CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN SETTLING WORKPLACE DISPUTES: THE CASE OF AIR ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to conduct the analysis of the conflict management strategies that Air Zimbabwe, a service delivery company in Zimbabwe in Southern Africa, employs in settling workplace disputes between it and its employees. The research approach relies mainly on a survey questionnaire that is completed by both the employees and management. The analysis of data is descriptive. The respondents indicate that strategies can move from a positive to a negative approach within a short space of time. The results are often detrimental for the quality of service that the company provides to its clientele. It is recommended that the parties should rely on negotiation and mediation to arrest conflicts before they escalate.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Public Enterprises, Resources, Negotiations, Autocracy

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1 Introduction

Private and public enterprises have been theatres of conflict since time immemorial between and among the employers and the employees or between the business entities and their different stakeholders. In the presence of a number of available definitions in this context conflict is broadly viewed as "a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something the first party cares about" (Robbins & Judge, 2009: 519). Key to the definition are the words "process" and "perceives". The word "process" suggests that a major conflict can occur as a result of many related events that were not adequately dealt with at the initial stage by the management and employees. The word "perceives" implies that parties involved may view certain behavior and attitude as a sign of conflict whereas this might be as a result of misreading the situation. For example, the management's refusal to accept demands for the increase of salaries could be perceived as a source of conflict within an organization. Negotiations conducted in good faith and sharing of financial records could, however, reveal to the employees that the refusal could be due to lack of funds resulting from the poor performance of the company. As a result of these open discussions, the perceived conflict could be resolved. Management and employees could even devise a strategy that would contribute towards the improvement of business to the benefit of both parties. Such a scenario makes it imperative that managers be provided with empirical guidelines on

what is conflict and how to positively deal with conflict (Cropanzano et al., 1999).

Conflict can be categorized into two types. On the one hand, it is interpersonal or relationship conflict when it is a matter of personality clashes between and among individuals (Billikopf, 2010). On the other hand, it is institutional or task conflict when it involves other organizations or parts of the same organization (Bates, et al., 2007 and Nel & Werner, 2014). K.C.'s (1993: 23) study involving fifteen Nepalese public enterprises, including the Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation, notes that top executives identify some of the common causes of organizational conflict as attributable to competition, scarcity of resources, incompatible goals, power and status differences, unclear rules and regulations, and introduction of new technologies. Similarly, the focus of this article is institutional conflict in which the management could be in conflict with employees on several issues.

The context of the article is workplace disputes that have been one of the prime challenges for Air Zimbabwe (Air Zim) over the past decade. The conflicts have not only contributed to the poor performance of the airline in the discharge of its services but have also affected the livelihood of its workers and other economic sectors like tourism. The national airline's workplace conflicts have often disrupted the organizational performance and efficiency at one time resulting in the grounding of Air Zim. In January 2012, the airline came under judicial management. The pilots refused to resume domestic services over $35 million in unpaid salaries and

allowances as reported by The *Zimbabwean* (24/02/2012). As a result, the airline was grounded indefinitely on 24 February 2012. The *New Zimbabwe* (02/05/2012) further points out that in March 2012, the government of Zimbabwe established Air Zimbabwe Private Limited as the new owner of the carrier after disbanding the airline's former parastatal-owner Air Zimbabwe Holdings and absorbing a $150 million debt. The airline resumed flying on a continuous basis in early May 2012, yet using a single aircraft and serving only three domestic destinations Bulawayo, Harare and Victoria Falls and only for a short period until the grounding of the aircraft on 2 July 2012. The airline was reactivated in late November 2012, with a reduced flight scheme serving the Zimbabwe and South Africa, Harare–Johannesburg, route. The carrier resumed domestic operations connecting Bulawayo, Harare and Victoria Falls, as well as the regional route to Johannesburg, on a daily basis in April 2013 ahead of the 2013 Zimbabwe International Trade Fair.

