

The Cost of Dyadic Conflicts in NGOs: A Case Study of Kamuli District, Uganda

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Abstract

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the causes, impacts, and costs of dyadic conflicts within non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kamuli District, Uganda. The research identifies key conflict drivers such as poor communication, role ambiguity, and resource scarcity, which result in significant costs like reduced productivity, decreased morale, and high staff turnover. The paper concludes by recommending proactive conflict management policies and strong leadership to mitigate these negative outcomes and improve organizational effectiveness.

Keywords

Dyadic Conflicts, Cost, NGOs, Drivers, Role Ambiguity, Policies, Staff Turnover, Organizational Effectiveness

1. Introduction

The basic unit of any conflict is the dyad, that is, a pair of primary warring parties. Conflicts are a reality, they exist in all walks of life and though not all, some conflicts are useful for creating change and establishing new perspectives on issues within NGOs. In order to effectively address conflicts within NGOs, it is important to first understand the nature of conflicts. This research posits that dyadic conflicts occur due to poor communication, role ambiguity, and resource scarcity. Dyads and their leadership are so important for organizational success and they significantly impact employees' performance, productivity and overall organizational progress. An effective dyad fosters a collaborative environment where unique skills and perspectives are shared, leading to improved problem-solving, innovation, efficiency, good direction, motivation and team cohesion towards shared goals.

However, research has revealed that dyadic conflicts can escalate quickly when not addressed promptly and negatively affect the performance of employees, the effectiveness of the dyad and the cohesion towards shared goals.

Dyadic means a pair or two things. A “dyad” is a group of two people. A dyad is actually the smallest possible social group according to Sociology. Often conflicts in NGOs begin at this level of social interaction known as a dyad. According to the Dyadic theory of conflict, dyads with similar interests are likely to experience less conflicts than dyads with dissimilar interests. Dyadic conflicts under organizational setting are conflicts involving disagreements or misunderstandings between two individuals within an organization.

In Kamuli district for example, a survey of two Nongovernmental organizations was conducted within different dyads and out of a sample of 12% of the dyads in the first organization reported having experienced dyadic conflicts while in another organization, 10.5% dyads reported to have experienced dyadic conflicts regarding how the resources about supporting the young teenager who had conceived were to be allocated (COVID-19 reports, Kamuli district).

Consequently, a study conducted by (Tebitendwa, 2021) on the prevalence of conflict within different types of dyads (pairs) within a sample of 917 individuals found that, on average, about one-fifth (21.5%) of all dyads were categorized as conflict links. Thus, in resource-constrained settings like Kamuli district, such conflicts may be exacerbated by cultural factors and limited access to formal conflict resolution mechanisms (Putnam, 1992). Very important to note is that most studies of conflicts at work have traditionally focused on conflict management and resolution but not on the prevalent nature of the conflict and how it impacts the individual or group performance (Susanea, 2019). These studies suggest that different types of conflict affect team performance in different ways yet they have been less studied and it is upon this background that the researcher in this particular study is investigating the cost of dyadic conflicts in NGOs in terms of their impact to employee performance, their well-being at work and organizational sustainability. Findings revealed that poor communication, role ambiguity, power imbalances, resource constraints, differences in opinions, personality clashes, lack of training, competition for recognition and promotions have caused dyadic conflicts within many NGOs in Kamuli district, Uganda. This further has left tangible and intangible costs on these NGOs such as; reduced productivity where conflicts divert employee time away from core activities, leading to delays in project implementation and decreased efficiency (Jehn, 1995), increased absenteeism of employees and high employee turnover where persistent conflicts end up causing stress and prompting absenteeism or even resignation, which incurs recruitment and training costs—expenses often burdensome for NGOs to manage or overcome and sustain their operation (Levine, 2019). In the same vein, Conflicts may cause project delays or suspension, affecting community beneficiaries and the NGO’s reputation (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), legal and mediation expenses and in severe cases, NGOs may need external mediators, adding to operational costs

(Rahim, 2002). Dyadic conflicts, though interpersonal, impose substantial costs on NGOs in Kamuli District, affecting efficiency, employee well-being, organizational reputation and organizational sustainability. Thus, proactive conflict management strategies through prevention, training, and open dialogues should be essentially undertaken to sustain organizational effectiveness, organizational sustainability and the overall community impact if the NGOs within Kamuli district are to implement their mandate for which they were registered.

