative phase employed stratified sampling to ensure representation across different organizational groups, while the qualitative phase utilized purposive sampling to select participants who possessed relevant insights into communication and conflict management practices. Quantitative data were collected using closed-ended questionnaires, administered personally with the assistance of data clerks to ensure

accuracy and a high response rate. Subsequently, qualitative data were collected using open-ended questionnaires through face-to-face interviews with management representatives and virtual focus group interviews with various staff unions. This sequencing facilitated a deeper understanding of the statistical results, allowing qualitative insights to contextualize and enrich the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study adopted a case study research strategy, which, according to Yin (2003, as cited in Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011), is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study approach was particularly suitable because it allowed the researcher to retain a holistic and real-world perspective on communication and conflict management within a specific institutional context. As Yin (2013) explains, case studies are valuable for exploring complex social processes such as small-group behaviour, managerial decision-making, and organizational communication.

Furthermore, Payne (2004) asserts that the case study method emphasizes detail and the natural order of events, seeking to extract meaning and theoretical statements from real-world data. This approach aligns with the study's focus on understanding contextualized communication strategies in conflict resolution. The study adopted an instrumental case study design, aimed at providing insights into how communication processes influence conflict management outcomes in university settings (Jwan & Ong'ondo, 2011).

Data collection and integration followed the three phases of mixed research analysis which are: timing, mixing, and weighing (Ivankova & Wingo, 2022). The sequential

timing ensured that quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data that expanded upon the initial findings. This process provided a structured and coherent framework for integrating data.

The mixing phase involved data embedding, whereby qualitative data were incorporated within the quantitative analysis to enhance interpretive depth (Greene, 2020). For instance, participants' quotes from interviews were embedded within the presentation of survey results to provide contextual explanations and illustrate statistical patterns (Johnson et al., 2020).

Finally, the weighing phase applied a quantitative priority approach, giving greater emphasis to the quantitative findings, while the qualitative data played a supplementary and explanatory role. This weighting was appropriate given the study's aim to first establish measurable relationships before interpreting their contextual meaning (Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2020).

The adoption of a mixed methods approach was justified by the nature of the research questions, which required both breadth and depth of understanding. The quantitative component addressed the "what" questions while identifying the prevalence and patterns of communication strategies and their relationship with conflict management outcomes. The qualitative component addressed the "how" and "why" questions while exploring the perceptions, experiences, and contextual dynamics that explained the observed statistical trends. This integration provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, ensuring both empirical validity and contextual richness, consistent with the pragmatist philosophical orientation guiding the study (Biesta, 2020; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2020).

3.5 Quantitative versus Qualitative

This study employed a mixed methods design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative components to provide a comprehensive understanding of communication strategies used in managing group conflict in higher learning institutions. The quantitative phase focused on collecting numerical data on the prevalence of conflicts and the perceived effectiveness of various communication strategies, while the qualitative phase explored participants experiences and perceptions to uncover contextual and interpretive insights.

A total of 125 respondents were sampled from the population of unionized staff members, including representatives from KUDHEIA, KUSU, and UASU. Out of these, 105 participants took part in the quantitative phase, while 20 participants contributed to the qualitative phase through interviews and open-ended discussions. The combination of these datasets enabled the researcher to not only measure patterns and relationships statistically but also interpret the meanings behind them within their organizational context.

The study adopted an Explanatory Sequential Design, where quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to further explain or elaborate on the initial statistical findings. This design was particularly appropriate for addressing the research objectives because it allowed the researcher to explore both the “what” and the “why” aspects of the phenomenon (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021). For instance, statistical results indicating a correlation between communication frequency and conflict reduction were later clarified through participants’ qualitative narratives explaining the mechanisms behind this relationship.

The explanatory sequential approach also strengthened the validity and interpretive depth of the findings. Quantitative trends were validated and enriched through qualitative insights, enhancing the overall credibility and trustworthiness of the research (Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This integration ensured that results were both empirically grounded and contextually meaningful, reflecting the pragmatic philosophy underpinning the study.

The design offered flexibility and adaptability, allowing the researcher to refine qualitative instruments based on preliminary quantitative outcomes. Such adaptability is essential for studies addressing complex and dynamic social phenomena, including workplace communication and conflict (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The mixed methods design also provided a practical foundation for policy and decision-making, as the qualitative insights helped interpret quantitative trends, thereby informing evidence-based recommendations for institutional communication and conflict management strategies (Ivankova & Plano Clark, 2018).

The integration of both data types enabled the study to address multifaceted research questions more effectively than a single-method design could. As Fetters, Curry, and Creswell (2023) note, explanatory sequential designs are particularly suited to exploring complex organizational phenomena by combining the breadth of quantitative data with the depth of qualitative exploration. Advances and innovations in methodological integration and data analysis tools have further enhanced the rigor and feasibility of such designs, enabling seamless triangulation between datasets (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2020).

3.5.1 Research Site

The research site was the Main Campus of the University of Eldoret, Uasin-Gishu County. It is an institution of higher learning whose population encompasses employed workforce who are categorically classified under three unions, namely; UASU, KUSU and KUDHEIA. The institution has various levels of management through various organizational structures ranging from top management to departments and sections.

3.5.2 Study population

The total population of the staff at the University of Eldoret are 1500. However, my target population for this study comprises of 316 members of staff which define my population of interest and are further categorized into four major groups namely: UASU, KUSU, KUDHEIA and University management. All were targeted to provide effective communication strategies used in group conflict management in universities.

To determine the appropriate sample size for a population of 1,500, we can use Yamane's formula for sample size calculation. Yamane's formula provides a simplified way of calculating sample size when the population is known, and it is widely used in research for estimating sample size in a finite population.

Yamane's Formula:

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

Where:

n is the sample size

N is the population size (in this case, 1,500)

e is the margin of error (usually between 0.01 to 0.10; commonly 0.05 for a 95% confidence level)

Step-by-Step Calculation:

Given:

Population size N=1,500

Margin of error e= 0.05 (for a 95% confidence level)

Substitute into Yamane's formula:

$$n = \frac{1500}{1 + 1500(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1500}{1 + 1500(0.0025)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1500}{1 + 3.75}$$

$$n = \frac{1500}{4.75}$$

$$n = 315.79 \approx 316$$

Justification for a Sample Size of 125:

Yamane's (1967) formula indicated an ideal sample size of approximately 316 for a population of 1,500 at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of 125 was adopted to balance statistical adequacy with practical constraints. This reduction was primarily influenced by limited financial, time, and personnel resources available during data collection. Additionally, non-response anticipation played a role, as data collection coincided with an academic recess period when staff availability was low. To ensure fair representation, proportional stratified sampling was applied, covering key subgroups such as faculty, administrative, and support staff.

While a smaller sample size may affect the precision of statistical estimates, validity and reliability were maintained through careful sampling design and consistent data collection procedures. Stratified sampling enhanced representativeness, while standardized instruments and pilot testing ensured measurement accuracy and internal consistency. Triangulation across quantitative and qualitative data further strengthened

the credibility of findings. Thus, despite being smaller than the calculated figure, the sample of 125 was methodologically sound and sufficient to yield meaningful and generalizable insights within the study's organizational context.

Conclusion:

Using Yamane's formula, the ideal sample size for a population of 1,500 with a 5% margin of error is approximately 316. However, a decision to sample 125 was based on resource limitations as long as it still provides sufficient representation of the university staff for meaningful data analysis.

3.5.3 Sampling Techniques

The study used purposive for the qualitative part and stratified sampling techniques for the quantitative part to select participants. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants who had experience in managing conflicts within the institution majorly, union officials and members of university management. Stratified sampling, on the other hand, was used to select participants in special groups, for the purpose of this study I categorized into five groups namely: UASU officials, KUSU Officials, KUDHEIA Officials, Student Leaders and Management Representative. staff and students who were willing to participate in the study.

The participants were selected as per the following similarities in their characteristics in relations with their roles:

a) Negotiates collective bargaining agreements, organizes strikes, and advocates for academic staff rights, better terms of employment, improved working conditions, and professional development opportunities while advocates for fair wages, safe working environments, and job security. General staff welfare and addresses grievances related to employment as they focus on improving the

livelihoods of lower-level support staff and addressing their specific needs. They engage in regular meetings, forums, and communication channels to keep members informed through memos, newsletters or digital platforms such as social media, campus activities, workshops, and communications to connect with members.

b) Student councils or unions organize events, protests, and negotiations with university management. They also engage in shaping policies related to higher education and academic staff welfare. The Management in its unique way oversees the administration, operations, and strategic direction of the university takes responsibility for decision-making, policy formulation, financial management, and academic oversight, engage in regular meetings with staff and student representatives, official communications, and public addresses, while ensuring the smooth running of the university, implements policies, and addresses concerns raised by unions and students.

c) Integration of Unions in University Governance plays critical roles in collaboration and negotiation vide: Collective Bargaining: Unions like UASU and KUSU negotiate with university management for better terms of service; Conflict Resolution: Management and unions work together to resolve disputes and maintain a conducive working and learning environment.

d) Policy Influence: Student unions and staff unions provide feedback and suggestions to management, influencing policy decisions.

e) Sampling and sampling techniques: It is obvious from the definition of the population above that a census is not feasible in this study. Accordingly, the purposive sampling type of research was adopted in sampling the target

population. In total, a sample of 125 people selected randomly from a target population of 1500. Details of the sample are as follows:

(i) KUDHEIA

(ii) KUSU

(iii)UASU

This study adopted a purposive sampling method in selecting participants. Division of population ensured a fair representation of each category of participants since their contributions are significantly different.

Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling process that a researcher specifies the characteristics of the population of interest and then locates individuals who match those characteristics. Purposive sampling was used with a purpose in mind. This allowed the researcher to present multiple perspectives of individuals to represent the complexity of each group/category (Creswell, 2002, p.194). Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or criteria.

A briefing was given first to the respondent during the Institutional Prayer Day concerning the aim of the study followed by explanatory information about the instructions. These instructions were later accompanied by written instructions at the beginning of the questionnaire (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002).

Stratified sampling is a technique which involves dividing the population of interest into subgroups or strata-based on specific characteristics relevant to the research question. The strata are then sampled independently using a random sampling method, such as simple random sampling or systematic sampling, to ensure that each stratum is

represented in the sample (Bryman, A. 2016). For the purpose of this study the researcher applied stratified random sampling.

Integrating purposive and stratified sampling in mixed methods research enhances the depth and breadth of data collection and analysis. Stratified sampling ensures representativeness and generalizability, while purposive sampling provides detailed, context-rich insights. This combination is particularly powerful in explanatory sequential designs, where qualitative data can elaborate on and explain quantitative findings (Lohr, 2021).