Evidently, disputes and conflicts between the management and employees have often bedeviled the airline during these trying financial times. Despite the improved economic standing of the country brought about by the Government of National Unity (GNU), it would appear that the management has failed to weed out the working conditions related disputes at the national airline. The airline, therefore, makes a curious case for assessment on its conflict management strategies that have been used in settling workplace disputes.

Specifically, a study aimed at assessing conflict management and how it affects performance has never been undertaken at the company. Given the positive influence that strategic conflict management has had on the success of many companies, including in the mining sector, it is essential to investigate the various conflict management styles and strategies that have been utilized by the national airline to try and bring sanity between the employees and the management at Air Zim. Broadly, available research has tended to focus on the perspectives of managers (Cropanzano et al., 1999), whereas, this article also explores the views of the subordinates. This all-encompassing approach has the potential not only to enable the company members identify deficiencies in their practices, but, also contribute positively to service delivery and upliftment of the other major economic sectors for the country of Zimbabwe, such as, the tourism sector.

2 Conflicting philosophies on conflicts

Conflicts have long been identified as an integral and inevitable part of human life in all aspects. Hence, three philosophies that reflect managerial attitudes toward conflict have been developed over the years (Stanley and Algert, 2007: 52). They serve to distinguish different ways in which conflicts can be regarded when they occur. The views held can

ultimately contribute to the manner in which conflicts are dealt with for the benefit of all those involved and their objectives within an organization. The three main views are the traditional view, human relations or contemporary view as well as the interactionist view (Robbins, 2005; Robbins, & Judge, 2009). These views assist in the understanding and conceptualization of conflicts.

Firstly, the traditional view asserts that conflict must be avoided as it reflects malfunction within the group. This type of conflict is viewed negatively and is as a result associated with destruction. It further denotes conflict as a sign of poor communication and lack of trust between people. The traditional view articulates that conflicts can be resolved only at the high levels of management. This perception is informed by the identification of managers as responsible for lack of harmony within an organization because they are the ones that are expected to respond positively to the needs of their subordinates. There is therefore a strong need for the management to pay attention to the causes of conflict and immediately correct them in order to improve group and organizational performance (Robbins, 2005; Robbins, & Judge, 2009).

Secondly, the Human Relations view also known as contemporary view considers conflict as a natural occurrence in all groups (Robbins 2005; Robbins & Judge, 2009). In accordance with this understanding, it is believed that conflict is something positive that may benefit a group's performance (Robbins & Judge, 2009). This is because conflict is in most cases unavoidable as people have different attitudes towards daily issues. Disputes happen from time to time and it is not wise to put too much effort avoiding or preventing the conflicts. The view further asserts that there is no need to resolve every conflict. People should not pay attention to minor conflicts or unimportant issues, rather focusing on developing of other more critical aspects of their daily activities. Leung (2010) argues that concentrating on larger or critical conflicts allows people to resolve conflicts in a better and more effective way.

The last school of thought is the interactionist view which encourages conflict with the understanding that it could lead to changes and innovations. Two contradictory perceptions of conflict exist in this scenario. While conflict could be accepted as absolutely necessary for the group to perform efficiently, but, not all conflicts are good. Interactionists argue that workplace conflict ranges from task related, relationship conflicts and process conflicts (Robbins, 2005; Robbins & Judge, 2009). Conflicts are treated as either functional or dysfunctional. Functional conflict is viewed as part of people's lives and a natural phenomenon in all organizations. This school of thought argues that low level conflict will not be harmful for daily operations but will help create smooth functioning by better understanding of existing issues. In this respect, Nel

and Werner (2014: 333) assert that lack of conflict can result in low performance when there is too much conformity that does not allow new perspectives within an organisation. However, Leung (2010) cautions that whenever a critical or major conflict occurs it should be resolved harmoniously because undesirable levels of conflict can be harmful for the productive functioning of an organization.