Purpose

This study aims to examine the Cost of Dyadic Conflicts in NGOs: A Case Study of Kamuli District, Uganda. Drawing on the Dyadic Theory of Conflict which notes that dyads with similar interests often experience less conflicts than dyads with dissimilar interests.

The Dyadic Theory of Conflict

Dyadic theory is a framework that examines the interaction and interdependence between two individuals, focusing on how their behaviors, thoughts, and feelings influence each other within a specific relationship context. One prominent example is the Vertical Dyad Linkage Theory, which categorizes leaders into “in-groups” and “out-groups” based on their roles and responsibilities. Another significant dyadic theory is the Dyadic Disruption Theory, which examines the impact of acute medical events on couples’ relationships and mental and physical health. This theory suggests that dyadic processes, such as social support, shared reality, and co-rumination, can lead to harmful dynamics when both individuals are distressed.

Dyadic conflicts within NGOs can lead to operational inefficiency, resource drain, strained collaborations, and potential reputational damage. These conflicts are shaped by the unique inter-dependencies and relational dynamics between individuals, departments, or partner organizations. They consume valuable resources, causing time and effort diversion, reduced productivity, and resource allocation imbalances.

Dyadic conflicts can also disrupt internal and external collaborations, affecting broader networks. Internal collaboration breakdowns can disrupt workflows and create silos, making it difficult for other teams to achieve objectives. Damaged partner relationships can jeopardize funding, undermine joint projects, and damage the NGO’s reputation within the wider community. Trust erosion can also occur, making future cooperation difficult even after the immediate conflict is resolved.

Reputational damage and loss of credibility can result from dyadic conflicts, which can lead to negative public perception, donor hesitation, and a lack of transparency in the organization. To mitigate these costs, NGOs should focus on addressing their unique inter-dependencies and fostering collaborations that foster trust and collaboration.

Causes of Dyadic Conflict in Kamuli District NGOs

The study highlights several factors that contribute to the prevalence of dyadic conflicts in Kamuli district NGOs including;

- **Resource Scarcity:** NGOs in Kamuli often operate with limited resources, leading to competition for funding, equipment, and opportunities. This scarcity has exacerbated existing tensions and created dyadic conflicts.
- **Role Ambiguity:** In many NGOs in Kamuli district, roles and responsibilities are not always clearly defined, leading to confusion and overlap. This ambiguity has triggered conflicts over who is responsible for specific tasks or decisions in those NGOs.
- **Power Imbalances:** Hierarchical structures within NGOs in Kamuli district has created power imbalances, where supervisors exert undue influence over subordinates and this has resulted into feelings of resentment and dyadic conflicts.
- **Poor Communication:** Ineffective communication channels and practices within the NGOs in Kamuli district have contributed to misunderstandings and dyadic conflicts due to lack of transparency, infrequent feedback, and poor listening skills.

The Cost of Dyadic Conflict within NGOs in Kamuli District

The cost of dyadic conflicts in NGOs in Kamuli district have been significantly noted in this study to be:

- **Reduced Productivity:** Dyadic conflicts have diverted time and energy away from core tasks, leading to decreased productivity and project delays.
- **Decreased Morale:** Dyadic conflicts have created a negative work environment in many NGOs in Kamuli district thereby leading to decreased morale, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.
- **Increased Turnover:** Employees that have been greatly affected by dyadic conflicts have experienced stress and dissatisfaction, leading to increased turnover rates. This further has disrupted project continuity and increased recruitment costs as a result of dyadic conflicts.

Dyadic Conflict Resolution Strategies

The study has recommended the following remedies to dyadic conflicts faced by NGOs in Kamuli district;

- **Training:** Kamuli NGOs should conduct planned employee training in conflict resolution, communication, and emotional intelligence to equip them with the skills to manage dyadic conflicts effectively.
- **Clear Policies and Procedures:** Kamuli NGOs need to establish clear policies and procedures for addressing dyadic conflicts by providing a framework for resolving disputes fairly and consistently.
- **Leadership Support:** Leaders within Kamuli NGOs need to be empowered with skills to create positive work environment and be able to support conflict resolution efforts.
- **Early Intervention:** the study further highlights that there is need for Kamuli district NGOs to adopt a proactive style of addressing dyadic conflicts early enough before they escalate in order to prevent more serious consequences.

2. Methodology

Case Study Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore the cost of dyadic conflicts in NGOs operating in Kamuli District, Uganda. A case study approach allows for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon within its real-world context. This approach is particularly suitable for understanding complex social phenomena like organizational conflict.