In the case of this study, stratified random sampling was considered appropriate to ensure that the sample is representative of different subgroups within the population of interest. For instance, the population of interest in this study includes students, faculty, administrative staff, and other stakeholders within the University of Eldoret, who are further divided into different clusters including UASU, KUSU, KUDHEIHA, Management and students. Each of these sub-groups may have different perspectives on the communication strategies employed for conflict management within the university, and therefore, it is important to ensure that the sample includes representation from each subgroup which involves both unions and University Management.

To apply stratified random sampling in this study, the first step was to identify the different subgroups within the population and determine the proportion of each subgroup relative to the entire population. The next step was to randomly select participants from each subgroup based on the proportion of the subgroup relative to the entire population. For example, if the administrative staff comprises 20% of the total population, then 20% of the sample would be selected from the administrative staff

subgroup. Stratified sampling can improve the precision of the sample and increase the generalizability of the results to the population.

Stratified random sampling is a robust technique that enhances the representativeness and precision of research findings. By ensuring that all relevant subgroups are adequately represented, it allows researchers to gain deeper insights into specific aspects of the study population. In the context of conflict resolution and management, this method can provide a comprehensive understanding of how different strategies work across various segments of an organization (Etikan et. al., 2020).

3.5.4 Piloting

A pilot study was conducted to evaluate the validity, reliability, and clarity of the data collection instruments prior to the main study. The pilot involved six participants from Moi University; two registrars, two union representatives, and two students selected for their comparable experiences with group conflict management. The purpose was to ensure that the questionnaires were conceptually sound, contextually relevant, and analytically suitable for the intended research objectives.

The Pilot Questions

1. How frequently do communication challenges lead to conflict within your department?
2. What communication strategies are most effective in resolving conflicts between management and staff?
3. How would you rate the clarity and adequacy of the communication channels within your organization?
4. Which forms of communication (formal or informal) contribute most to conflict resolution?

5. How can organizational communication be improved to reduce recurrent conflicts?

The pilot questions revealed minor ambiguities in question phrasing and sequencing, prompting revisions for improved clarity and flow. Respondents also noted redundancy in some items, which were streamlined to reduce response fatigue. The process confirmed that the analytical techniques planned were appropriate and that the instrument was both valid and reliable for assessing communication and conflict management dynamics. Consequently, the final questionnaire was refined to enhance comprehensibility, internal consistency, and analytical precision for the main study.

3.5.4.1 Validity and Reliability of the Data

Validity and reliability were maintained through rigorous instrument design, piloting, and standardized administration. Well-structured questionnaires were developed and pretested on a small sample to assess clarity, consistency, and analytical suitability. Trained research assistants administered the instruments to ensure uniform data collection and minimize bias. As Creswell (2003) explains, validity and reliability establish the strength and accuracy of research findings, ensuring that results reflect the true nature of the phenomenon under investigation. The pilot study confirmed the appropriateness of analytical techniques, refined ambiguous questions, and improved the coherence of response options. These measures enhanced both the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, ensuring that the findings were both accurate and replicable.

3.5.4.2 Reliability of the Data

Reliability was achieved by ensuring consistency in measurement and procedure. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a reliable instrument yields stable and consistent results when administered repeatedly under similar conditions. In this study, test–retest reliability was verified through pilot administration and re-evaluation of

similar participants, confirming response stability over time (Field, 2021). Inter-rater reliability was upheld by training research assistants to apply uniform data recording procedures, reducing subjective bias (Cohen et al., 2021). Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's alpha, ensuring that questionnaire items measuring constructs such as communication and conflict management were closely related, with coefficients above 0.7 indicating acceptable reliability. These measures confirmed that the instruments consistently captured the intended variables, thereby reinforcing the precision of the data collected.

3.5.4.3 Validity of the Data

Validity was ensured through expert evaluation, comprehensive coverage of content, and methodological rigor. Three research experts reviewed the questionnaires to assess content validity, confirming that items adequately represented all dimensions of conflict management such as communication, mediation, and resolution (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Construct validity was achieved by aligning survey items with established theoretical frameworks on organizational communication and conflict resolution, while criterion-related validity was strengthened by comparing the results with established measures and previous studies (Krosnick & Presser, 2022). Internal validity was maintained by controlling of confounding variables such as gender, role, and departmental affiliation, whereas external validity was enhanced by drawing respondents from diverse staff categories and improving generalizability (Hair et al., 2022).

The pilot study was pivotal in refining the instrument, improving content accuracy, and verifying analytical suitability. Feedback from respondents led to rewording unclear items and adjusting sequencing to improve flow. These processes ensured that the data collection tools measured the intended constructs accurately and consistently, thereby

enhancing the overall rigor, accuracy, and generalizability of the study's findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

3.6 Data Generating Techniques

This study employed multiple data generation techniques consistent with the case study approach, which relies on diverse sources of evidence collected over time to ensure data richness and credibility (Mills et al., 2010). Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and virtual focus group discussions (VFGDs). The use of multiple instruments enhanced the depth and reliability of findings by allowing triangulation of perspectives from various respondents.

Semi-structured interviews encouraged participants to express their perceptions and experiences freely regarding communication strategies within the institution. Informal follow-up conversations were also conducted in natural settings outside workplaces to build rapport and elicit more authentic responses, consistent with Jwan and Ong'ondo's (2011) assertion that interviews in natural contexts produce more accurate data.

The data collection process involved administering structured questionnaires, conducting interviews, and facilitating VFGDs at times convenient to participants. Prior to data collection, the researcher sought consent, introduced the study's objectives, and communicated schedules for both face-to-face and virtual sessions. The use of participant-friendly language and flexible timing between 8:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. ensured inclusivity and participant comfort throughout the process.

3.6.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were the primary tool for quantitative data collection, designed to capture information relevant to communication strategies and conflict management.

They comprised both structured (closed-ended) and unstructured (open-ended) items. Structured questions enabled efficient analysis and consistency in responses, while open-ended questions allowed participants to provide detailed explanations, attitudes, and motivations (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). As Kombo and Tromp (2006) note, questionnaires are economical and practical for collecting data from large populations. To ensure comprehension, questionnaires were written in simple, accessible language, and administered personally to respondents to enhance response accuracy.

3.6.2 Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Interviews and focus group discussions were used to gather qualitative insights complementing the quantitative data. Face-to-face interviews were particularly effective for clarifying ambiguous responses, probing deeper into complex issues, and obtaining historical perspectives (Creswell, 2003). Given logistical and financial limitations, some discussions were conducted virtually through Virtual Focus Group Discussions (VFGDs) with officials from UASU, KUSU, and KUDHEIA.

The adoption of VFGDs was informed by technological advancements and the need for methodological flexibility. According to Stewart and Shamdasani (2018), virtual focus groups extend traditional approaches by enabling real-time and asynchronous discussions across digital platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. This approach proved cost-effective, accessible, and flexible, aligning with findings by Lobe et al. (2020), Archibald et al. (2019), Hamilton et al. (2021), and McKeown and Weidmann (2021). Furthermore, VFGDs facilitated enhanced data management through features such as recording, transcription, and real-time analysis, which improved accuracy and analytical efficiency.

3.6.3 Content Analysis

Rationale for Using Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed in this study as a systematic and objective method for analyzing textual and verbal data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. According to Katundu (1998), content analysis involves defining a set of content categories, coding elements of communication, grouping them into themes, and interpreting their meanings to understand underlying patterns. This method was particularly appropriate for this study as it enabled the researcher to organize large amounts of qualitative data, identify emerging themes, and interpret meanings in relation to conflict management and communication strategies within the university.

The use of content analysis was justified by its ability to examine both manifest and latent meanings within participants' responses, offering a comprehensive understanding of communication dynamics and conflict experiences. As Krippendorff (2018) explains, content analysis allows researchers to systematically analyze written, spoken, or visual communication to make valid inferences about their context. In this study, it facilitated the identification of trends, intentions, and attitudes expressed by participants regarding communication and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Application of Content Analysis in the Study

The analysis process followed a structured procedure. First, all qualitative data from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions were transcribed, organized, and coded. Codes represented recurring words, phrases, or ideas related to communication, leadership, mediation, and conflict management. The coded data were then grouped into categories and themes aligned with the study's objectives. Each

theme represented a major aspect of how university management and labor unions addressed conflict through communication strategies.

Content analysis was particularly useful for analyzing open-ended questionnaire responses and focus group discussions, complementing the quantitative data and deepening understanding of the research findings. This triangulation of data ensured that the research captured both the breadth and depth of the phenomenon under study, enhancing validity and credibility (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015).

The technique was used to:

1. Identify communication trends and intentions among university stakeholders.
2. Describe attitudinal and behavioral responses to organizational conflict.
3. Determine emotional and psychological aspects of participants' experiences.
4. Analyze open-ended questions and interview transcripts to support qualitative interpretation (Abroms et al., 2011; Owen, 2012; Ullström et al., 2014).

Each of the five respondent groups; management, academic staff, non-teaching staff, union officials, and students was analyzed individually before synthesizing the data thematically. This approach allowed for comparison and integration across categories to generate a comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

Integration with Thematic Analysis and Mixed Methods

In line with the explanatory sequential mixed methods design, content analysis was applied in the qualitative phase to elaborate on the quantitative findings. Quantitative results were first analyzed using descriptive statistics through SPSS (Version 26.0), while qualitative data were examined using thematic content analysis to interpret patterns and meaning. This integration of methods provided both statistical precision

and contextual understanding, enhancing the overall robustness of the research conclusions.

By employing content analysis alongside thematic analysis, the study brought order and structure to the mass of collected data, enabling meaningful interpretation and presentation through narratives, tables, and charts. The approach also supported the identification of dominant themes such as communication barriers, collaborative decision-making, and leadership in mediation, all of which contributed to understanding effective conflict management strategies in university settings.

Achieving Data Saturation

Data saturation represents the point in qualitative research where no new information, codes, or themes emerge from the data, indicating that additional data collection would not contribute to further understanding of the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2018). In this study, data saturation was achieved during the iterative process of coding and thematic analysis. After analyzing multiple interview and focus group transcripts, recurring patterns began to stabilize, and no new themes were identified. This signified that the data collected were sufficient to provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of communication strategies and conflict management within the institution.

The process of achieving saturation involved continuous comparison of data across participants to ensure thematic consistency. Each subsequent transcript was reviewed for emergent insights, and once the information became repetitive and aligned with existing codes, it was determined that theoretical saturation had been reached (Guest et al., 2020). This process ensured completeness and credibility in the qualitative phase of the study.

Furthermore, the use of thematic analysis facilitated the identification of key themes that reflected both surface-level and underlying issues, consistent with the Onion Theory of Conflict Management. This theoretical lens allowed the researcher to interpret deeper layers of participants' experiences, linking individual narratives to broader patterns of organizational communication and conflict resolution. Achieving data saturation thus strengthened the reliability and validity of the qualitative findings, confirming that the data were rich enough to represent the full range of perspectives relevant to the research objectives.