K.C. (1993: 24) finds that top executives of public enterprises in Nepalese perceive all conflict negatively. This is because they believe that conflict creates poor coordination of efforts that can lead to low organizational performance. The view held by these top executives is rather narrow as it fails to recognize that conflict can both be positive and negative. It all depends on whether the management deals with conflict constructively or destructively. In this case, Chen and Tjosvold (2002: 558) indicate that constructive conflict management means developing quality solutions that will strengthen relationships. This approach has the potential to make employees feel valued and would in turn adopt a positive attitude towards the organization. Conversely, a destructive approach creates friction that is detrimental for organizational productivity. Employees are likely not to be committed to the objectives of the organization in ensuring uninterrupted quality service to customers during times of conflict. The worse thing that can happen is an influx of resignations especially if the employees are skilled in scarce skills that are sought after by other organizations in the same industry within that country or/and beyond its borders. Along these lines, a study conducted by Chan, Huang and Ng (2008: 283) in China concludes that the manner in which employees are treated influences their work attitudes and behavior. As a form of redress, Chan, et al, recommend an integrating conflict management style by managers if they are to promote positive attitudes among subordinates (2008: 290).

3 Conflict management strategies and styles

Managers tend to handle conflict in certain ways in cases involving their subordinates. The manner in which managers deal with conflict is referred to as strategies and styles (Ozaralli, 2002: 81) or dispute resolution mechanisms (Pretorius, 1993: 3). Harris, et al. (2008) make a distinction between conflict resolution, which is finding a solution that satisfies all parties, and conflict management, that is, making a temporal arrangement that serves to control conflict. The ultimate goal of conflict management is to reduce tensions and incidences of dysfunctional conflicts that hinder group performance and enhance efficiency and effectiveness at the workplace. Success in this regard largely depends on the selection and application of the most appropriate intervention process in relation to the intensity of the dispute and in relation to the specific

dynamics of groups involved (Edmund, 2010: 35-36; Pretorius, 1993: 3).

It is, however, not uncommon for some leaders to rely on negative and dysfunctional strategies time and again (K.C., 1993). This happens particularly when the roles of managers, especially that of Human Resource (HR) managers, overlap. HR managers' roles can move from that of being workers' strategic partners and employee champions to being representatives of the organizational interests (Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006). This can happen when managers are under constant pressure from board members, investors and politicians who would interfere in the activities of the organization. Politicians are particularly more likely to exact pressure on managers when the organization involved is a public enterprise. In other instances, such as in Australia, there is little room for maneuver due to pre-established dispute resolution systems that must be adhered to by managers, employees and unions in an effort to ensure justice and consistency (Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006: 198). This however does not rule out political interference when the conflict situation is considered to be out of control as the recent events involving Qantas would suggest.

The 2011 Qantas industrial disputes were between the Australian airline Qantas and a number of trade unions during much of 2011 and the start of 2012. The disputes emerged when Qantas and unions commenced bargaining for new enterprise agreements. The bargaining became more heated when the airline announced its intentions to launch a new airline in Asia. From the management point of view, the plans were expected to increase the market share of Qantas by making it more competitive. However, Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary Jeff Lawrence described the day of this announcement as the "darkest" in the airline's history (ABC News, 16/08/2011). The Sydney Morning Herald (29/10/2011)notes that during the bargaining, engineers, pilots and baggage handlers carried out a number of protected industrial actions, culminating in the decision by Qantas, on 29 October 2011, to lock out those employees with the consequence that the entire Qantas mainline fleet was grounded. The grounding was expected to cause disastrous consequences to the Australian economy (The Sunday Telegraph, 30/10/2011). Australian Senator Nick Xenophon criticized the action as "militant management". The Sydney Morning Herald (31/10/2011) reported that Tony Abbott, Leader of the Opposition, blamed the disputes on the government's decision not to intervene, and said that the grounding was avoidable. It was then that the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, requested an urgent meeting at a Fair Work Australia tribunal. The Daily Telegraph (31/10/2011) reports that after an application by the Federal Minister for Workplace Relations, Fair Work Australia terminated the industrial action with effect from 2 am on 31 October 2011.

