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Shaping Organizational Success: Do Conflict Management Strategies Drive Performance Through Trust-Building in Ethiopian Public Bureaus?

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of conflict management strategies on organizational performance, mediated by trust building, within public bureaus of the Oromia Region, Ethiopia, by employing a quantitative research approach that includes descriptive and explanatory research design. The study sought to uncover the underlying mechanisms through which conflict management practices influence organizational outcomes. A quantitative component involving a survey of 225 managers at different levels employed descriptive statistics, CFA, and SEM to examine the hypothesized relationships. The findings revealed a compelling picture of the effect of conflict management strategies on organizational performance. Specifically, the study demonstrated that cooperative conflict management styles, such as compromising and integrating, were positively associated with both trust building and organizational performance. Conversely, dominating behavior exerted a detrimental influence on these outcomes. Importantly, the study identified a partial mediating role of trust building in the relationship between certain conflict management strategies (compromising, integrating, and avoiding) and performance. These results underscore the critical importance of fostering a collaborative and trust-based organizational culture within public bureaus in Oromia, Ethiopia. Public bureaus can significantly improve their performance and achieve desired outcomes by prioritizing cooperative conflict management approaches and implementing strategies to enhance trust. The research has some limitations including potential social desirability bias and contextual nuances. The study implies that exploring the relationships among conflict management strategies, trust, and performance contributes to a deeper understanding of organizational behavior dynamics.

Organizational life is inherently characterized by conflict, which arises from interactions between people who sense resistance to their goals and values but have interdependent goals (Rahim, 2011). Because various individuals must work together in organizations to accomplish common goals, conflicts may arise in both personal and professional contexts. In order to minimize bad effects and maximize favorable ones, these conflicts must be managed effectively because they can be both constructive and destructive (Akhtar et al., 2020). Due to its dual character, conflict can undermine organizational harmony, but when handled properly, it can also spur innovation and advancement (Rahim, 2011).

Effective conflict management is crucial as it involves strategies that minimize adverse effects while maximizing beneficial outcomes. Conflict in organizations arises due to numerous issues that include resource competition, variation in values and beliefs, and communication breakdown, among others, as indicated by authors such as Omisore and Abiodun (2014) and Taher et al. (2018). The inevitability of conflict in organizational settings underscores the importance of developing robust conflict resolution strategies that can transform potential disruptions into opportunities for growth (Mwaniki & Muathe, 2021). Moreover, leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping conflict management approaches. Leaders must possess the skills to navigate conflicts effectively, as their strategies can significantly impact organizational performance (Mohammed, 2020; Tamunomiebi & Elechi, 2020). Research indicates that managers allocate a substantial portion of their time, approximately 20%, to resolving conflicts, highlighting the critical nature of this responsibility (Yi, 2019).

In sub-Saharan Africa, including Ethiopia, conflict resolution has emerged as a pressing concern for human resource managers due to the increasing prevalence of workplace disputes (Chu & Fafchamps, 2022). Igbinoba (2016) claims that management executives in Nigeria are now devoting twice as much effort to resolving employee conflicts as they were ten years ago. According to Omulo (2017), traditional workplace practices and systems in Kenya are no longer deemed adequate due to their tendency to foster conflict. These practices and systems include hierarchical structures, strict divisions of labor, jobs that are narrowly defined, detailed rules, limited employee involvement, and managerial decision-making, authority, and control. However, performance in the majority of Tanzanian companies has declined due to frequent organizational conflict (Masalu, 2015).

Particularly in Ethiopia, conflicts have intensified recently, resulting in serious social unrest and humanitarian disasters (Yigzaw & Abitew, 2019). This situation calls for a more thorough comprehension of how conflict resolution techniques can be modified to meet the particular difficulties faced by organizations in this area. In prior research, effective conflict management techniques have been linked to improved organizational performance (Akanji, 2005; Nneka, 2019; Sammy, 2016; Obasan, 2011), indicating that well-managed conflicts can boost output and promote a cooperative workplace.

Trust building is also increasingly recognized as a vital component in effective conflict management strategies and organizational performance. Trust enhances team dynamics and facilitates open communication, which are essential for constructive conflict management (Asencio, 2016; Paliszkiewicz, 2021; Vanhala & Tzafrir, 2021). The interplay between trust and conflict management strategies may significantly influence organizational outcomes by promoting a culture of collaboration and resilience. Organizational trust can be an essential

factor in improving business performance and a source of sustainable competitive advantage (Guinot et al., 2013).

The literature indicates that conflict management strategies have two primary effects on organizational performance: positive and negative effects. However, the current published literature offers a lot of information about the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and organizational success. The mechanisms through which trust-building initiatives and conflict-resolution tactics impact organizational performance are not discussed in the literature, which is surprising. Further research is required to ascertain the effects of these strategies on organizational performance. According to Paliszkievicz et al. (2022), Lenton and Mosley (2011), and Mayer and Gavin (2005), despite the fact that numerous research studies have shown a connection between trust and individual performance, the mechanism underlying this relationship is still unknown.

Several researchers (e.g., Omene, 2021; Tamunomiebi & Elechi, 2020) noted that an effective conflict resolution strategy ensures good communication, time management, good cooperation, and organizational performance. Neskertin and Porterfield (2016) are of the view that managing and handling conflict increases the support of the team members within the organization. This ultimately affects the performance positively. M'mbwanga (2021), Akhtar et al. (2020), Omulo (2017), and Ajike et al. (2015) posited that conflict management strategies and organizational performance found a statistically significant and positive relationship between them. Thus, organizational performance can be enhanced when the organization maintains an acceptable level of conflict resolution in the work environment that helps to coordinate and control the activities of the organization (Agbo, 2020). Ajike et al. (2015) argued that though conflict is often viewed as negative, it is capable of increasing organizational innovativeness and productivity, thereby improving organizational performance.