3.7 Trustworthiness, Credibility and Ethical consideration

3.7.1 Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness and credibility of findings of a research activity are ensured by adhering to the study by reporting on what actually occurred in the field, including answering various research questions or the same question from different perspectives in order to improve the quality of data especially during the interviews. Trustworthiness is one of the ways in which qualitative and mixed methods researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability and conformability are evident in their research (Zohrabi, 2013).

3.7.2 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are the ethical principles relevant to research involving human subjects. These include respect for persons, beneficence, justice, freedom from exploitation, rights to self-determination, rights to full disclosure, rights to fair treatment, rights to privacy (Ethical Consideration, 2020). Ethics are norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. They are generally professional codes of conduct.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the study to ensure that the rights of the participants are protected. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent obtained from the University Administration before they participated in the study. Confidentiality was also maintained by ensuring that the data collected is kept secure and only accessed by the researchers. The study adhered to ethical guidelines outlined in the Helsinki Declaration and the Kenya National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI, 2019) regulations.

As this study utilized human participants and investigated real life issues, certain issues were addressed. The consideration of these issues is necessary for the purpose of ensuring the privacy as well as self-esteem of participants. These issues were put into consideration in advance so as to prevent future problems that might arose during the research process. Among the significant issues that were considered included consent, confidentiality and data protection.

Before distributing the questionnaires and conducting interviews the researcher ensured that the documents were very clear and concise in order to prevent conflicts among respondents. Participants were given ample time to respond to the questions posed on them for purpose of avoiding errors and inaccuracies in their answers. They were further given assurance regarding the confidentiality of their identity and the information they do not wish to disclose. The respondents' cooperation was eagerly sought before, to ensure that the data gathered from them is treated with the strictest confidentiality, so that they would be more open. This was done with the hope that it would promote trust between the researcher and the respondents.

The researcher considered some research ethics including: -

a) *Official Authority:* Permission to carry out the study was sought from the School of Information Science and authorization and research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), and the University of Eldoret was obtained. Appendix – IV
b) *Respondents:* Populations who served as data sources for research were referred as 'participants' in the research.
c) *Informed Consent:* The researcher created awareness and purpose of the research and type of the data to be collected verbally to the staff through an organized meeting "University Prayer Day". The respondents were to react either positively or negatively. Those who agreed to take part in the research did so voluntarily.
d) *The Confidentiality of Information:* Data collected from the research respondents was kept in confidentiality (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999).
e) *Respondent Identity Protection:* Identities of respondents were kept anonymous. The purpose for protection is that the information required was sensitive. The researcher ensured the instrument had no place for respondents to write their personal details.
f) *Truthfulness and Honesty with the Findings*: The researcher applied honesty, while collecting, analysing and presenting the findings. The research content is honest and truthful.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents information on all methodology requirements pertaining to the study. It covers an analysis of research approach, research design, population and sampling, data collection methods, research procedure and ethical considerations. Validity and reliability issues and ethical standards, which informed the research

process, have been presented. These methodology procedures provide the scientific basis for dealing with research problems and provides for the generalization of findings across the target sample population.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The study aimed at determining communication strategies for managing group conflicts in universities in Kenya. This Chapter presents data collected, analysised and interpreted of the study based on the following research objectives: To investigate the types of group conflicts which occur in university unions; to evaluate factors that contribute to escalation of group conflicts; find out the communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university unions and their effectiveness; and recommend communication strategies to resolve group conflicts in university unions.

The findings of the study were analyzed as guided by the systems theory and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). Systems theory, which views organizations as complex and interdependent systems, is instrumental in understanding how different elements within a university interact to influence conflict and its management. Communication Accommodation Theory provides insight into how individuals adjust their communication styles to either converge or diverge in interactions, influencing conflict dynamics and resolution.

The study also used Situational Crisis Communication Model (SCCT), which provides a framework for understanding how organizations can use communication strategies to protect their reputations during a crisis. SCCT emphasizes the importance of tailoring communication strategies based on the nature of the crisis and an organization's level of responsibility (Coombs, 2007).

4.2 Response Rate

One hundred and five questionnaires were administered. However, in addition to administering the questionnaires, 25 people divided into four groups (UASU, KUSU, KUDEIHA & Management) were interviewed. The interviews were conducted among key informants who had also filled the questionnaires. The interviews were necessary as they provided in-depth data from Management, Union members and union officials. Seventy-six questionnaires were filled and the interviews successfully conducted. This translated to a seventy-six percent (76%) response rate on the questionnaire and one hundred (100%) response rate on the interviews.

The high response rate was attributed to the respondents' guarantee of anonymity. The researcher was also familiar with most of the respondents and was also helped to collect data by assistants. In addition, the respondents were given adequate time to respond to the questionnaires.

4.3 Demographic Information of Respondents

The study sought to establish the gender, age, length of service as a university staff and union member and the role of the respondents in the university union.

Systems theory suggests that gender dynamics within a university, as a social system, can significantly affect conflict and communication strategies. Differences in communication styles between genders may contribute to the emergence and management of conflicts (Smith & Lewis, 2018).

4.3.1 Gender of the Respondents

The study sought to establish the gender of the respondents. This was important as it gave the researcher insight into the relationship between one's gender and the way they communicate or handle conflict with others in their work place. The distribution of the

respondents on the basis of gender is presented in table 1 and figure 4

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage
Female	40	52.6
Male	36	47.4
Total	76	100.0

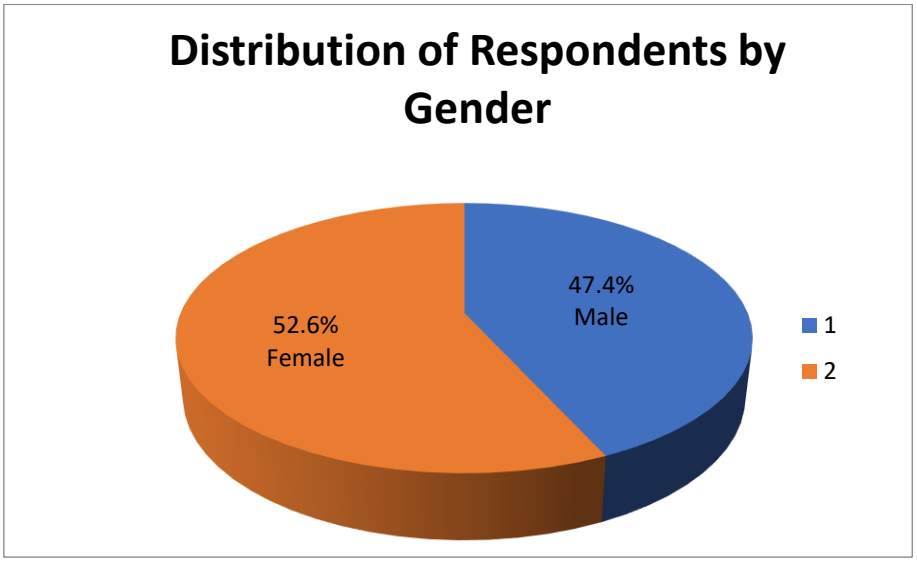


Figure 4: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Table 1 shows that there were more female respondents (52.6%) than there were male respondents (47.4 %). The gender distribution among respondents highlights the importance of considering gender dynamics in evaluating and implementing communication strategies for managing group conflicts in universities. By understanding and integrating gender-specific communication styles, universities can develop more effective and inclusive conflict management approaches.

4.3.2 Age of the respondents

The study sought to establish the distribution of respondents by their age. This was important as it would enable the researcher to gain insight in the relationship of one's

age with how communication is used in conflict resolution in university union. Table 2 shows the data of the age of the respondents.

Table 2 Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age bracket	No. of respondents	Percentage
18-24	11	14.5
25-34	17	22.4
35-44	28	36.8
45-54	15	19.7
55 and above	5	6.6
Total	76	100.0

Table 2 shows that there were more respondents aged between 35 and 50 with the age bracket 35-44 and 45-54 having (36.8%) and (19.7 %) respondents respectively. Respondents aged below 35 years with age bracket 18-24 years and 25-34 years having (14.5 %) and (22.4 %). That the age group above 55 years, was fewer but these could be explained by the freeze in direct employment by the Government of Kenya in the late 1990s.

According to Manda (2001) the government's blank guarantee of employment to graduates from tertiary institutions was discontinued due to its unsustainability as a result of a declining economy, the freezing of recruitment and the introduction of civil service retrenchment under the influence of the donor community. This means that most civil servants' workforce is middle aged and that the continued recruitment of civil servants every year in recent years has opened opportunities for the younger generation aged below 30 years to join the public service, thus their high number among the respondents. The age bracket 31-40 years cohort could have ventured into other professions, while the freeze of direct employment of public servants by the government prevailed.

The age distribution of respondents provides valuable insights into the preferred communication strategies for managing group conflicts in universities. By understanding the distinct preferences and needs of different age groups, universities can develop more effective and inclusive conflict management strategies that harness the strengths of both long-service and relatively new staff members

4.3.3 Length of Service at the University Staff unions

The study also sought to find out the duration the respondents had worked at the university. This was important as it would help the researcher gain insight into whether there is a relationship between one's experience as a university employee and the effectiveness of communication in conflict resolution.

According to systems theory, the length of service influences individuals' roles and their interactions within the university system. Experienced staff may have developed more effective conflict resolution strategies through prolonged engagement with the university's structures and culture (Morgan, 2019). The findings are as shown in table 3

Table 3. Distribution of Respondents by Experience at the university

Experience (Years)	No. of respondents	Percentage
Less than a year	8	10.5
1-4 years	21	27.6
5-9 years	14	18.4
More than 10 years	33	43.4
Total	76	100.0

Table 3. shows that respondents who had worked as university employees for more than 10 years (43.4 %) were found to be in the majority and those with experience of

less than a year were the minority (10.5 %). Respondents who had worked between 1-10 years with age brackets 1-4 years and 5-9 years were also a significant 27.6 % and 18.4 %) respectively.

The length of service at the university significantly influences employees' effectiveness in managing group conflicts. By applying systems theory, we understand that experienced staff contributes to systemic stability and effective conflict resolution, while newer staff bring fresh perspectives and adaptability. Tailoring communication strategies and training programs to address the needs of different tenure groups can enhance overall conflict management in university employee unions.

4.3.4 Role Held by Respondents

The study also sought to establish the roles held by the respondents at the university. Understanding the roles helped the researcher in relating the position held by the respondent to conflict management experiences. The findings were shown in table 4:

Table 4. Distribution of Respondents by Role held at the University

Position held	No. of respondents	Percentage
General Union worker	**44**	**57.9**
Technical staff	**11**	**14.5**
Management	**6**	**7.9**
Union Official	**2**	**2.6**
Student	**6**	**7.9**
Intern	**4**	**5.3**
Office Administrator	**3**	**3.9**
Total	**76**	**100.0**

Table 4 shows that general union workers formed the majority 57.6 %. The other respondents were technical staff (14.5 %), management staff (7.9 %), Union official (2.6%), Students (7.9 %), Intern (5.3 %) and Office administrators (3.9 %). This variation could be explained by the fact that there are less administrative officers since

most of them are occupying various positions across the Unions, others work in management offices and other sections thereby feeling uncomfortable to declare themselves as administrators.