The four primary strategies of dispute resolution that are at disposal for parties in conflict situations are; negotiation, mediation, arbitration and litigation (NASBP, 2014; Pretorius, 1993). Pretorius (1993) considers the other known methods as derivations or applications of these four primary processes. Other derivations include what Sample (2008) and Schaubhut (2007) identify as the five conflict management strategies that are proposed in the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI). It is claimed that the TKI strategies have been used successfully by many individuals for over thirty years. These five strategies are: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.

Linked to the different strategies are two dimensions that can be adopted by managers in dealing with conflict. The two orientations are concern for self (production) and concern for others (people) (Ozaralli, 2002 & Zhang and Purao, 2014). The term preferred by Thomas and Kilmann (2007) for a leader whose conflict management approach is driven by individual concern is assertiveness while a leader who shows concern for others is described as using cooperativeness. However, Kilmann (2013) points out that it is not always easy to categorise strategies as either indicative of assertiveness or cooperativeness due to complex and contemporary conflict situations that can lead to an individual moving from one mode to the other within a short space of time.

This article adopts the four primary strategies of dispute resolution that are suggested by NASBP (2014) and Pretorius (1993) in its investigation of the conflict in Air Zim. Firstly, Billikopf (2009:7) asserts that most conflicts can be resolved through negotiation. In this respect, negotiation is described as a method by which people attempt to settle differences through collaboration, compromise or agreement in an effort to find a solution that will either be fully or partially acceptable to both parties (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). At Air Zim negotiations are carried out by the workers' representatives who attempt to bargain on behalf of the airline employees with the management and board members representing the company. This is in line with the Labour Act which recognizes the right to collective bargaining. The 2005 Labour Amendment Act in sections 25, 79, 80 and 81 gives the Minister of Labour the power to approve collective bargaining agreements, register and publish them. The law supports the creation of workers committees in enterprises where less than 50% of workers are unionized. These committees are supposed to work together with representatives of management to discuss workplace issues in a Works Council, which have to be approved by the Labour minister. However, collective bargaining is not the exclusive privilege of trade unions in the Labour Act. Workers committees may also bargain at company level. The act also states that collective bargaining agreements should provide for measures to contain violence at the workplace (Grogan, 2000; Gwisai,

2006). However, this is seen by trade unions as a way to criminalize striking in Zimbabwe.

Secondly, mediation is another type of conflict resolution. Pearl (2011:426) views mediation as a consensual form of dispute resolution or prevention in which typically, a third party, the mediator assists the two conflicting parties to reach agreement or, in a legal context, negotiate a settlement. The mediation process is typically private and confidential, lowering the risk to participants of disclosing information and encouraging them to speak freely without fear of compromising a potential court case. The mediation process treats conflicting parties as collaborating in the construction of an agreement. The ultimate aim is to reach a mutually satisfying agreement, not to declare a winner or a loser. Machingambi (2007:16) describes conciliation, which is similar to mediation, as a form of third party assistance involving an outsider to the dispute who comes in as a facilitator to provide alternatives and endeavor to reach a resolution by agreement. It is, however, not uncommon for supervisors to handle mediation involving their subordinates. In one such case, Kozan et al., (2014) study reports that subordinate satisfaction was highest with supervisor mediation and lowest when supervisors distanced themselves from the conflict.

In Zimbabwe conciliation is a phenomenon which is used as a bridge to arbitration. This concept of dispute resolution was introduced in the labor dispute resolution system in Zimbabwe in 2002 following the major amendment to the Labour Relations Act which also saw the repulsion of the statutory instrument 379 of 1985 on termination of employment procedures. The amendment of the Labour Relations Act No 17 of 2002 sought to streamline the labour dispute settlement under the Labour Act with a view to reducing the backlog of cases in the system and introducing an efficient and expeditious system of resolving labour disputes. At an ILO Labour Law Reform workshop held at Monte Claire, Nyanga on 11-13 May 2010, Dr Madhuku presented the ILO commissioned audit which was conducted on dispute resolution system in Zimbabwe (Grogan, 2000; Gwisai, 2006). The findings showed the whole picture of deficiencies affecting conciliation which included lack of enforcement of conciliation agreements, involvement of legal practitioners, and the absence of guidelines for conciliation process, complicated and disharmony of the dispute resolution system. It is also of paramount importance to note that the outcome of conciliation agreement is not enforceable in Zimbabwe, unlike in the South African Law where settlement becomes an agreement which is enforceable in the courts. Thus trying to settle is not a conclusive jurisdiction and there is no provision for enforcement of the agreement in the event that other parties decide to renege from the agreement.