Conversely, if the dispute is not handled properly, it leads to the destruction of moral beings on a political, social, and provident level (Dahl, 2023). According to Awan and Saeed (2014), disagreements can have a variety of negative effects on a company, including low performance, insubordination, decreased production, financial loss, and fragmentation. In addition to maintaining open lines of communication between management and employees and encouraging interpersonal ties among coworkers to raise morale, management must implement conflict management techniques that enhance the organization's performance. According to Hicks (2021), not all conflict is bad, but if it is not handled and resolved right away, even a small argument between two individuals might worsen. Further, their research showed that conflict is very much a part of organizational life and a common occurrence at work.

In Ethiopia's Oromia Regional State, bureaucracies play a critical role in public service delivery and regional development (Daba, 2020). According to Daba (2020), yet, the effectiveness of these bureaucracies can be significantly hampered by ineffective conflict management strategies. While prior studies such as Gomathy et al. (2022), Mwaniki and Muathe (2021), and Akhtar et al. (2020) have explored conflict management in various organizational settings globally, there remains a notable gap in research specifically examining its dynamics within public sector bureaus in Ethiopia. Specifically, the absence of context-specific research leaves a critical knowledge gap: how can conflict management

strategies be effectively tailored to navigate the complex interplay of ethnic diversity, socio-political instability, and bureaucratic function in Oromia (Mengist, 2020; Van Hecke et al., 2021). Furthermore, the potential mediating role of trust-building efforts in this specific environment is largely unexplored. In a region where trust has been significantly eroded by conflict, understanding how to rebuild it and leverage it to enhance organizational performance is paramount (Apriliyati & Pasan, 2024; Ghossein & Rana, 2022). This gap invites further investigation into how trust-building efforts can mediate the relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational performance.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the complexities of conflict within selected bureaus of the Oromia Regional State by assessing their nature and specific conflict management strategies and their effect on organizational performance using the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). Additionally, it evaluates the current conflict management strategies and investigates how trust building can create an environment conducive to constructive conflict management. By addressing these paradoxical ideas surrounding conflict's role in organizations, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into developing effective strategies that enhance bureaucratic efficiency and contribute to the broader development goals of the Oromia Regional State. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How do conflict management strategies affect the performance of selected public bureaus in the Oromia Regional State?
2. How does trust building mediate the relationship between conflict management strategies and performance?

Literature Review

Concepts of Conflicts

According to Zhao and Chen (2014), the notion of conflict differs greatly between the various fields of physics, mathematics, biology, psychology, economics, political science, and organizational behavior. Adopt the definition of conflict in the organizational behavior area for this study. According to Thomas (1992), conflict starts when one party believes that another has raised or is going to raise a concern of theirs or the party. Conflict arises when individuals or groups believe another person's actions harm their interests (Labovitz, 1980). The process that starts when one party believes another party has impacted or is going to negatively impact something the first party cares about is known as conflict, according to Robbins and Judge (2017). Conflict refers to the moment in a continuous activity when interaction turns into disagreement.

Easterbrook et al. (1993) also stated that a fundamental aspect of collaborative work is that individuals are not identical and will approach the same task with differences in their expectations, goals, and preferred working styles. They will have different amounts of time to commit to the resolution of a problem and even different notions of what the problem is. These differences will, at times, lead to conflict. Thus, conflict, which is a natural outcome of human interaction, begins when one individual perceives that their goals, attitudes, values, or beliefs are incongruent with those of another individual (Rahim, 2000).

Theoretical Frameworks

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) is a widely recognized tool developed by Thomas in 1974 to assess an individual's preferred conflict management style. The TKI categorizes conflict management strategies into five distinct styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Each style represents a different approach to handling conflict based on two dimensions: assertiveness and cooperativeness (Thomas, 1974).

Dominating: This style is characterized by a high degree of assertiveness and low cooperativeness. Individuals using this approach aim to win the conflict at the expense of others; often employing power dynamics or authority to achieve their goals (Thomas, 1974).

Integrating: This style reflects both high assertiveness and high cooperativeness. It involves working together with others to find a mutually beneficial solution that satisfies all parties' needs, fostering open communication and trust (Thomas, 1974).

Compromising: This approach represents moderate levels of both assertiveness and cooperativeness. Individuals using this style seek a quick, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies both parties, often involving concessions (Thomas, 1974).

Avoiding: Characterized by low assertiveness and low cooperativeness, this style involves sidestepping the conflict altogether. Individuals may withdraw from the situation or delay addressing the issue, which can lead to unresolved tensions (Thomas, 1974).

Accommodating: This style is marked by low assertiveness and high cooperativeness. Individuals prioritize the other party's needs over their own, often yielding in order to maintain harmony and relationships (Thomas, 1974).