That there were even less management staff and union officials mean that the higher the position in the organizational hierarchy and administrative post, the lesser the number of people that occupy the offices.

The roles individuals occupy within a university, viewed through systems theory, contribute to the systemic nature of conflict. Each role represents different subsystems within the larger organizational system, with unique interests and perspectives that can lead to conflicts (Meadows, 2018).

4.4 Group Conflicts in University Unions

Conflict is the misunderstanding that arises between individuals or groups of individuals as a result of incompatible goals or a breakdown in communication. Although often viewed negatively, conflict is a normal occurrence whenever there is interaction of individuals or groups of individuals. According to Adejimola (2009) and Verma (1998), conflict is inevitable in any society.

4.4.1 Presence of Conflict in the University

This study sought to find out if conflict was experienced by the respondents in the university and what are the most common types of conflicts. The findings were as shown in the table 5.

Table 5. Presence of Conflict in the University Union

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	34	44.7
No	20	26.4
No response	22	28.9
Total	76	100.0

Table 5. shows that 34 (44.7 %) respondents, had encountered conflicts in the past; 20 (26.4%) respondents had not experienced any conflict while executing their duties and responsibilities and 22 (28.9%) respondents, didn't provide any response.

An official said that:

> *"For my case I cannot say that I have encountered any conflict since the conflicts that exist are not only common to our institution but to all public universities and that is why CBA negotiations are still under discussion by all public universities Vice-Chancellors."*
>
> *The Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC) has misled in decision making concerning the CBA. Vice-Chancellors have also initiated another body which we term it as illegal – IPUCCF. We look at it as a strategy to interfere and delay the processes of signing the CBA". We have lost faith in our leaders since they have joined with SRC to disadvantage us".*

4.4.2 Experience of Conflict due to Differences in Opinions and Values

The study went on to establish if respondents had experienced conflict due to differences in opinions and values. This was important as it helped the researcher also find if differences in opinions and values can cause conflict in university unions (Table 6.)

Table 6. Experience conflict due to differences in opinions and values

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	52	68.4
No	24	31.6
Total	76	100.0

Table 6. shows that most respondents 68.4 % said conflict was experienced in the university union due to differences in opinions and values. This confirms Overton &

Lowry (2013) assertion that disagreements, where people have different viewpoints despite understanding each other's position can lead to conflict.

Systems theory states that conflicts often arise from differences in opinions and values due to the diverse subsystems within an organization. Different values and opinions reflect the varying goals and functions, leading to inevitable conflicts (Laszlo &Krippner, 2018).

This scenario was witnessed when one member said that

> " *KUDHEIHA officials agreed by signing zero percent agreement on the 2013-2017 CBA which was contrary to the opinion of its members and of the other unions".*

4.4.3 Experience of Conflict between Union Workers and Management

The respondents said they had experienced conflict between union workers university management (Table 7).

Table 7. Presence of conflict between union workers and University management

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	34	63.0
No	20	27.0
Total	54	100.0

Table7. shows that most respondents (63.0 %) knew that, conflict was experienced between union workers and university management. This confirms Johnson et. al., (2020): Ronquillo et al., (2023) assertion that clashes between union workers and university administration have intensified, with issues such as job security and healthcare benefits being major points of contention.

Communication Accommodation Theory can explain the conflicts between union workers and management as a result of divergence in communication styles. Management may use more formal and hierarchical communication, while union

workers may prefer more egalitarian and direct styles, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts (Gallois et al., 2018: Hoffman & Yan Bing Zhang, 2022).

During focus group interviews it was mentioned that management requests to engage university Council on grievances and took too long to respond or, not responding to grievances until conflict arises again. This makes union members agitated hence forcing the official to go for top management from their offices to come and address members in '*Kamukunji*'.

4.4.4 Experience of Conflict between Union Workers and Other Staff Members

Respondents reported that they had experienced conflict between union workers and other staff members in the university (Table 8).

Table 8. Experience of Conflict between union workers and other staff members.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	11	20.4
No	43	79.6
Total	54	100.0

Eleven respondents (20.4 %), had experienced conflict between union workers and other staff members. This confirms the assertion that whenever there is an interaction between individuals or groups of people, conflict is likely to occur, and it is normal.

4.4.5 Experience of Conflict Between Union Workers

Respondents reported that they had experienced conflict between union workers.

Table 9. Conflict between Union Workers.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	7	13.0
No	47	87.0
Total	54	100.0

Table 9. shows that 7 (13.0 %) respondents had experienced conflict with union

workers. This confirms the assertion that whenever there is an interaction between individuals or groups of people, conflict is likely to occur, and it is normal.

4.4.6 Factors that Contribute to Escalation of Group Conflict in University Unions

Conflict in an institution is brought about by a variety of reasons among which are: competition, resources, difference in thoughts, misunderstanding between people, among others. However, Verma (1998) says breakdown in communication is the most common and evident source of conflict. To verify this, the study sought to establish factors that contribute to escalation of group conflict in university unions (Table 10 and figure 5).

Table 10. Factors that contribute to escalation of group conflicts in university unions

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Lack of communication	**33**	**35.9**
Power struggles	**18**	**19.6**
Inadequate conflict resolution skills	**26**	**28.3**
Job insecurity	**9**	**9.8**
Cultural differences	**6**	**6.5**
Total	**92**	**100.0**

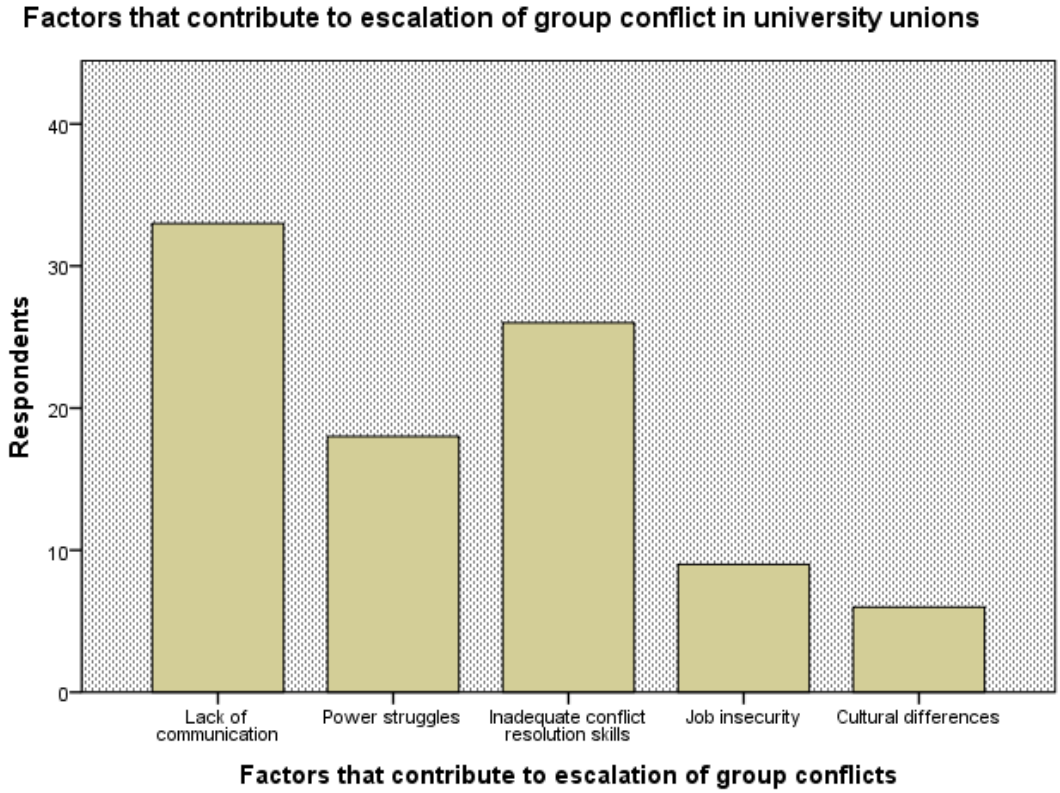


Figure 5: Factors that contribute to escalation of group conflict in university unions

Among respondents, 35.9 % said group conflict witnessed or experienced in the university was as a result of lack of communication thus supporting assertions by Wanjama et al (2010) and Spaho (2013). It is, however, worth noting that lack of communication, though a major contributor to conflict was not the only cause; other factors are inadequate conflict resolution skills, 28.3 %, Power struggles, 19.6 %, Job insecurity, 9.8 %, and cultural differences, 6.5 %.

Although the interviewees agreed that lack of communication played a major role in conflict, they added that the other major cause of conflict between them and the management was implementation of CBA with at least one of the four interviewees saying distribution of workload also caused conflict. This affirms Nyamboga and Kiplangat's (2008) assertion that there is no single cause of conflict. In addition, all the

interviewees said communication played a big role in triggering, sustaining and resolving conflict at the university.

The interviewees explained that open communication helped parties exchange their thoughts, make themselves understood and reach mutual understanding as well as get feedback. They said they made their best efforts to maintain open communication with their juniors. Nyamboga and Kiplangat (2008) say conflict can result because of misinformation between people with regard to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals and values, but to address a conflict, needs communication channels between differing groups to be open.

4.4.7 How group conflict is currently managed in the university union.

The study also sought to establish how group conflict at the university union were currently managed. Most respondents, 38.1 %, said a conflict was managed using open communication like letters, meetings and forums to try and identify some of the reasons why conflict occurred and what can be done to avert the dire consequences of these conflicts. Meetings, private or open communication, provide fora where parties involved in a conflict could negotiate to reach an agreement. However, Nyamboga and Kiplangat (2008) say, coercion can also be used, to force individuals or groups to a particular conclusion. This could then explain why some respondents said a member or members of staff in conflict with university management was/were sent warning letters or forced to continue with their daily duties and responsibilities without trying to solve existing conflict that may hinder their performance. Others had emissaries, for example, heads of their departments or other senior staff members sent to address the matter. Emissaries are sometimes sent in an attempt to address conflict with members of staff relating to one of the approaches (Nyamboga and Kiplangat, 2008) identify

communication strategies used to resolve conflict, arbitration or using a third party to resolve an issue in dispute, but with the consent of the parties involved.

Thirty-one (29.5 %) respondents said mediation was used, where the parties involved in a conflict tried solving their differences by use of a neutral third party. However, eighteen (17.1 %) respondents said conflict was managed through disciplinary actions where management sent warning letters or summons to members union members to face disciplinary committee, while sixteen (15.2 %) respondents saying the conflict was managed through legal actions.

4.4.8 Effectiveness of the current communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university union

The study also sought to establish how current communication strategies used to manage conflicts are effective. This was important as it gave the researcher insight into the effectiveness of the current communication strategies in conflict management in the university unions. The findings are shown in the table 11.