Thirdly, Pretorius (1993: 5) and Summers (2004:70) describe arbitration as a form of adjudication that involves a neutral third party to

whom the disputing parties present their case for examination and decision-making. In this manner, the role of the third party becomes that of a "referee" (NASBP, 2014). While the decision is usually binding it can, however, be non-binding. The parties agree to hold all existing or future disputes to arbitration, which can be either binding or non-binding. Non-binding arbitration is similar to mediation in that a decision cannot be imposed on the parties. However, the principal distinction is that whereas a mediator will try to help the parties find a middle ground on which to compromise, the (non-binding) arbitrator remains totally removed from the settlement process and will only give a determination of liability and, if appropriate, an indication of the quantum of damages payable. Behrens (2007:175) argues that arbitration is binding and so non-binding arbitration is technically not arbitration. In the United States, arbitration is most commonly used in labor-management, commercial, and consumer conflicts. In 1985, more than 95 percent of all collective bargaining contracts required that arbitration be used to resolve disputes (Robbins, 2005:420).

Lastly, litigation is a formal method of resolving conflict through the court system of the country when the other three alternative dispute resolution (ADR) strategies have failed (NASBP, 2014). The matter is presented to the judges to provide a legal remedy that would be binding to all parties involved. This method can be costly and time-consuming which could be detrimental to the survival of the organization. Saundry and Wibberley (2014: 18-19) find that litigation is feared by many managers in the United Kingdom because they could be held liable if they did not follow the correct procedures when handling conflict situations. This was found to be more the case in unionized organisations where union representatives tended to be well trained and knowledgeable about legal procedures.

4 Research methodology

The design of this study is quantitative in that a questionnaire survey is utilized as the main instrument of data collection (Bles, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013). However, Hansen et al., (2000) propose that researchers should consider a combination of research methods which will produce a better and deeper understanding of the research design. The aim should always be to choose those methods or combination of methods, which can elaborate the most angles, and dimensions of what are invariably multidimensional and complex processes and phenomena. In the same breath, in order to complement primary research a secondary approach was also adopted whereby online research of newspapers and literature from Air Zim were analysed to understand not only the nature of conflicts but also the methods which have been used to resolve the dispute.

Brink and Wood (1998:293) observe that questionnaires are favorable in that respondents feel that they remain anonymous and can indicate their views without fear of identification. This aspect was considered as very important in this study where the respondents are employees of the organization under investigation. At the same time, the questions were kept short and simple in an effort to make it easy for the respondents to give answers that reflect their true opinions (Malhotra, Birks and Willis, 2012). This was, however, done without compromising the objectives of the study. An essential step that was taken before the collection of the data is pilot testing. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A mainly captured personal information of the respondent as well as that of the organisation under study. Section B went deeper to capture details on the workplace conflicts and how they are being addressed by the management at Air Zim.

Bles et al., (2013) and Castillo (2012) note that choosing the appropriate method and persons who will participate in the study involves careful thought, taking into consideration relevancy between the issue or phenomena under study and the group chosen for investigation. This involves a decision on non-probability sampling. David and Sutton (2010:161) assert that non-probability sampling represents a group of sampling techniques that help researchers to select units from a population that they are interested in studying. In the same breath, senior members of staff such as engineers and pilots were considered to be in a better position to provide some valuable data on how the labour unrest at Air Zimbabwe evolved and how the board and management dealt with the issue. Equally important, were the officials in the board and management at Air Zimbabwe and officials in the Ministry of Transport who participated from an employer's point of view.