The TKI has been extensively used in various organizational settings, including public organizations. By applying the TKI to public sector employees, organizations can gain insights into the dominant conflict management styles within their workforce. This knowledge can be used to identify potential areas for improvement, such as training programs to develop more effective conflict resolution skills (Awan & Saeed, 2014). For instance, a study by Berhanu (2014) indicated that compromising is often the dominant strategy used in Ethiopian schools, suggesting a cultural inclination towards finding a middle ground in conflicts. This aligns with the TKI's premise that understanding one's conflict style can facilitate more effective interactions among team members. Furthermore, integrating collaborative approaches can enhance teamwork and communication within public organizations, leading to improved problem-solving capabilities and overall performance (Gomathy et al., 2022). Moreover, as public organizations increasingly emphasize transparency and accountability, adopting collaborative strategies can foster trust among employees and stakeholders. Trust is essential for effective collaboration; thus, utilizing the TKI can help organizations develop training programs that enhance collaborative skills among employees (Asencio, 2016).

Therefore, this study used the TKI theory to investigate conflict management strategies and organizational performance in public bureaus of the Oromia regional state, Ethiopia.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The resource-based view (RBV) is a strategic management theory that proposes that a firm's competitive advantage stems from its unique bundle of resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991). These resources can be tangible, such as physical assets, or intangible, such as human capital, brand reputation, and organizational culture. According to RBV, organizations should focus on leveraging their unique resources, such as human capital, organizational culture, and technological capabilities, to achieve better performance outcomes than their competitors. This perspective shifts the focus from external market conditions to the internal capabilities of the organization, suggesting that effective management of these resources is crucial for long-term success (Wernerfelt, 1984).

Public organizations can utilize technological advancements as a resource to enhance service delivery and operational efficiency. For example, implementing digital platforms for communication and service provision can streamline processes and improve citizen engagement (Heeks & Bailur, 2007). By leveraging technology effectively, public organizations can create value for stakeholders while optimizing resource utilization. Additionally, RBV emphasizes the importance of building relationships with stakeholders as a critical resource. Public organizations can engage with citizens, community groups, and other stakeholders to gather feedback and foster collaboration. This engagement not only enhances transparency but also helps organizations align their services with community needs (Bryson et al., 2013). Public organizations can improve their legitimacy and accountability by viewing stakeholder relationships as valuable resources.

Effective conflict management strategies within public organizations can be viewed through the lens of RBV. Public entities can mitigate the negative impacts of conflicts on performance by identifying and developing conflict resolution capabilities as an organizational resource (Mwaniki & Muathe, 2021). This includes training employees in various conflict management strategies, such as collaborating or compromising to foster a more harmonious work environment.

Therefore, this study used the RBV model to measure the dependent variable (organizational performance).

The Trust-Performance Linkage Model

The trust-performance linkage model posits that trust among employees significantly enhances collaboration and communication, which in turn leads to improved organizational performance. This model is grounded in the premise that trust serves as a critical facilitator of effective teamwork and organizational effectiveness (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust is defined as the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor (Mayer et al., 1995). Research has shown that trust can mitigate the negative effects of conflict by fostering an environment where open communication is encouraged. When trust levels are high, employees are more likely to share information, collaborate on problem-solving, and engage in constructive conflict resolution (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). This positive dynamic not only enhances individual performance but also contributes to overall organizational effectiveness.

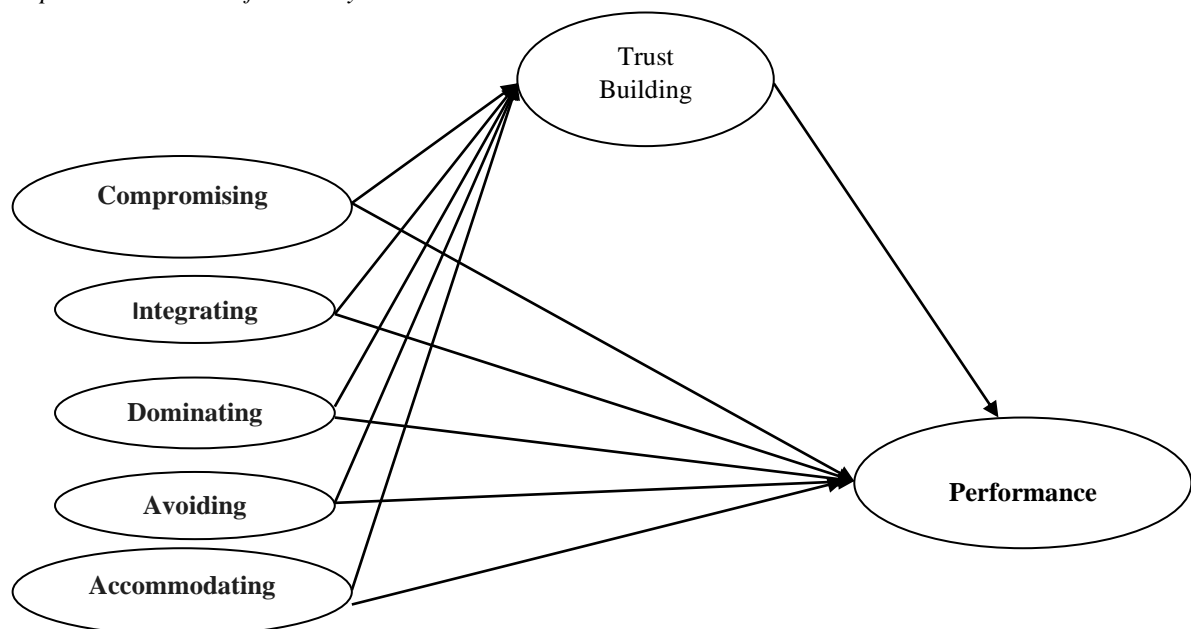
In the context of public organizations, the trust-performance linkage model can be particularly beneficial for several reasons. Public organizations often involve multiple stakeholders with varying interests. Trust among employees facilitates collaboration across departments and teams, leading to more effective service delivery and problem-solving (Asencio, 2016). Trust fosters open lines of communication, which are essential for addressing conflicts constructively. In public organizations where bureaucratic structures may impede communication, building trust can help break down silos and encourage dialogue (Bryson et al., 2013). This is crucial for ensuring that conflicts are managed effectively and do not escalate into larger issues that could hinder organizational performance.