Table11. Effectiveness of the current communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university union

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very effective	29	38.1
Somewhat effective	25	32.9
Not very effective	20	26.4
Not at all effective	2	2.6
Total	76	100.0

Table 11 shows that most respondents considered the current communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university union very effective (38.1 %). Only 2.6% of the respondents said the current communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university union are not at all effective. Those who believed that the current communication strategy used to manage group conflicts are somewhat effective were

32.1 % of the respondents, while 26.4% of the respondents said those communication strategies were not very effective.

4.5 Role of training and education in conflict management

The study also sought to find out the role played by training and education in conflict management in university union (Table 14). The nature of training or education received by the respondents shows how effective it was in improving their communication and conflict management skills.

4.5.1 Receive training or education on communication and conflict management skills

The study collected information on the number of respondents that have received training or education on communication and conflict management skills (Tables 12).

Table12. Respondents who have received training or education on communication and conflict management skills

Response	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	48	63.2
No	28	36.8
Total	76	100.0

Table 12 shows that 48 (63.2%) respondents had received training or education on communication and conflict management skills, while 28 (36.8%) respondents had not received any training or education on communication and conflict management skills.

The 63.2% of respondents had been trained on management, primarily through workshops and seminars. On the effectiveness of these training programs, 26.3% consider the training as very effective, while 40.8% said it was somewhat effective. Their responses highlight the importance of equipping staff with skills to manage conflicts effectively.

4.5.2 Nature of training or education received by the respondent

The study sought information on the nature of training or education that respondents had received. This was important as it helped the researcher gain insights on the role played by training or education in managing various conflicts in the university. The findings are shown in table 13 and figure 6.

Table 13. Nature of training or education received by the respondent

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Workshops	27	35.5
Seminars	16	21.1
Online courses	2	2.6
In-person courses	5	6.6
Not applicable	26	34.2
Total	76	100.0

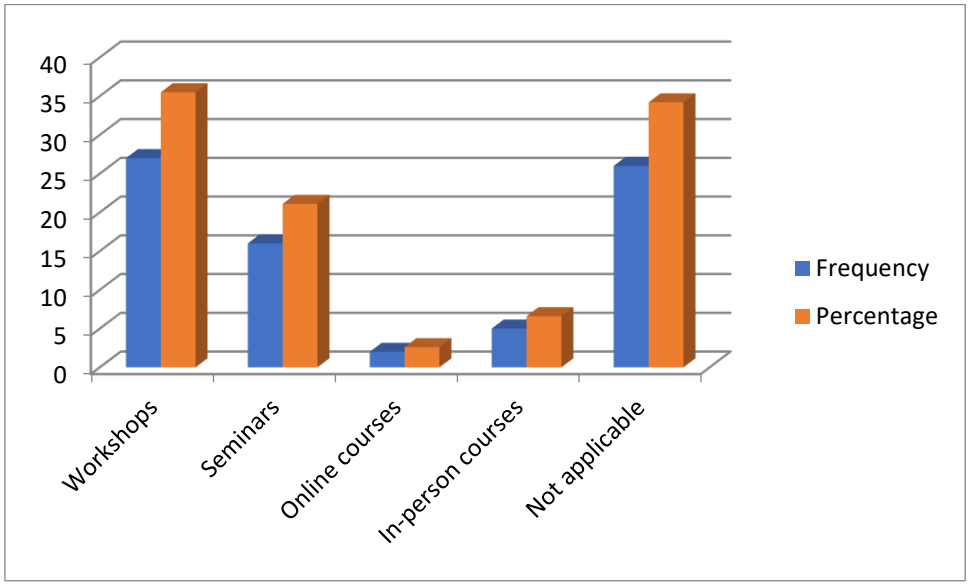


Figure 6: Nature of Training or Education received by the respondent

4.5.3 How effective was the training or education in improving communication and conflict management skills

The study also sought to establish effectiveness of training or education in improving communication and conflict management skills at the university union. This was important as it gave the researcher insight into the role played by the training or

education in improving communication and conflict management skills. The findings are as shown in table 14.

Table 14. Effectiveness of the training or education in improving communication and conflict management skills

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Very effective	20	26.3
Somewhat effective	31	40.8
Not very effective	21	27.6
Not at all effective	4	5.3
Total	76	100.0

Table 14 shows that, although the training and education programs were conducted in order to improve communication and conflict management skills only 40.8% said they were somewhat effective, while 5.3% said they were not at all effective. These trainings and education programs were intended to ensure that union workers and other staff would be enabled to have the knowledge and skills to manage conflicts.

Systems theory underscores the importance of continuous training and education to enhance the adaptive capacity of individuals within the system, thereby improving conflict management strategies. Similarly, Communication Accommodation Theory is intended to improve individuals' ability to adjust their communication styles effectively in managing conflicts (Gallois et al., 2018; Meadows, 2018).

4.5.4 Approaches in implementing training and education programs on communication and conflict management skills in university settings

The study sought to find out best approach for implementing training and education programs on communication and conflict management skills in university settings. This was important as it gave the researcher insight in how training and education programmes on communication and conflict management skills in university settings

are implemented. The findings are shown in Table 15.

Table 15. The best approach for implementing training and education programs on communication and conflict management skills in university settings.

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Mandatory training for all staff members	40	52.6
Optional training for interested staff members	13	17.1
Online training modules	5	6.6
In-person workshops or seminars	16	21.1
No response	2	2.6
Total	76	100.0

Table 15 shows that most of the respondents (52.6 %) said that the best approach for implementing training and education programs on communication and conflict management in a university setting is mandatory training for all staff members followed by in-person workshops or seminars, (21.1 %). Some respondents (17.1 %) said that the best approach for implementing training and education programs on communication and conflict management in a university setting is optional training for interested staff members and lastly online training modules with (6.6 %). Two respondents (2.6 %) didn't provide any response concerning the best approach for implementing training and education programs on communication and conflict management in a university setting in relations with effective communication strategies for managing group conflicts.

4.5.5 Effective communication strategies for managing group conflicts in university union

The study also sought to establish the most effective communication strategies for managing group conflicts in a university union. This gave the researcher insight into how this relates to the effectiveness of communication strategies in conflict resolution in a university union. The findings are shown in Table 16.

Table 16. Effective communication strategies for managing group conflicts in university union

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Active listening	40	17.3
Open communication	52	22.5
Mediation	30	13.0
Conflict resolution training	30	13.0
Clear communication channels	54	23.4
Arbitration	25	10.8
Total	231	100.0

Table 16 shows that most of the respondents said that the most effective communication strategy needed to manage conflict in university union is clear communication channel (23.4 %). Therefore, conflict is easily managed by giving people opportunity to communicate what bothers them without any restriction.

Other effective communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university union are open communication (22.5 %), active listening (17.3 %), mediation and conflict resolution training (13.0 %), and arbitration (10.8 %).

4.6 Qualitative Analysis

This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of communication strategies in managing group conflicts between university unions and management of the University of Eldoret. Guided by four objectives (a) identifying types of conflicts experienced, (b) examining factors contributing to conflict escalation, (c) assessing the effectiveness of existing communication strategies, and (d) recommending improved strategies. The qualitative interviews with UASU, KUSU, KUDHEIHA, and management officials provided rich insights that complement the quantitative findings.

Findings from focus group discussions and interviews with UASU, KUSU, KUDHEIHA, and management representatives revealed persistent communication breakdowns, delays in feedback, distrust between unions and management, and

inconsistencies in policy interpretation. Respondents highlighted conflicts related to CBA negotiations, promotions, staff welfare, compensation, and grievance-handling procedures.

The quantitative results complemented these insights, showing that **open communication (M = 4.5/5)**, timely feedback, and face-to-face engagement were perceived as the most effective strategies, while hierarchical or top-down communication was associated with higher conflict escalation rates (χ^2, $p < .05$). These statistical trends underscore the importance of transparency in conflict settings (Rahim et al., 2023).

Table 17: Types of conflicts, factors affecting conflicts, strategies for managing conflicts and recommendations

Thematic Findings from Qualitative Interviews and FGDs/VFGDs			
Research Objective	**Theme**	**Description**	**Supporting Evidence**
Objective 1: Types of Group Conflicts	CBA-Related Conflicts	Disputes over signing, implementation, and financial implications of CBAs.	HR reported "major conflict on national CBA implementation."
	Promotion & Welfare Conflicts	Delays in promotions, unclear criteria, and perceived unfair welfare policies.	Interviewees cited "issues to do with promotion and staff welfare."
Objective 2: Factors Escalating Conflicts	Communication Breakdowns	Delayed feedback, unclear communication channels, lack of structured crisis communication	Back and forth delays… seeking authority from management
	Distrust & Poor Collaboration	Staff believe management is not transparent or honest in communication.	They believe we are not acting in good faith."

	Policy Misalignment	Lack of harmonization between university policies and SRC guidelines.	SRC advised zero CBA; unions rejected."
Objective 3: Effectiveness of Communication Strategies	Open-Door Policy	Considered effective but inconsistently applied across departments	We encourage open-door policy… they are effective."
	Face-to-Face Engagement	Helps diffuse tensions and facilitate dialogue.	VC addresses staff directly during picketing."
	Use of Digital Channels	Bulk SMS, emails, memos, and union social media walls disseminate updates.	We use bulk SMS and memos; unions post on social walls."
Objective 4: Recommended Improvements	Training Needs	Need for negotiation, assertiveness, and conflict management training.	We need staff to be aware of communication channels… and be trained
	Honest & Transparent Communication	Building trust through consistent messaging and honoring commitments.	We should improve how honest our communication is."
	Harmonization of Compensation Policies	SRC policies should align with university realities to reduce recurrent disputes.	HR recommended "harmonization of SRC guidelines."

4.6.1 Objective 1: Types of Group Conflicts in University Unions

Thematic Finding 1: Recurrent Conflicts Over Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs)

Interview data revealed that disputes around the implementation of the national CBA were the most persistent conflicts. Issues included disagreements on financial increments, delayed approvals from the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC), and perceived inequities across unions. Human Resource respondents noted that

"the major conflict was on signing a zero CBA," indicating that union expectations were unmet, especially regarding monetary benefits. These findings mirror broader studies which identify compensation disputes as a leading cause of union–management conflict (Rahim et al., 2023).

Thematic Finding 2: Conflicts Related to Promotion and Staff Welfare

Promotion delays, welfare concerns, and perceived inconsistencies in policy implementation also fueled tensions within the university. Such issues are consistent with failure to recognize welfare and career progression as key triggers of organizational conflict (Williams & Martin, 2022).