The research analyzed data using quantitative methods. Views of research participants were recorded in tables and their frequencies were depicted graphically. The study is descriptive statistics in that the objective is to describe an organizational behavior in respect of handling conflict situations (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2006).

5 Findings

A total of 20 questionnaires were completed by the company's selected employees and management on the subject of conflict strategies and styles. The distribution of the survey took into perspective universal suffrage which resulted in ten female and male employees completing the questionnaire.

The survey's first question inquired on the number of years served at the airline by the participants. This was meant to give credence to the research by tapping into experience and knowledge of the national airline operations and the conflicts that had erupted in the past and the way they were solved

and effectiveness of the methods. The findings show that 65% of the total respondents had served for more the five years. This suggests that a high number of the respondents were acquainted with the national airline due to the many years they had spent in the company. While the second question inquired on the position held so that there could be a distinction between the management and subordinates views on the issue under investigation, it was found that this question was generally left unanswered.

The third question asked the respondents to indicate if they had experienced any form of organizational conflict (Bates et al., 2007 and Nel & Werner, 2014). The majority of respondents (85%) indicated that they had experienced conflict at Air Zim. This finding is consistent with media reports that point to a number of problems in the airline that resulted in flights being grounded due to disputes involving pilots and the management over salaries (The *Zimbabwean* 24/02/2012 & The *New Zimbabwe* 02/05/2012). Surprisingly, 15% of the respondents claimed that there were no conflicts at Air Zimbabwe. This divergent view can be explained by the fact that managers also participated in the survey and the probability is high that they constituted the three respondents who stated that there were no conflicts in a bid to maintain the image of the airline.

The last background information question interrogated the performance of the national airline's dispute resolution mechanisms. The results showed that the airline's managers are perceived to be operating below capacity with the majority of respondents indicating negative views.

Table 1. Views on the conflict management strategies

Poor and costly	18
Good and cheap	2

As displayed in Fig 1, the majority of respondents (90%) were of the view that the company's mechanisms were poor and costly. The response suggests that the airline's conflict management systems were incompetent. This view is confirmed by the disciplinary action and the resulting financial losses mentioned above. Almost all the respondents were of the view that conflict negatively affects the performance of the company. When the national airline failed to handle the remuneration disputes in 2011, which resulted in strikes, the airline could not sustain its running costs as it also resulted in the grounding of the planes. Operations came to a halt as the company was no longer making profits to remain viable. Thus, the responses from the participants are in line with what the national airline has experienced with conflicts year in and year out that have destabilized the smooth running of operations of the company, as noted in media reports.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the main objective of the study that investigated the

dispute resolution strategies of the airline. The findings suggest that the organization utilizes different methods of conflict resolution depending on the intensity of conflict (Edmund, 2010: 35-36; Pretorius, 1993: 3).

Table 2. The conflict management strategies that are used at Air Zimbabwe

Dialogue	10
Disciplinary action	9
None	1

Diverse conflict management styles are apparent at Air Zim. On the one hand, the respondents (n10) indicate that the most utilized method of dispute resolution at the national airline is dialogue or collective bargaining to negotiate the terms of employment between the employer's representatives and that of workers. On the other hand, when negotiations fail, an equally high number of respondents (n9) cite disciplinary action as another way the national airline tends to solve disputes (K.C., 1993 and Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006). Indeed, radiovop (2011) reports that the pilots who embarked on strikes were threatened with unspecified disciplinary action from the airline's chairperson, Jonathan Kadzura. The management tried to be firm on its striking pilots as a way of trying to resolve the dispute, however, this negative approach failed to achieve the intended results of intimidating and halting the strike as the pilots continued with their protest action. Similarly, in Nepalese (K.C., 1993) and in China (Chan, Huang and Ng, 2008) it is found that a negative perception of conflict by managers results in counterproductive attitudes and behavior by employees to the detriment of the organizational goals. The disciplinary action in 2011 against the striking pilots at Air Zim cost it millions of dollars as well as its reputation as a competitive player in the aviation industry (The *Zimbabwean* 24/02/2012 & The *New Zimbabwe* 02/05/2012). Overall, the results suggest that conflict management strategies at the airline can move from one mode to the other within a short space of time (Kilmann, 2013).