Furthermore, the model suggests that trust may act as a mediator between conflict management strategies and organizational performance. Effective conflict management strategies that promote trust can lead to better performance outcomes by ensuring that conflicts are addressed constructively (Asencio, 2016; Guinot et al., 2013). This underscores the importance of integrating trust-building initiatives into conflict management training programs for public sector employees.

Therefore, as the conceptual model of the study depicted in Figure 1 shows, this study used the trust-performance linkage model to measure the mediator variable (trust building).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Source: Authors' Conception based on reviewed literature (2024)

Hypothesis Development

Integrating Strategy and Organizational Performance

The integrating conflict management strategy, also known as the collaborative or problem-solving approach, emphasizes cooperation and open communication between conflicting parties to find mutually beneficial solutions (Thomas, 1974). Research indicates a strong positive relationship between the use of integrating strategies and organizational

performance. For instance, integrating strategies promotes teamwork and enhances employee commitments, which are crucial for achieving organizational goals (Abazeed, 2017). According to Chukwuemeka et al.'s (2022) research on conflict resolution strategies and workers' commitment in selected oil companies in Rivers State, these two factors are strongly positively correlated. In particular, integrating, accommodating, and compromising conflict management strategies increase employees' commitment to the chosen oil businesses in Rivers State.

Integrating strategies foster open communication among staff members, which in turn promotes teamwork. This is crucial in public organizations, as efficient service delivery requires cross-departmental coordination (Bryson et al., 2013). Higher levels of job satisfaction among employees can result from the application of integrating methods. Commitment to the organization rises when people believe their opinions are heard and that they are involved in decision-making (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Employee morale has a direct impact on service quality, which makes it especially crucial in public enterprises. Using techniques that address the underlying causes of conflicts rather than just their symptoms promotes positive conflict management. Thus, it made the following hypothesis:

H_{1a}: Integration strategy positively and significantly influences organizational performance.

Accommodating Strategy and Organizational Performance

The accommodating or obliging conflict management strategy involves prioritizing the needs and concerns of others over one's own. This approach is characterized by a willingness to suppress personal differences and accept the requests of the other party, often to maintain harmony within the organization (Schermerhorn et al., 2000). While accommodating can foster strong interpersonal relationships and a collaborative atmosphere, its impact on organizational performance is complex and multifaceted.

Research has shown that accommodating strategies can lead to immediate conflict management and improved relationships. For instance, Rahim's (2002) research highlights that accommodating can improve group cohesion and trust among team members, which are crucial components of effective teamwork. Therefore, it hypothesized that:

H_{1b}: Accommodating strategy positively and significantly influences organizational performance.

Dominating Strategy and Organizational Performance

The dominating strategy also referred to as a competing or forcing strategy, is characterized by a high concern for one's own interests and a low concern for the interests of others. This approach is often described as a win-lose situation, where one party seeks to achieve its goals at the expense of another (Thomas, 1974). While this strategy can lead to quickly managing conflicts, its long-term implications for organizational performance are complex and often negative.

Research has shown that the use of dominating strategies can have mixed effects on organizational performance. For instance, Longe (2015) highlighted that non-integrative conflict management strategies, including competition and dominance, had a statistically significant negative effect on organizational performance. This finding suggests that while dominating strategies may yield immediate results in certain situations, they can also foster

resentment and conflict among team members, ultimately undermining collaboration and trust. Conversely, M'mbwanga (2021) found a significant positive relationship between dominating strategies and performance in specific contexts. This indicates that in competitive environments where assertiveness is valued, such as sales or high-stakes negotiations, dominating strategies may enhance performance by driving results and achieving objectives. This duality suggests that the effectiveness of dominating strategies may depend on contextual factors such as organizational culture, the nature of the conflict, and the specific goals of the organization. Therefore, it hypothesized that:

H_{1c}: A dominating strategy negatively and significantly influences organizational performance.

Avoiding Strategy and Organizational Performance

Research indicates that the avoiding strategy can have both positive and negative effects on organizational performance, depending on the context and frequency of its use. For instance, Tabassi et al. (2019) found that in multicultural project teams, avoiding conflict management styles can sometimes lead to positive outcomes by preventing escalation and allowing time for reflection. This suggests that in certain situations, particularly where emotions run high or when immediate resolution is not feasible, avoidance can serve as a short-term strategy to maintain team cohesion.

However, other studies highlight the potential downsides of relying on avoidance as a primary conflict management strategy. For instance, Longe (2015) indicates that non-integrative conflict management strategies (competition, domination, and avoidance) had a negative statistically determinate effect on organizational performance. M'mbwanga (2021) also reported a significant negative relationship between avoiding strategies and overall organizational performance in microfinance institutions. Thus, it made the following hypothesis:

H_{1d}: Avoiding strategy negatively and significantly influences organizational performance.

Compromising Strategy and Organizational Performance

The compromising strategy in conflict management is characterized by a willingness to find a middle ground where all parties involved are somewhat satisfied with the outcome. This approach often involves mutual concessions and is particularly useful in situations where parties have important goals but do not require the use of more assertive methods (Okumbe, 2001). While compromising can lead to temporary resolutions, its effectiveness in enhancing organizational performance has been the subject of various studies.