Study Area

Kamuli District is located in the Eastern Region of Uganda. The district is characterized by a predominantly rural population and a significant presence of NGOs working on various development projects. Some of these NGOs operating in Kamuli include; The Vine Uganda, Aids Education Group for Youth (AEGY), IDI, Hold Uganda, Plan International Uganda, Musana Community Development Organisation, Child Redeemed Mission, Brac Uganda, all providing a range of significant services to the district and the choice of Kamuli District provides a relevant context for examining the impact of dyadic conflicts in a setting where NGOs play a vital role in community development.

Data Collection

Data collection involved the following methods:

- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** Interviews were conducted with NGO staff, including project managers, program officers, and administrative staff, to gather their perspectives on dyadic conflicts. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol to ensure consistency while allowing for flexibility to explore emerging themes.
- **Document Review:** Relevant documents, such as project reports, staff handbooks, and internal communication records, were reviewed to gain insights into the nature and frequency of conflicts.
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of NGO staff to explore shared experiences and perspectives on dyadic conflicts.

Sample Selection

The study purposely selected NGOs operating in Kamuli District. The selection criteria included:

- **NGO Size:** Both small and large NGOs were included to capture a range of experiences.
- **Sector of Operation:** NGOs working in different sectors (e.g., health, education, agriculture) were included to provide a diverse perspective.
- **Years of Operation:** NGOs with varying years of operation were included to assess the impact of experience on conflict management.

Data Analysis

The data collected from interviews, document reviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved:

- **Transcription:** All interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed

verbatim.

- **Coding:** The transcripts and documents were coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to dyadic conflicts.
- **Theme Development:** The codes were grouped into broader themes that captured the key findings of the study.
- **Interpretation:** The themes were interpreted to understand the nature, causes, and impacts of dyadic conflicts in the context of Kamuli District.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical principles, including:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- **Confidentiality:** Participants' identities and responses were kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used to protect their privacy.
- **Anonymity:** Data were anonymized to ensure that individual responses could not be linked to specific individuals.
- **Respect:** The study was conducted with respect for the participants and their experiences.

Findings

1. Prevalence and nature of dyadic conflicts

The study revealed that dyadic conflicts are a common occurrence in NGOs operating in Kamuli District. The conflicts often involved supervisors and subordinates, with the most frequent issues being related to work allocation, performance evaluation, and communication. The nature of these conflicts ranged from minor disagreements to more serious disputes involving accusations of bullying, harassment, and unfair treatment.

2. The conflict resolution strategies being used in Kamuli district NGOs to address dyadic conflicts:

The study found that NGOs in Kamuli District employed a variety of conflict resolution strategies, but their effectiveness varied. Some of the strategies included:

- **Informal Discussions:** Supervisors and managers often attempted to resolve conflicts through informal discussions with the parties involved.
- **Mediation:** Some NGOs used mediation to facilitate communication and find solutions. For example, in one of the NGOs, one employee reported that;

“A year ago, a conflict arose with a colleague over the use of a field car. The supervisor mediated the dispute, stating that disputes were undesirable and that the car was intended for organizational use. The supervisor clarified that all employees had the right to use it for work-related purposes...”
- **Formal Grievance Procedures:** Some NGOs had formal grievance procedures, but these were not always effective.
- **Leadership Intervention:** Leaders played a role in intervening in conflicts, but their effectiveness depended on their skills and approach.

- **Training:** Some NGOs provided training in conflict resolution, but this was not widespread.

3. Discussion

The Cost of Dyadic Conflicts

The findings of this study highlight the significant cost of dyadic conflicts in NGOs operating in Kamuli District. These costs are not only financial, including lost productivity and increased turnover, but also intangible, such as decreased morale and damage to working relationships. The negative impacts of these conflicts can undermine the effectiveness of NGOs and their ability to achieve their development goals. The study's findings align with existing literature on organizational conflict, which emphasizes the detrimental effects of unresolved disputes on productivity, morale, and organizational performance.

Addressing the Causes of Conflict

The study's findings underscore the importance of addressing the root causes of dyadic conflicts. Poor communication, role ambiguity, power imbalances, and resource constraints are all contributing factors. NGOs need to take proactive steps to address these issues, including:

- **Improving Communication:** Implementing clear communication channels, providing regular feedback, and promoting active listening skills.
- **Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities:** Defining roles and responsibilities clearly and ensuring that all staff understand their duties.
- **Addressing Power Imbalances:** Promoting a culture of respect and fairness, and providing training on power dynamics.
- **Managing Resources Effectively:** Developing strategies for managing limited resources and minimizing competition.
- **Providing Training:** Offering training in conflict resolution, communication, and emotional intelligence.