4.6.2 Objective 2: Factors Contributing to Conflict Escalation

Thematic Finding 3: Ineffective Communication Channels

Both unions and management acknowledged that information flow was often delayed or inconsistent. Although the university used memos, bulk SMS, and open-door policies, staff frequently doubted the transparency of communication, particularly regarding salary delays and policy updates. The interviews showed that departmental heads often failed to address issues at their level, causing grievances to escalate vertically. This aligns with literature showing that unclear communication structures intensify conflicts (Kim & Wang, 2021).

Thematic Finding 4: Lack of Trust and Perceived Bad Faith

Union members often believed that management withheld crucial information, especially during financial crises. This lack of trust reinforces existing evidence that perceptions of dishonesty exacerbate conflict escalation (Giles & Ogay, 2021).

4.6.3 Objective 3: Effectiveness of Existing Communication Strategies

a) Quantitative Findings

Survey data indicated that **open communication and feedback mechanisms were perceived as effective**, with mean effectiveness ratings of **4.5/5**, while hierarchical or top-down communication was associated with higher conflict escalation rates (χ^2, $p < .05$). These statistical trends underscore the importance of transparency in conflict settings (Rahim et al., 2023).

b) Qualitative Findings

Interviews validated these quantitative outcomes. Respondents reported that face-to-face meetings, open-door policies, and dialogue sessions helped reduce tension. One participant noted that "open channels reduce misunderstandings," reflecting the principles of transparent communication in conflict environments (Kim & Wang, 2021). However, strategies such as mediation and arbitration were *rarely* used, suggesting a limited repertoire of conflict management tools.

4.6.4 Objective 4: Recommended Improved Strategies

a) **Thematic Finding 5: Need for Structured Communication Policies and Staff Awareness**

Participants emphasized the need to educate staff on formal communication channels and protocols. Management acknowledged that although a communication policy exists, awareness among staff remains low.

b) **Thematic Finding 6: Importance of Training in Negotiation and Conflict Management**

While some managers received negotiation training from the Kenya School of Government, no structured or continuous conflict management training exists. This gap

supports broader evidence that conflict resolution skills require continuous capacity-building (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2019).

c) **Thematic Finding 7: Harmonization of Salary Policies and Regularization of CBA Processes**

Interviewees recommended harmonizing salary structures in alignment with national directives to reduce CBA-related disputes.

The qualitative findings revealed significant tensions within union–management relations, primarily driven by communication gaps, misaligned expectations, and inconsistent application of institutional policies. Respondents from management acknowledged that delays in CBA implementation, inadequate financial allocations, and the influence of external bodies such as SRC and IPUCCF frequently triggered conflicts. Union officials, on the other hand, cited issues of transparency, delayed feedback, and inadequate staff involvement in decision-making as key sources of frustration.

Communication strategies currently in use such as open-door policies, memos, emails, bulk SMS, and occasional face-to-face meetings were acknowledged as helpful but inconsistently applied. Some departments reportedly failed to address grievances internally, resulting in premature escalation to HR or union leadership. The absence of structured crisis communication protocols reinforced mistrust and fueled tension, confirming patterns identified in the literature emphasizing the risks of poor communication structures (Kim & Wang, 2021; Giles & Ogay, 2021).

Quantitative findings strengthened these insights by showing that communication practices strongly correlated with conflict outcomes. Respondents rated open communication, timely feedback, and collaborative dialogue as the most effective conflict-management strategies (M = 4.5/5). Statistical tests also revealed that

hierarchical and top-down communication tended to escalate conflicts supporting Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles & Ogay, 2021), which asserts that mismatched communication styles increase social distance.

Integrating both data sources indicates that improving communication infrastructure, enhancing transparency, and training staff in conflict resolution are essential for reducing conflict escalation. Strengthening collaborative negotiation, improving policy harmonization, and adopting structured communication frameworks are recommended as sustainable solutions.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented, analyzed, and interpreted the qualitative and quantitative findings of the study, revealing how communication strategies influence the management of group conflicts between university unions and management at the University of Eldoret. Across the analyzed data, several key patterns emerged. First, the findings established that conflicts predominantly arise from issues related to Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) implementation, staff promotions, welfare concerns, and inconsistencies in communicating institutional decisions. These conflicts were shown to escalate where communication channels were unclear, feedback was delayed, and trust between management and union representatives was weak.

The analysis demonstrated that while the university employs a number of communication strategies such as open-door policies, memos, face-to-face meetings, and digital channels, their effectiveness is limited by structural challenges such as lack of harmonized communication policies, inadequate crisis communication procedures, and fragmented departmental communication. Quantitative findings further confirmed

that open communication and prompt feedback are strongly associated with improved conflict management outcomes.

The integration of theoretical perspectives provided a deeper understanding of the findings. SCCT clarified how conflict responses varied depending on perceived responsibility, while CAT illuminated the communicative adjustments and power relations between stakeholders. The Onion Theory helped uncover underlying tensions and historical grievances that fueled conflict recurrence, while Systems Theory highlighted systemic breakdowns in communication structures that undermined the effectiveness of conflict resolution processes. Together, these theories explain not only what conflicts occur and how, but also why existing strategies succeed or fail within the university context.

The findings suggest that although current communication strategies address immediate concerns, they do not sufficiently engage with the deeper interpersonal, structural, and systemic issues driving conflict. This highlights the need for more intentional, transparent, and layered communication practices that align with the complexity of union–management relations in higher education institutions.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the major findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study, which examined the effectiveness of communication strategies in managing group conflicts within university unions and university management, with a focus on the University of Eldoret, Kenya. The chapter integrates theoretical insights from Systems Theory, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), and the Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) to explain the study outcomes.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

5.1.1 Types and Nature of Group Conflicts

The study established that group conflicts were prevalent between unionized staff and university management. The dominant sources of conflict were linked to differences in opinions, values, and perceived inequities in implementing Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs). These findings align with Oetzel and Ting-Toomey (2019), who argue that value-based conflicts often emerge from divergent expectations and organizational communication breakdowns.

5.1.2 Factors Contributing to Conflict Escalation

Poor communication, power struggles, job insecurity, and cultural misunderstandings were identified as primary contributors to conflict escalation. Participants reported that delayed feedback, lack of transparency, and mistrust between management and union leaders often intensified disputes. These observations resonate with Bodenhausen et al. (2021), who highlight that ineffective communication structures amplify workplace tensions and reduce morale.

5.1.3 Effectiveness of Current Communication Strategies

The university relied on open communication, dialogue forums, and meetings as the main strategies for managing disputes. While these methods encouraged engagement, their impact was limited by inconsistent communication channels and inadequate feedback mechanisms. Quantitative results showed that open communication and active listening improved conflict outcomes, echoing Dixon and Adamson's (2020) assertion that trust-based communication enhances resolution efficiency. However, respondents also called for structured mediation and arbitration frameworks to supplement open dialogue.

5.1.4 Recommended Improvements

Participants recommended enhanced use of mediation, conflict resolution training, assertive communication, and arbitration to strengthen existing practices. These findings align with Rahim (2018) and Gelfand et al. (2023), who emphasize that context-specific communication strategies yield better outcomes in managing organizational conflicts.

5.2 Emerging Knowledge

The study contributes new insights into the role of communication in higher education conflict management:

1. **Mediation and Conciliation**

   Mediation was found to foster mutual understanding by providing a neutral space for dialogue, while conciliation informally diffused tension before escalation (Baruch & Rousseau, 2021; Cloke & Goldsmith, 2022).

2. **Open and Assertive Communication**

   Transparent communication channels encouraged grievance airing without fear, while assertive communication allowed constructive self-expression. This reflects Thomas and Kilmann's (2021) model, emphasizing assertiveness and cooperation as key to sustainable resolution.

3. **Collaboration and CBAs**

   Collaborative approaches and CBAs were instrumental in preventing recurring conflicts by establishing predictable, formalized communication frameworks (Rubinstein & Kochan, 2020).

4. **Digital and Restorative Communication**

   The rise of digital platforms and restorative justice practices reshaped communication dynamics, emphasizing relational repair and inclusivity (Smith & Taylor, 2022; Zehr & Gohar, 2021).

5.3 Theoretical Application to the Study

5.3.1 Systems Theory

According to Luhmann (2021), organizations function as interdependent systems where disruptions in one part affect the whole. The study confirmed that poor feedback mechanisms, fragmented communication, and hierarchical barriers created systemic breakdowns that escalated conflicts. Effective communication, therefore, required alignment across departments and leadership levels to maintain organizational equilibrium.

5.3.2 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Giles (2016) posits that communication effectiveness depends on one's ability to adjust linguistic and behavioral patterns to the interlocutor's needs. The study demonstrated that management's failure to accommodate union members' communication styles

particularly regarding tone, feedback, and timing which worsened misunderstandings. Adapting messages to audience expectations enhanced trust and mutual respect.

5.3.3 Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT)

Drawing on Coombs (2022), SCCT explains how communication strategies vary depending on the perceived responsibility for a crisis. The study found that when management took ownership of miscommunication or policy inconsistencies, reconciliation was faster. Conversely, defensive communication led to blame cycles and diminished credibility. Thus, proactive, transparent responses are critical for crisis containment in university contexts.

5.3.4 Integrated Layered Crisis Communication Model (ILCCM)

The study proposes the Integrated Layered Crisis Communication Model (ILCCM), which synthesizes the above theories into a cohesive framework for managing complex organizational conflicts. The ILCCM operates across four interrelated phases:

1. **Layered Communication:** Recognizes crises as multi-layered, requiring tailored messaging at the levels of core causes, internal responses, external perceptions, and media influence (Littlejohn & Foss, 2022).
2. **Strategic Adaptation:** Encourages convergence or divergence in messaging based on audience sensitivity and cultural context (Giles et al., 2023).
3. **Systemic Response:** Reflects Systems Theory's principle of interconnectivity by promoting coordination across leadership, departments, and stakeholders.
4. **Crisis-Type Strategies:** Integrates SCCT's response typologies such as denial, diminishing responsibility, rebuilding trust, and reputation reinforcement (Coombs, 2024).

Collectively, ILCCM provides a dynamic, context-sensitive approach that integrates conflict management, communication adaptation, and systemic feedback for sustained institutional harmony.

5.4 Conclusions

The study concludes that communication plays a central role in both escalating and resolving university-based conflicts. Poor communication channels, lack of transparency, and limited accommodation of diverse perspectives intensify conflicts, whereas open, assertive, and adaptive communication fosters understanding and cooperation. Integrating Systems Theory, CAT, and SCCT illuminates how communication failures disrupt organizational balance and how adaptive, transparent, and systemic communication can restore stability. Implementing ILCCM offers a holistic and proactive framework for conflict management, strengthening institutional trust and productivity.

5.5 Recommendations

1. **Enhance Communication and Conflict Management Training**

   Universities should institutionalize regular workshops to build skills in negotiation, mediation, and assertive communication (Rahim, 2018; Lempereur et al., 2021).

2. **Promote Open Communication and Transparency**

   Create consistent feedback loops and accessible communication platforms to ensure timely information flow (Malik & Aftab, 2024).