Research indicates that the compromising strategy can have both positive and negative effects on organizational performance, depending on the context and frequency of its application. For instance, Ndulue and Ekechukwu (2016) noted that while compromising is a popular strategy for resolving conflicts, it often results in only temporary solutions. Moreover, Aziziha et al. (2014) explored various conflict management strategies, including compromise, and found that cooperation and compromise could significantly contribute to the development of a cooperative culture within organizations. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1e: Compromising strategy positively and significantly influences organizational performance.

The Relationship between Conflict Management Strategies and Trust, the Mediating Role of Trust Building

Conflict management strategies play a crucial role in shaping trust within organizations. The way conflicts are managed can either enhance or diminish trust among employees, which in turn affects organizational performance. The relationships between various conflict management strategies and trust, supported by existing literature, are presented below.

The Influence of Compromising Strategy on Trust

The compromising strategy involves finding a middle ground where all parties make concessions to reach a mutually acceptable solution. Research indicates that this strategy can enhance trust among team members. For example, Ndubisi (2011) noted that compromising fosters cooperation and encourages open communications, which are essential for building trust. When employees feel their needs are acknowledged through compromise, it enhances their commitment to collective goals. Additionally, other recent finding indicates that effective communication and a willingness to engage in honest dialogue are crucial for maximizing the benefits of this strategy (Onyekwere, 2024). Thus, the use of compromising conflict management strategies significantly contributes to trust-building in public organizations by fostering cooperation and maintaining positive relationships among stakeholders. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2a: Compromising conflict management strategy positively and significantly influences trust building.

The Influence of Integrating Strategy on Trust

The integrating strategy emphasizes collaboration and open dialogue to find solutions that satisfy all parties involved. Research has consistently shown that integrating strategies significantly enhances trust within teams (Gomathy et al., 2022). For instance, Iyiola and Rjoub (2020) found that a strong conflict management climate characterized by integrating strategies positively predicted trust and relationship quality among contractors and owners in the construction industry. Moreover, when parties perceive that their concerns are genuinely addressed through integrative approaches, it fosters a sense of mutual respect and understanding, further enhancing trust (Einarsen et al., 2018). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2b: Integrating conflict management strategy positively and significantly influences trust building.

The Influence of Accommodating Strategy on Trust

Accommodating behavior can foster trust among team members when it is perceived as a genuine concern for others' needs. This trust can enhance collaboration and team communication (Henderson et al., 2016), critical components of high-performing organizations. When managers demonstrate accommodating behavior, it can enhance collaboration and communication within teams. However, excessive accommodation may

lead to resentment if employees feel their own needs are consistently overlooked (M'mbwanga, 2021). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2c: Accommodating conflict management strategy positively and significantly influence trust building.

The Influence of Dominating Strategy on Trust

Employees may perceive dominating behaviors as oppressive or dismissive of their concerns, leading to decreased morale and engagement (Rahim, 2010). A study by Du and Graedel (2011) emphasizes that trust plays a critical role in the negotiation and conflict management process. Their findings suggest that when dominant strategies are employed, they can obstruct open communication and collaboration, which are vital for trust development. The presence of trust is shown to mitigate the escalation of conflicts, reinforcing the idea that constructive conflict management strategies are more effective in fostering a trusting environment (Du & Graedel, 2011). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2d: Dominating conflict management strategy negatively and significantly influences trust building.

The Influence of Avoiding Strategy on Trust

The avoiding strategy involves sidestepping conflict altogether. While this approach may provide temporary relief from tension, it often leads to unresolved issues that can undermine trust (M'mbwanga, 2021). Employees who perceive avoidance as a lack of engagement may feel undervalued or unsupported, leading to increased mistrust among team members. Another research highlighted that avoiding conflict management is associated with a negative correlation to overall project success and interpersonal relationships within teams. The preference for avoidance over more constructive approaches can lead to dissatisfaction and erode trust among team members, as unresolved conflicts tend to fester and create an atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust (Adavbiele, 2015). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2e: Avoiding conflict management strategy negatively and significantly influences trust building.

The Influence of Trust on Performance and Its Mediating Role

According to a study by Paliszkiewicz (2021), trust orientation is directly related to organizational performance, and organizations with higher levels of trust have better performance outcomes. This highlights the importance of trust as a resource that improves teamwork and efficiency (Paliszkiewicz, 2021). Karhapää et al. (2022) investigated the dynamics of trust during management changes in the public and private sectors, and their findings indicate that effective management practices that foster trust result in improved organizational effectiveness and employee performance. Moreover, the study highlights that trust not only facilitates smoother transitions during change but also enhances job performance through better communication and role clarity (Karhapää et al., 2022). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Trust building positively and significantly influences organizational performance.

In the relationship between organizational performance and conflict management strategies, trust is a crucial mediator. Trust strongly predicts relationship quality and partially mediates the association between relationship quality and conflict management climate (Iyiola & Rjoub, 2020). According to Najam et al. (2018), a conflict-resolution-friendly workplace culture increases mutual trust between the parties. Employees are more inclined to trust their bosses and coworkers when they believe that disagreements are resolved amicably using collaborative tactics like integrating or compromising. Research conducted in a South Korean automobile company found that organizational trust significantly contributes to psychological safety, which in turn reduces group conflict. This indicates that when employees feel trusted, they are more likely to engage in open communication and collaboration, minimizing conflicts and enhancing performance (Ugwu et al., 2022). Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Trust building mediates the relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational performance.