The respondents were also asked to indicate the source of conflict within the airline.

Table 3. Causes of conflicts at Air Zimbabwe

Remuneration	12
Contractual breaches	3
Autocracy	5

Twelve of the twenty respondents were of the view that conflicts that are bedeviling the national airline emanate from remuneration disputes. In September 2011, the national airline had to be grounded as the pilots embarked on a strike due to outstanding salaries and allowances (The *Zimbabwean*

24/02/2012 & The *New Zimbabwe* 02/05/2012). Thus, the national airline has always been at loggerheads with its employees over the issue of salaries which are perceived not to be in harmony with the international standards for civil aviation remuneration. This indicates that lack of resources (Bates et al., 2007; Nel & Werner, 2014 and K.C., 1993), in this case, financial resources, is the main contributory factor to conflicts at Air Zim. It is no wonder that most experts in the various fields of the national airline left the country for greener pastures after their salary conditions were never improved even through collective bargaining. This left Air Zim with a shortage of experts especially in the field of civil aviation engineering.

Five of the respondents attributed autocracy as one of the main causes of conflicts at the national airline. The management style of dictating at Air Zim has often led to workplace disputes which have often compromised the effectiveness and efficiency of the national airline. Three of the respondents attributed conflict to contractual breaches. Contractual breaches have resulted in massive retrenchments at the national airline and this has led to the disgruntled workers to pursue litigation against the national airline when they have exhausted other alternative dispute resolution (ADR) strategies (NASBP, 2014).

Lastly, in an effort to limit bias in the questionnaire the respondents were allowed to indicate other sources of conflict in the national airline.

Table 4. Additional information about conflicts at Air Zimbabwe

Political influence	10
Lack of corporate governance	5
Others	5

Table 4 shows that the respondents were of the view that other factors such as political influence and lack of corporate governance are some of the main contributing factors to conflict at the national airline. The governance culture of professionalism and adherence to business ethics are often substituted for political interests at the national airline. This could result in the day to day smooth running of the operations being affected as political decisions occasionally take precedence at the expense of business decisions. When management is driven by political interests their role could change from being strategic partners and employee champions to being representatives of the organizational interests (Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006). The management orientation towards conflict would also inevitable change from concern for others to self in order to protect themselves from their political masters (Thomas and Kilmann, 2007; Ozaralli, 2002 & Zhang and Purao, 2014).

6 Conclusion

The study found out that Air Zim does not have a clear conflict management framework they use in settling labour disputes. The management appears to keep an open door policy and employees who have concerns approach the human resource department for negotiations. They often employ collective bargaining when engaging employees in labour related issues like salaries and benefits. However, some of the labour disagreements end up in the courts of law because of the employees who are perceived to be making unrealistic demands. The situation is compounded by the fact that the airline has not been doing well financially which resulted in the government having to bail it out. Moreover, media reports suggest a high level of corruption at management level that has seen former bosses receiving ten year jail sentences (The Herald, 10/04/2015 & New Zimbabwe, 09/04/2015). Clearly, there is tension at Air Zim because of numerous disputes resulting from perceptions of conflict between management and subordinates. These perceptions are largely fuelled by lack of resources. Conflicts often result in the intervention of government. Air Zim is however not the only airline experiencing such problems, as similar issues were witnessed at Qantas airline in recent years. The ultimate goal of conflict management is to reduce tensions that may hinder group performance. The management ought to engage the workers through their representatives in the workers committee. Threats and the use of disciplinary action against those who try to seek audience with the management over grievances will only escalate the tension at the national airliner.

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