Implementing Effective Conflict Resolution Strategies

The study's findings also emphasize the need for effective conflict resolution strategies. NGOs should:

- **Develop Clear Policies and Procedures:** Establishing clear policies and procedures for addressing conflicts, including grievance procedures.
- **Provide Training in Conflict Resolution:** Equipping staff with the skills to manage conflicts effectively.
- **Promote Mediation:** Utilizing mediation as a tool for resolving disputes.
- **Foster Leadership Support:** Ensuring that leaders are trained and equipped to support conflict resolution efforts.
- **Encourage Early Intervention:** Addressing conflicts early on, before they escalate.

Furthermore, the study couldn't ignore the role of leadership in conflict resolution and management, thus stating that; leadership plays a crucial role in creating a positive work environment and supporting conflict resolution efforts and

provide proactive permanent measures to curb the problem of dyadic conflicts and related costs, leaders need to:

- **Model Positive Behavior:** Demonstrate effective communication, active listening, and respect for all staff.
- **Create a Culture of Trust:** Foster a culture where staff feel safe to raise concerns and express their opinions.
- **Provide Support for Conflict Resolution:** Ensure that staff have access to the resources and training they need to resolve conflicts.
- **Intervene Promptly and Fairly:** Address conflicts promptly and fairly, ensuring that all parties are treated with respect.

4. Conclusion

Dyadic conflicts pose a significant challenge to the effectiveness of NGOs operating in Kamuli District, Uganda. These conflicts have far-reaching consequences, impacting project outcomes, staff morale, and the overall sustainability of the organization. This case study has identified the key causes and impacts of these conflicts and highlighted the need for proactive measures to address them. By implementing effective conflict resolution strategies, improving communication, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and fostering strong leadership, NGOs can mitigate the negative impacts of dyadic conflicts and create a more positive and productive work environment. This will ultimately enhance their ability to achieve their development goals and contribute to the well-being of the communities they serve.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Conflict Management Policy:** NGOs should develop a clear and comprehensive conflict management policy that outlines procedures for addressing conflicts, including grievance procedures, mediation, and disciplinary actions.
- 2. Provide Training in Conflict Resolution and Communication Skills:** NGOs should provide training to all staff on conflict resolution, communication skills, and emotional intelligence. This training should be ongoing and tailored to the specific needs of the organization.
- 3. Improve Communication Channels and Practices:** NGOs should establish clear communication channels and practices, including regular staff meetings, feedback mechanisms, and transparent decision-making processes.
- 4. Clarify Roles and Responsibilities:** NGOs should clearly define roles and responsibilities for all staff members, ensuring that there is no ambiguity or overlap.
- 5. Promote a Culture of Respect and Fairness:** NGOs should foster a culture of respect and fairness, where all staff members are treated with dignity and their contributions are valued.

6. Strengthen Leadership Skills: NGOs should provide training to leaders on conflict management, communication, and emotional intelligence. Leaders should model positive behaviour and support conflict resolution efforts.

7. Conduct Regular Staff Surveys: NGOs should conduct regular staff surveys to assess morale, job satisfaction, and the prevalence of conflicts. This information can be used to identify areas for improvement and track the effectiveness of conflict management efforts.

8. Establish a Mediation Program: NGOs should establish a mediation program to provide a neutral forum for resolving disputes.

9. Encourage Early Intervention: NGOs should encourage early intervention in conflicts, before they escalate.

10. Allocate Resources for Conflict Management: NGOs should allocate sufficient resources for conflict management, including training, mediation, and staff time.

6. Areas for Further Research

This study provides valuable insights into the cost of dyadic conflicts in NGOs operating in Kamuli District, Uganda. However, further research is needed to:

1. Explore the impact of specific conflict resolution strategies: Further research could evaluate the effectiveness of different conflict resolution strategies in the context of NGOs in Kamuli District.

2. Investigate the role of cultural factors: Further research could explore the role of cultural factors in shaping dyadic conflicts and conflict resolution approaches.

3. Examine the impact of external factors: Further research could examine the impact of external factors, such as funding constraints and political instability, on dyadic conflicts.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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