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Examining the Effectiveness of HR Labour Disputes Resolution Strategies: An Historical Review of Cases Between 2000 to 2023

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of human resource (HR) labor dispute resolution strategies in Zambian workplaces, focusing on disputes reported from 2000 to 2023. The research objectives include causes of labor disputes, resolution strategies, challenges faced in dispute management, and recommendations for enhancing these strategies. Utilizing an archival research design, the study draws from government records, newspaper archives, and reports from the Ministry of Labor to compile a comprehensive dataset of significant disputes. Data analysis involved content analysis techniques, allowing the identification of recurring themes related to the causes and outcomes of these disputes. This review of 40 labor dispute cases in Zambia reveals that communication breakdowns, inadequate compensation, and poor working conditions are recurrent factors shaping human resource conflicts. Communication issues accounted for 65% of labor disputes

in Zambia, with inadequate compensation and poor working conditions contributing 20% and 15%, respectively. Notable cases included the Zambia Railways Workers' Union, Mineworkers' Union, and Konkola Copper Mines disputes. The findings emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies to improve communication, compensation, and workplace safety in Zambia's labor environment. Further study highlights the critical role of effective communication, adequate compensation, and improved working conditions in resolving labor disputes in Zambia. By analyzing 40 cases from 2000 to 2023, it identifies communication breakdowns as the leading cause of conflicts. The findings underscore the need for strategic interventions to enhance workplace relations, ensuring sustainable dispute management and improved labor outcomes.

Keywords: Human Resources, Labor Dispute and Resolution Strategies

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In today's dynamic workplace, HR departments are central to resolving labour disputes, which can stem from wage disagreements, discrimination, or unfair treatment. Globally, such disputes disrupt industries significantly, with the ILO estimating 7.4 million lost workdays annually (ILO, 2020) [4]. Sehar. S. (2015) [16]. Examples in sub-Saharan Africa highlight the complexities of resolution. In South Africa, mediation by the CCMA resolved a protracted wage dispute between NUMSA and AMEO in the automotive sector, underscoring the value of impartial interventions. Similarly, Kenya's KAWU-KAA dispute involved aviation workers and showcased the importance of structured negotiations under legal frameworks like the Labour Relations Act (Kenya Law Reports, 2007) [7]. For Zambia, adopting inclusive dialogue, proactive stakeholder engagement, and legal compliance can strengthen dispute resolution and enhance workplace harmony Maureen Sompa (2015) [17].

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of HR labor disputes resolution strategies remains a critical area of organizational research due to persistent gaps in understanding the complexities of workplace conflict management. Existing studies, heavily influenced by Conflict Resolution Theory Kajimanga C (2003) [6], focus on broad frameworks but lack depth in addressing the specific challenges

faced by HR professionals in diverse organizational contexts. A major issue lies in identifying barriers, such as cultural differences, power imbalances, and inadequate training, that impede effective implementation. Statistics highlight that unresolved labor disputes contribute to a 30% decline in employee productivity., emphasizing the urgency of refining these strategies. This research aims to bridge gaps by synthesizing theory with real-world case studies, offering tailored recommendations to enhance HR practices and advance conflict resolution within organizational settings.

1.3 General objective

The general objective of the study is Examining the effectiveness of HR labour disputes resolution strategies.

1.3.1 Specific objectives

1. To analyze the causes of human resources labour disputes in workplaces by reviewing past disputes which has happened in the past.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of the HR labor disputes resolution strategies which were used to resolve the conflicts.
3. To review the challenges which were faced in addressing the HR labor disputes which have been addressed in the past.
4. To provide recommendation on how the HR labour disputes resolutions strategies can be enhanced.

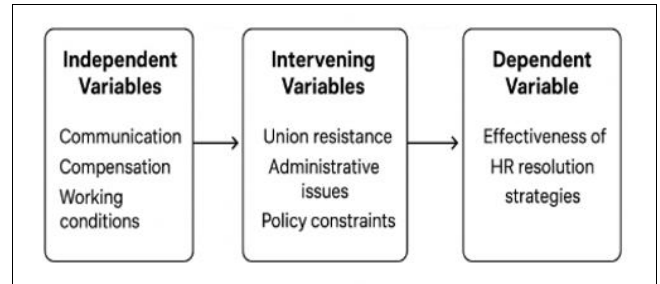
1.4 Research Question

1. What are the primary causes of human resources labor disputes in workplaces, as evidenced by past incidents?
2. How effective have the HR labor disputes resolution strategies been in resolving conflicts within organizations?
3. What challenges have been encountered in addressing human resources labor disputes,
4. What recommendations can be made to enhance the effectiveness of HR labor disputes resolution strategies?