Method

This study employed a positivist research paradigm, which allowed for quantitative research using a variety of methodologies, viewpoints, and assumptions. A quantitative approach was used, combining both descriptive and explanatory research designs to investigate the relationship between conflict management strategies, trust-building, and organizational performance.

Data were collected from managers in public bureaus in the Oromia Regional State through questionnaires, particularly from 30 public bureaus in focus. Stratified simple random sampling was used to select a sample of 232 respondents from a total population of 552, which was calculated using Yemane's (1967) sample determination formula.

Data analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and structural equation modeling using SPSS AMOS 23.0. Data quality was ensured through validity and reliability testing, including content validity, construct validity, and Cronbach's alpha. Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research process to ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality.

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 1, the descriptive statistics analysis revealed that among the five conflict management strategies evaluated, compromising emerged as the most frequently utilized approach ($M = 4.53$), followed closely by dominating ($M = 4.36$). Strategies of avoiding (Mean = 4.18), accommodating ($M = 4.19$), and integrating ($M = 4.05$) were used less frequently. This aligns with previous research indicating that compromising and integrating strategies are often favored in collaborative environments, as they promote mutual benefits and satisfaction among the parties involved (Rahim, 2000).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Response decision:
Compromising	4.53	.71	Strongly Agree
Integrating	4.05	1.07	Agree
Dominating	4.36	.92	Strongly Agree
Avoiding	4.18	1.17	Agree
Accommodating	4.19	1.18	Agree
Trust Building	4.36	1.00	Strongly Agree
Performance	4.42	.91	Strongly Agree

Source: Survey Result (2024)

The respondents also expressed strong agreement with trust-building practices, yielding a mean score of 4.36. This finding supports the notion that trust is a critical component in effective conflict management, as highlighted by Mayer et al. (1995), who argued that trust enhances cooperation and reduces the negative impact of conflict. The respondents reported high levels of organizational performance ($M = 4.42$). This finding is consistent with studies suggesting that effective conflict management and trust-building significantly contribute to improved organizational outcomes (Awan & Saeed, 2014).

Inferential Statistics

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the data's alignment with the hypothesized structure of latent constructs and their relationship to observed variables, as well as to evaluate the measurement model fit and identify items with weak loadings on their intended factors (See Table 2).

Table 2
Summary of Goodness of Fit Indices

Model	χ^2	df	GFI	CMIN/DF	AGFI	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI	PNFI	ECVI
Hypothetical model	1893.79	573	.67	3.30	.62	.10	.08	.72	.69	.59	9.28
Modified model1	1210.55	462	.75	2.81	.70	.09	.07	.81	.78	.65	6.72
Modified model 2	1210.55	462	.77	2.62	.72	.08	.07	.83	.81	.66	6.28

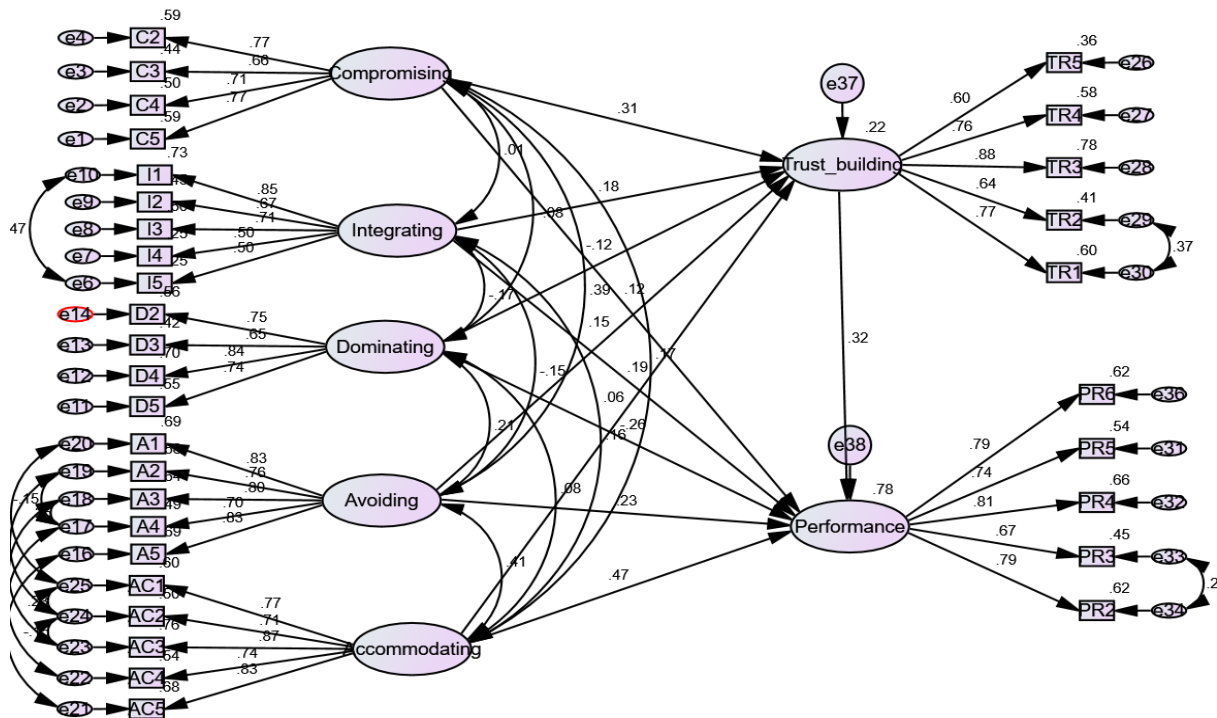
Note. AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit index; CFI = comparative normed fit index; df = degree of freedom; ECVI = expected cross validation index; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; PNFI = parsimony normed fit index; RMSEA = root mean squared error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Figure 2 presents the SEM analysis model.