3. **Implement Mediation and Arbitration Mechanisms**

   Formalize mediation and arbitration structures with clear protocols for impartial resolution (Dai & Chen, 2022; Gelfand et al., 2023).

4. **Foster Cultural Sensitivity**

   Train staff on intercultural communication to align with CAT's emphasis on adaptive interaction (Giles, 2016).

5. **Develop Proactive Conflict Policies**

   Establish clear communication and conflict management policies guided by SCCT principles to prevent crisis escalation (Coombs, 2022).

6. **Establish Employee Support Systems**

   Introduce counseling and peer support programs to mitigate the emotional toll of workplace conflicts (Bodenhausen et al., 2021).

The recommendations outlined above are designed to enhance the effectiveness of communication strategies in managing group conflicts within university unions. By investing in communication training, fostering open and transparent communication, implementing mediation and arbitration mechanisms, promoting cultural sensitivity, developing proactive conflict management policies, and establishing support systems for affected employees, universities can create a more harmonious and productive work environment. These recommendations are grounded in both the findings of this study and the broader literature on conflict management, providing a comprehensive approach to resolving conflicts in university unions.

Further, the study recommends an enhanced model that can singly deal with the multiple emerging issues in communication, conflict management and resolution for a successful and peaceful working environment. The recommended model is termed as Integrated Layered Crisis Communication Model (ILCCM) which can be further developed to simplify the process of communication and conflict management.

5.5.1 Integrated Layered Crisis Communication Model (ILCCM)

(a) Overview

The Integrated Layered Crisis Communication Model (ILCCM) is a comprehensive framework designed to explain how organizations should communicate during conflict and crisis situations. The model recognizes that crises, whether organizational, relational, or reputational does not occur at one level. instead, they unfold in layers, involve multiple actors, and require communication strategies that are adaptable, systemic, and context-specific.

ILCCM helps explain why communication challenges between university management and labour unions escalate into prolonged disputes and how improved communication structures can enhance conflict resolution.

b) Layered Crisis Communication: Understanding the Multi-Level Nature of Conflict

This component emphasizes that crises evolve through several interconnected layers such as:

(i) Core Causes

These are the root factors triggering conflict, such as delayed CBA implementation, unclear policy guidelines, lack of transparency, or staff promotion disputes at the University of Eldoret.

In the study, these "core causes" reflect underlying tensions linked to mistrust, inadequate communication, and policy misalignment.

(ii) Internal Responses

These involve how management reacts whenever there is conflict through either emergency meetings, memos, staff briefings, or negotiations with unions concerning

existing issues. Findings revealed that internal responses at the University of Eldoret were often slow or inconsistent, contributing to conflict escalation.

(iii) External Perceptions

This refers to how external stakeholders such as clients, media and the public perceive the conflict, shaped by their own experiences or limited information. The study showed that unions mainly rely on their leaders' communication rather than management, creating parallel narratives and mistrust.

(iv) Media Influence

The role of media in shaping narratives about the crisis, which can either amplify, distort or mitigate the situation depending on coverage and framing. Media platforms, either formal or social can amplify tensions. Union WhatsApp groups, social media posts, and public commentary often escalate pressure on an institution.

c) Relevance to the study

This layered understanding explains why conflicts persist: surface issues such as feedback, medical cover and salary delay often mask deeper problems resulting into mistrust and communication breakdown. ILCCM therefore, supports the study's argument that addressing deeper layers of conflict is essential for lasting solutions.

The study reveals that crisis communication is understood in layers; core causes, internal responses, external perceptions, and media influence. Each layer requires tailored messaging and engagement strategies, while conflict communication requires gradual information disclosure, moving from superficial to deep layers based on trust and relationships.

d) Strategic Message Adaptation: Adjusting Communication to Stakeholder Needs

ILCCM emphasizes that communication must be strategically adapted based on:

(i) Convergence

Aligning messages with stakeholders' expectations to build trust and credibility, for example using transparent language, offering explanations, or acknowledging grievances.

(ii) Divergence

Differentiating the institution's stance to maintain its integrity and avoid misinformation, such as clarifying SRC conditions on adopting harmonized compensation system as government agency even when unions disagree. Communicators must adjust their messaging style, tone, and medium depending on the audience's expectations and cultural background.

(iii)Application to the University of Eldoret

The study found that management sometimes failed to adjust messages to union expectations, creating perceptions of arrogance or insensitivity. Conversely, unions adapted their communication styles depending on their goals, exemplifying convergence and divergence in practice.

e) Systemic Crisis Response: Interconnectedness of People, Processes, and Structures

This component is rooted in Systems Theory and highlights that crisis communication must involve:

(i) Coordinated internal teams

Management, Human Resource, Union representatives, corporate affairs-PR, Legal advisors and Council members must communicate consistently.

(ii) Strong leadership involvement

Effective crisis communication depends on visible, decisive leadership. The study showed that unions sometimes demanded direct communication from the Vice Chancellor because they did not trust delegated communication.

(iii) Transparent stakeholder engagement

Regular updates, feedback loops, and clear channels are necessary to prevent rumours and tensions.

Relevance to the study

Weak departmental communication, delayed feedback, and lack of a unified crisis strategy reflect systemic issues. ILCCM shows how these interconnections, when poorly aligned intensify union-management conflict.

f) Crisis Type-Based Strategies: Matching Response to Conflict Severity

This phase outlines four crisis response categories;

- **Denial**: used when allegations are false;
- **Diminishing Responsibility:** justifying actions or clarifying constraints;
- **Rebuilding Trust**: Apologies, corrective action, compensation to regain credibility and restore relationship; and
- **Reinforcing Reputation**: Long-term credibility strategies

g) Application to the study

The University of Eldoret used denial or diminishing responsibility during CBA disputes such as SRC restrictions in relations to adopting harmonized salary scales, and occasionally used trust-rebuilding strategies like negotiated agreements. The model therefore helps interpret which strategies were effective or ineffective in given situations.

h) Summary Interpretation of ILCCM

The ILCCM explains crisis communication as a step-by-step layered process:

(i) **Crises have layers** which include root causes, internal responses, public perceptions, and media influence. The layered frameworks enhance understanding of deep-seated issues (Littlejohn & Foss, 2022).

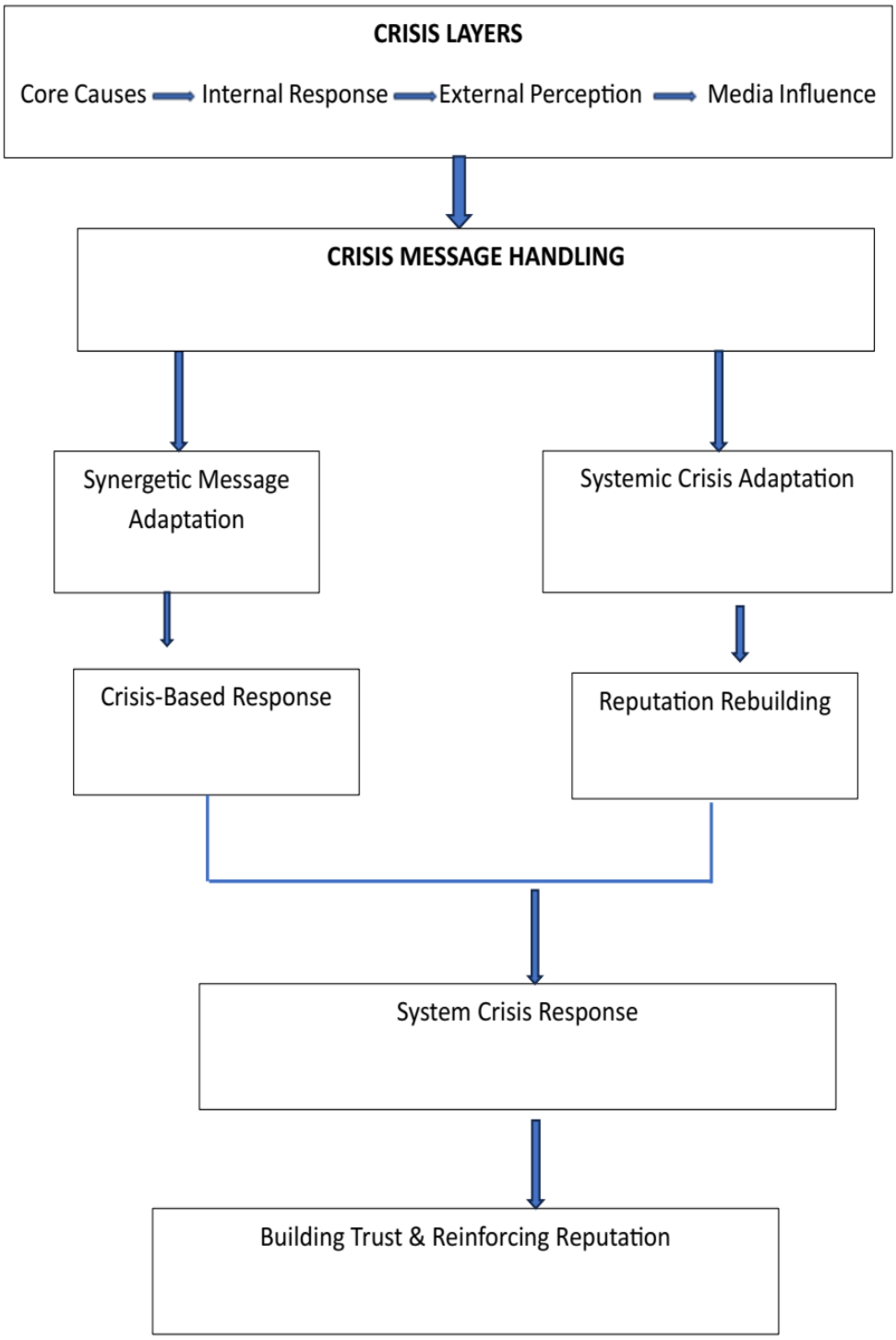
(ii) **Messages must be adapted** to different audiences to avoid conflict escalation. Adaptability in communication is critical for conflict resolution and crisis mitigation (Giles et al, 2023).

(iii) **Crisis response is systemic** whereby decisions in one part of the organization affect the whole structure. Systemic approaches acknowledge interdependencies, ensuring a comprehensive response to conflicts (Luhmann, 2021).

(iv) **Different crises need different strategies**, from denial to reputation rebuilding. Crisis communication models provide tailored responses, preventing escalation and ensuring institutional reputation management (Coombs, 2024).

The ILCCM shows that effective crisis and conflict communication must be layered, flexible, and systemic. This directly supports the study's findings: conflict in university unions cannot be solved with surface-level communication only. It requires strategic, timely, transparent, and coordinated communication across all organizational levels.