Figure 2

SEM Model



Analysis of Direct Effect and Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 shows the direct effects of the conflict management strategies on both trust building and performance in the structural model. The model can test whether these effects are positive or negative and statistically significant.

The direct effect of conflict management strategies on performance is revealed by the analysis, which reveals that the conflict management strategies (compromising, integrating, and accommodating) are positive and statistically significant on performance ($\beta = .11, p < .05$, $\beta = .19, p < .05$, and $\beta = .47, p < .05$), respectively. Based on these results, we accept hypotheses H1e, H1a, and H1b. Furthermore, the direct effect of dominating and avoiding conflict management strategies is both negative and positive and statistically significant on performance ($\beta = -.25, p < .05$, and $\beta = .25, p < .05$), respectively. Particularly, the reason that avoiding strategy was positive in this study is that most people in the Oromia region use avoiding strategy rather than immediate answers and solving conflicts. Based on these results, we accept hypothesis H1c and reject hypothesis H1d.

On the other hand, when we see the direct effect of conflict management strategies on trust building, compromising and integrating conflict management strategies are positive and statistically significant on trust building ($\beta = .31, p < .05$) and ($\beta = .18, p < .05$), respectively. Based on these results, we accept the hypotheses H2a and H2b. Conversely, the analysis reveals that the conflict management strategies (accommodating, avoiding, and dominating)

do not have a statistically significant effect on trust building (all p -values $> .05$). This suggests that these strategies do not exert a substantial effect on trust-building within the context of this study. Thus, based on these results, we reject the hypotheses H_{2c}, H_{2d}, and H_{2e}.

Moreover, when we see the direct effect of trust building on performance, the analysis reveals that trust building is positive and statistically significant ($\beta = .31$, $p < .05$). Based on these results, we accept hypothesis H₃.

Table 3

Standardized Regression Weights and Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Parameter			Estimate	Lower	Upper	p	Decision /Remarks
H _{2a}	Trust building	<---	Compromising	.31	.16	.52	.00	Accept
H _{2b}	Trust building	<---	Integrating	.18	.05	.36	.01	Accept
H _{2c}	Trust building	<---	Dominating	-.11	-.23	.03	.16	Reject
H _{2d}	Trust building	<---	Avoiding	.14	-.00	.31	.05	Reject
H _{2e}	Trust building	<---	Accommodating	.05	-.07	.18	.41	Reject
H _{1e}	Performance	<---	Compromising	.11	.02	.24	.02	Accept
H _{1a}	Performance	<---	Integrating	.19	.08	.30	.00	Accept
H _{1c}	Performance	<---	Dominating	-.25	-.37	-.15	.00	Accept
H _{1d}	Performance	<---	Avoiding	.22	.09	.38	.00	Reject
H _{1b}	Performance	<---	Accommodating	.47	.33	.61	.00	Accept
H ₃	Performance	<---	Trust building	.31	.20	.44	.00	Accept

Therefore, this aligns with previous research indicating that integrative strategies, including compromise and accommodation, significantly contribute to organizational goal attainment (Abazeed, 2017; Omulo, 2017; Tabassi et al., 2019; Thomas, 1974). Specifically, integrating strategies have been shown to promote teamwork and employee commitment, which are crucial for achieving organizational goals (Dialoke et al., 2017). Similarly, studies have indicated that accommodating behaviors can positively influence performance when perceived as genuine (Henderson et al., 2016). Furthermore, studies have indicated that compromising strategies can positively influence performance. For instance, M'mbwanga (2021) reported a significant positive relationship between compromise and performance in microfinance institutions, suggesting that engaging in compromise enhances team effectiveness.

Analysis of Mediation Effect and Hypothesis Testing

As presented in Table 4, the result shows that trust building is partially mediating the relationship between compromising and performance as the indirect effects are statistically significant ($\beta = .09$, $p < .05$). Similarly, the result shows that trust building is partially mediating the relationship between integrating and performances the indirect effects are statistically significant ($\beta = .05$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, trust building also partially mediating the relationship between avoiding and performance as the indirect effects are statistically

significant ($\beta = .04$, $p < .05$). Accordingly, based on the results, we somehow accept hypothesis H₄, since three of conflict management strategies mediated by trust building are significant. These conflict management strategies influence performance indirectly through their impact on trust building.

Table 4
Mediation Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Path	Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Remarks
Compromising>Trust>performance	.21*	.11*	.09*	The hypothesis is supported since the indirect effect is statistically significant
Integrating>Trust>performance	.25*	.19*	.05*	The hypothesis is supported since the indirect effect is statistically significant
Dominating>Trust>performance	-.29*	-.25*	-.03	The hypothesis is not supported since the indirect effect is not statistically significant
Avoiding>Trust>performance	.27*	.22*	.04*	The hypothesis is supported since the indirect effect is statistically significant
Accommodating >Trust>performance	.48*	.47*	.01	The hypothesis is not supported since the indirect effect is not statistically significant

Note. * $p < .05$; values in parentheses are standardized estimates and estimated using bootstrapping.

This finding aligns with previous research indicating a strong connection between trust and performance outcomes. For instance, Paliszkievicz (2021) highlighted that organization with higher levels of trust experience better performance due to enhanced cooperation and efficiency among teams. Similarly, Karhapää et al. (2022) found that effective management practices fostering trust lead to improved employee performance and organizational effectiveness, particularly during transitions. The collective findings underscore the importance of fostering trust within organizations to enhance the effectiveness of conflict management approaches and ultimately improve organizational performance (Elgoibar et al., 2021; Ugwu et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The following conclusions are drawn based on the key findings: The study revealed that compromising strategy is the most common conflict management strategy employed within the surveyed public bureaus, followed by dominating, accommodating, avoiding, and integrating strategies. Among these strategies, compromising and integrating were the most effective in fostering trust among employees in the bureaus. These conflict management strategies involve open communication, alternative exploration, and examining differences to find workable solutions for complex issues.

The findings revealed positive associations between compromising, integrating, and avoiding conflict management strategies and organizational performance. Conversely, a dominating approach exhibited a negative impact on performance. Interestingly, performance appeared to be more strongly influenced by conflict management strategies than trust-building within the surveyed bureaus. Among the strategies, accommodating showed the strongest positive effect on performance, followed by integrating, avoiding, and

compromising. Thus, it concluded that public organizations in Oromia can significantly enhance performance by prioritizing and promoting cooperative conflict management strategies, such as compromising and integrating.

The study also revealed that compromising and integrating conflict management strategies positively influence trust building within organizations. Conversely, accommodating, avoiding, and dominating strategies did not exhibit a statistically significant effect on trust building. Therefore, public organizations in Oromia can significantly enhance performance by prioritizing and promoting cooperative conflict management strategies, such as compromising and integrating. These approaches not only directly benefit performance but also foster trust among employees, which further strengthens performance.

Moreover, the study revealed a positive effect of trust building on organizational performance, suggesting that fostering trust among employees contributes to improved performance within the bureaus. Interestingly, the study provides evidence for partial mediation by trust building in the relationship between compromising, integrating, and avoiding conflict management strategies and organizational performance. While dominating and accommodating strategies were not mediated by trust-building in their effect on performance, it is therefore concluded that employing cooperative conflict management strategies such as compromising, integrating, and avoiding directly benefits performance and fosters trust-building, which further enhances performance. Conversely, a dominant strategy directly hinders performance and does not influence trust building. These findings can inform public sector leadership in adopting appropriate conflict management strategies to optimize performance and build trust within their organizations.

Theoretical Implications

The main theoretical implications derived from the findings and discussions are: The study reinforces the relevance of established theories such as the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), the trust-performance linkage model, and the Resource-Based View (RBV) in understanding how different conflict management strategies influence trust and performance. This integration suggests that a comprehensive theoretical framework is necessary to analyze the multifaceted nature of conflict in organizations.

The varying impacts of different conflict management strategies on trust and performance underscore the need for a subtle understanding of these strategies. For instance, while compromising and integrating strategies generally foster trust and improve performance, dominating strategies tend to have negative effects. This complexity suggests that theoretical models of organizational behavior should incorporate contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of these strategies.

The findings suggest that trust acts as a critical mediating factor in the relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational performance. This highlights the importance of integrating trust-building mechanisms within conflict management frameworks to enhance performance outcomes. The findings support the trust-performance linkage model, highlighting trust as a crucial mediator in the relationship between conflict management strategies and organizational performance. This emphasizes the need for theories to account for mediating variables that can enhance or diminish the effectiveness of conflict management efforts.

The study reveals a dynamic interplay between trust and performance, suggesting that higher levels of trust can lead to improved performance outcomes, which in turn can reinforce trust. This cyclical relationship warrants further exploration in future research to understand its implications for organizational dynamics.

Practical Implications

Based on the discussions made, one of the practical implications is that organizations should invest in training programs that emphasize effective conflict management strategies, particularly those that foster trust, such as compromising and integrating approaches. This can enhance team collaboration and overall performance. Secondly, implementing initiatives aimed at building trust within teams such as open communication channels, team-building activities, and transparent decision-making processes, can create a more cooperative organizational culture that enhances performance. Thirdly, leaders in the bureaus should be trained to recognize the importance of trust in their interactions with employees. Leaders can foster a more engaged and productive workforce by employing conflict management strategies that prioritize trust-building. Moreover, organizations should assess their specific context issues, such as culture and industry, when selecting conflict management strategies. Understanding when to apply avoiding or accommodating strategies can help prevent potential negative impacts on performance.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Sample Representativeness: The research employed a sample survey restricted to managers in the Oromia region. This limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions of Ethiopia or to different organizational levels within the bureaus (e.g., non-managerial employees). Future research efforts could benefit from a more geographically diverse sample encompassing a broader range of employee positions.

Measurement Considerations: Both performance and trust-building were assessed through subjective self-reported data. While valuable, such data can be susceptible to bias. Future research designs could incorporate objective performance measures (e.g., productivity metrics, client satisfaction surveys) alongside subjective assessments to provide a more comprehensive picture.

Social Desirability Bias: The potential for social desirability bias may have influenced respondents to report more socially acceptable conflict resolution styles. Future studies could mitigate this by employing anonymous surveys or observational methods to gather data on conflict management practices.

Contextual Nuances: The study acknowledges the importance of contextual factors but does not delve deeply into how the nature of the conflict, the personalities involved, or the prevailing organizational culture might influence the selection and effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies. Future research could explore these contextual factors in greater detail to provide a more nuanced understanding of conflict management dynamics.

Declarations

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Ethics Approval

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