INTEGRATED LAYERED CRISIS COMMUNICATION MODEL



5.5.2 Linking the Model to the Study:

Applying ILCCM to the University of Eldoret demonstrates the following:

a) Conflict escalated because communication did not adequately address deeper layers related to values, mistrust.
b) Messages were not always adapted to union expectations, causing misalignment.
c) Systemic weaknesses like slow feedback and unclear communication structures amplified conflicts.
d) Crisis responses were not always matched with crisis severity.

Thus, ILCCM underscores the importance of strengthening communication systems, improving transparency, training staff, and aligning institutional responses. These insights directly shape the recommendations in this section, which propose practical strategies for enhancing communication and managing conflicts more effectively.

5.6 Recommendations for Further Research

The study makes the following recommendations for further research:

a) There is need to find out the effectiveness of meetings as a means of communication in universities as they seem the most preferred in public universities;
b) Study effectiveness of communication and its role in addressing conflict in other government institutions including universities and parastatals.
c) Adaptation of the Integrated Layered Crisis Communication Model (ILCCM) in organizational communication and conflict management.
d) Using Communication strategies in conflict management in Kenyan Public Universities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Researcher's Introduction Letter

Dear Respondent,

RE: QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a Masters Student at the School of Information Science. The aim of this study is to establish effective communication strategies for managing group conflict in organization.

The study specifically seeks to explore the nature of communication between different groups; investigate issues that trigger conflicts in groups and how communication strategies might play a role in the management of inter labour union conflicts in organization.

The information you will give will be used only for this study and will be treated as confidential.

Thank you.

Jepkemboi Kirwa

Moi University,

School of Information Science

Appendix II: Questionnaire for Respondents

This Questionnaire is meant to collect data among University staff falling under the three unions; KUDEIHA, KUSU and UASU at the University of Eldoret. Please answer the questions correctly and as accurate as possible.

Tick the correct answer in the boxes provided against the questions where provided.

Write brief answers where explanation is required.

Please do not write your name on the questionnaire.

Section 1: Demographics

1. What is your current role in the university union?

   a. Union worker

   b. Management

   c. Other (please specify): _____

2. How long have you worked in the university union?

   a. Less than a year

   b. 1-5 years

   c. 5-10 years

   d. More than 10 years

3. What is your age?

   a. 18-24 ☐

   b. 25-34 ☐

   c. 35-44 ☐

   d. 45-54 ☐

   e. 55 and above ☐

4. What is your gender?

   a. Male ☐

b. Female

c. Other (please specify): _____

Section 2: Group Conflicts in University Unions

1. Have you experienced any group conflicts in your role in the university union?

a. Yes

b. No

2. If yes, please select the most common types of group conflicts that occur in university unions:

a. Differences in opinions and values

b. Conflicts between union workers and management

c. Conflicts between union workers

d. Conflicts between union workers and other staff members

e. Other (please specify): _____

3. What factors do you think contribute to the escalation of group conflicts in university unions? (Select all that apply)

a. Lack of communication

b. Power struggles

c. Inadequate conflict resolution skills

d. Job insecurity

e. Cultural differences

f. Other (please specify): _____

4. How are group conflicts currently managed in university unions?

a. Through open communication

b. Through mediation

c. Through disciplinary actions

d. Through legal actions

e. Other (please specify): _____

5. In your opinion, how effective are the current communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university unions?

a. Very effective

b. Somewhat effective

c. Not very effective

d. Not at all effective

Section 3: Role of Training and Education

1. Have you received any training or education on communication and conflict management skills?

a. Yes

b. No

2. If yes, what was the nature of the training or education received? (Select all that apply)

a. Workshops

b. Seminars

c. Online courses

d. In-person courses

e. Other (please specify): _____

3. How effective was the training or education in improving your communication and conflict management skills?

a. Very effective

b. Somewhat effective

c. Not very effective

d. Not at all effective

4. In your opinion, what is the best approach for implementing training and education programs on communication and conflict management skills in university settings?

a. Mandatory training for all staff members

b. Optional training for interested staff members

c. Online training modules

d. In-person workshops or seminars

e. Other (please specify): _____

Section 4: Effective Communication Strategies for Managing Group Conflicts

1. In your opinion, what are the most effective communication strategies for managing group conflicts in university unions? (Select all that apply)

a. Active listening

b. Open communication

c. Mediation

d. Conflict resolution training

e. Clear communication channels

f. Arbitration

g. Other (please specify): _____

2. How do these strategies vary based on the type of conflict and the stakeholders involved?

a. They do not vary

b. They vary based on the type of conflict

c. They vary based on the stakeholders involved

d. They vary

Appendix III: Open ended Questionnaire for interviews

Questionnaire for respondents

This Questionnaire is meant to collect data among University staff falling under the three unions; KUDEIHA, KUSU and ASU at the University of Eldoret. Please answer the questions correctly and as accurate as possible.

Tick the correct answer in the boxes provided against the questions where provided.

Write brief answers where explanation is required.

Please do not write your name on the questionnaire.

Questionnaire for interview

1. To identify the most common types of group conflicts that occur in university unions and the factors that contribute to their escalation.

a. Can you describe a recent conflict that occurred within the university union?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

b. What were the main factors that contributed to the escalation of the conflict?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

c. How were the parties involved in the conflict able to resolve it?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

2. To evaluate the current communication strategies used to manage group conflicts in university unions and their effectiveness.

a. Can you describe the communication strategies currently used to manage conflicts within the university union?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

b. In your opinion, how effective are these communication strategies in preventing or resolving conflicts?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

c. Are there any specific communication strategies that have been particularly effective in your experience?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

3. To investigate the role of training and education in improving communication and conflict management skills among unionized workers and management.

a. Have you participated in any training or education programs related to communication or conflict management within the university union?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

b. In your opinion, how effective were these programs in improving your communication or conflict management skills?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

c. What do you think would be the most effective approach for implementing these types of programs within the university setting?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

.....

4. To develop evidence-based recommendations for effective communication strategies to manage group conflicts in university unions based on the findings of the study.

a. Based on your experience, what do you think would be the most effective communication strategies for managing group conflicts within the university union?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

b. How do you think these strategies could be tailored to different types of conflicts and stakeholders involved?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

.....

c. Are there any other recommendations you would make to improve communication and conflict management within the university union?

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

vii) .....

.....

5. What type(s) of communication does your institution adopt:

i) .....

ii) .....

iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

6. How is conflict/grievances resolved in your organization: state the relevant

i) .....

ii) .....

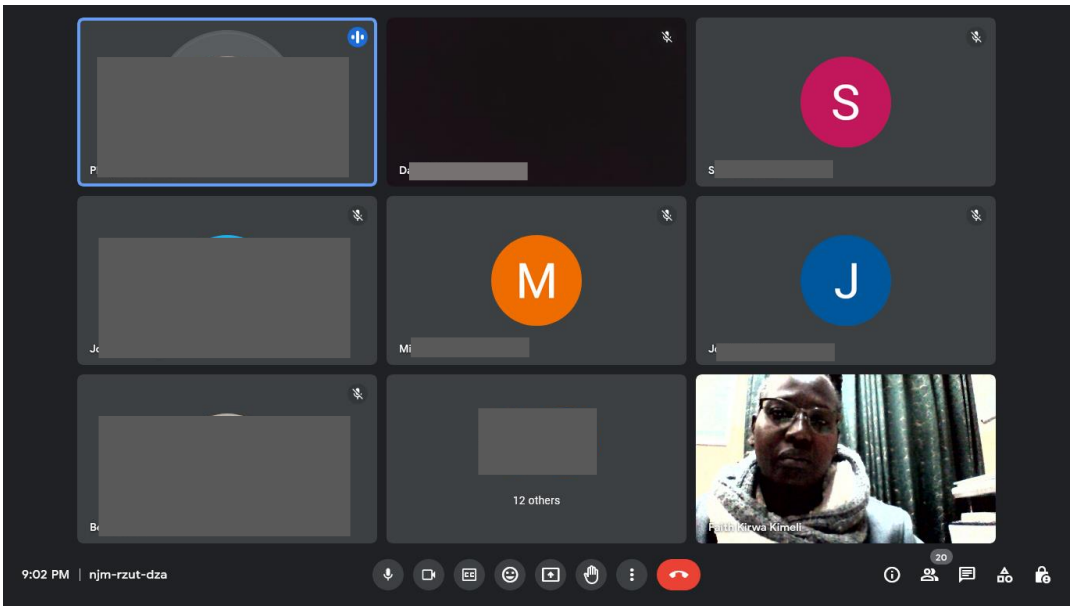
iii) .....

iv) .....

v) .....

vi) .....

Appendix IV: Virtual Focus Group Discussion (VFGDS)



Appendix V: Authorisation Letter from University Of Eldoret

University of Eldoret
flame of knowledge and innovation

P. O. Box 1125 - 30100, Eldoret, Kenya
Tel: +254 788 232 004/+254 740354966
E-mail: dvcpre@uoeld.ac.ke
Website: www.uoeld.ac.ke

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR
(PLANNING, RESEARCH & EXTENSION)

REF: UoE/D/DVPRE/LOS/075 **22nd June, 2023**

Ms. Jepkemboi Kirwa
Moi University
P.O. Box 3900-30100
ELDORET

Dear Madam,

RE: REQUEST TO COLLECT RESEARCH DATA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ELDORET

We refer to your application to carry out research on the topic: ***''Communication Strategies used in Group conflict Management in Universities: A case of University of Eldoret, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya***'.' and are pleased to inform you that your request has been approved.

You are advised to report to the Deputy Vice- Chancellor (PRE) on arrival at the University to commence your research. The permission is also granted on condition that you will share the findings with the University once you complete your studies.

Yours faithfully,

Deputy Vice Chancellor
Planning, Research & Extension
University Of Eldoret

PROF. P. O. RABURU
DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR (PLANNING, RESEARCH & EXTENSION)

Cc: Ag. Vice-Chancellor

University of Eldoret is ISO 9001:2015Certified

Appendix VI: Research Permit

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE,TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: 551406

Date of Issue: 17/June/2023

RESEARCH LICENSE

This is to Certify that Ms.. Jepkemboi Kirwa of Moi University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Uasin-Gishu on the topic: AN EVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES USED IN GROUP CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES: A CASE OF UNIVERSITY OF ELDORET, UASIN GISHU COUNTY, KENYA for the period ending : 17/June/2024.

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See overleaf for conditions

Appendix VII: Plagiarism Awareness Certificate

SR905

ISO 9001:2019 Certified Institution

THESIS WRITING COURSE

PLAGIARISM AWARENESS CERTIFICATE

This certificate is awarded to

JEPKEMBOI KIRWA

SHRD/PGC/07/16

In recognition for passing the University's plagiarism

Awareness test for Thesis **entitled: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN RESOLVING CONFLICTS BETWEEN STAFF UNIONS AND UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: A CASE OF UNIVERSITY OF ELDORET with** similarity index of 14% and striving to maintain academic integrity.

Word count:40417

Awarded by

Prof. Anne Syomwene Kisilu
CERM-ESA Project Leader Date: 07/07/2025