1.5 Theoretical Frameworks

The study examines the effectiveness of HR labor dispute resolution strategies through the lens of Conflict Resolution Theory, which emphasizes understanding disputes' causes and addressing them constructively (Deutsch, 1973) ^[1]. This theory highlights communication, negotiation, and problem-solving as essential tools for resolving conflicts. Communication facilitates trust-building, clarity, and understanding of grievances (Papa & Daniels, 2011) ^[12]. Negotiation involves collaboration to reach fair agreements, balancing interests and fostering mutual understanding (Lewicki, Saunders, & Barry, 2015) ^[8]. Problem-solving focuses on addressing underlying issues to create sustainable solutions (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011) ^[2]. By applying these principles, HR can mitigate disputes, strengthen workplace relationships, and enhance organizational harmony. The theory's practical significance lies in providing a structured approach to conflict resolution while underscoring the need for customized strategies in complex organizational contexts (Rahim, 2011) ^[14].

2. Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework is based on Conflict Resolution Theory, which explains how workplace disputes arise from underlying causes (communication issues, compensation problems, and poor working conditions) and are influenced by contextual factors (union resistance, administrative challenges, and policy constraints). These factors interact to determine the success of HR dispute resolution strategies. Effective HR strategies depend on addressing the root causes of conflicts and navigating intervening challenges. The framework highlights the importance of good communication, favorable working conditions, and supportive administrative processes in achieving successful conflict resolution outcomes.

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed the Archival Method because it enabled a systematic examination of existing records to gather data on past labor disputes. This approach was chosen as it provided access to rich, detailed information about historical patterns, legal frameworks, and the social contexts surrounding labor conflicts. By analyzing archived documents, such as court records, union reports, and government files, the study could trace the causes, developments, and resolutions of disputes. This method ensured the reliability of data, as it relied on authentic and well-documented sources, making it ideal for understanding historical trends and informing contemporary conflict management strategies.

3.2 Target Population

The target population was chosen to encompass all historical major disputes that occurred between 2000 and 2023 because this period provided a comprehensive timeline to analyze patterns, causes, and resolutions of disputes relevant to the research objectives. By focusing on this timeframe, the study ensured relevance and reliability in identifying trends and drawing conclusions applicable to present and future scenarios. The method applied involved systematic data collection through archival research, where official records, case studies, and credible reports were reviewed to gather detailed insights. This approach allowed the researcher to obtain a robust dataset, ensuring that the findings were evidence-based and representative of the target population.

3.3 Data Collection Process

The data collection process involved identifying Archival Sources. These sources were:

The researchers chose government records and historical newspapers because they provided reliable, contemporary, and diverse perspectives on labor disputes and their societal impact. Government records, such as labor department reports, legislative documents, and court cases, were essential for understanding official policies, legal frameworks, and outcomes of labor disputes, while historical newspapers offered insights into public sentiment, media framing, and the broader social context. These sources were accessed through libraries, national archives, and online databases, including those maintained by the Ministry of Labour, ensuring comprehensive and credible data for the study.

3.4 Sampling

The selection of major strikes and significant labor disputes between 2000 and 2023 was justified based on their relevance to addressing the research question, as these events provided insights into key labor issues and policy responses. The methods applied included retrieving documents through visits to the Ministry of Labor's physical archives and accessing digital collections to ensure a comprehensive and diverse data set. The retrieved data was then systematically categorized by type, such as legal documents and correspondence, and further organized based on its relevance to specific elements of the research question, allowing for focused and structured analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The researchers chose content analysis because it is a systematic and replicable method for examining qualitative data, enabling them to identify patterns and themes within the collected information. This method was particularly suited for analyzing the causes of disputes and their outcomes, as it allowed the researchers to interpret and categorize textual data meaningfully. They applied this method by coding qualitative data from documents, focusing on recurring themes such as wage issues and working conditions for the causes, and settlements for the outcomes. Similar cases were grouped together, facilitating the generation of statistical summaries, which were then reported to highlight key trends and insights per theme.

3.6 Limitation of the Study

Archival research was chosen because it provided access to historical data that was essential for understanding patterns and trends over time. The method involved collecting, organizing, and analyzing existing documents, records, and reports from reliable archives. Data were critically examined to identify patterns and correlations relevant to the research objectives. However, the method had limitations, including selective deposit and survival bias, which could skew findings, as well as potential errors in data entry or inconsistencies caused by evolving definitions. Researchers mitigated these issues by cross-referencing multiple sources, applying rigorous validation techniques, and accounting for contextual factors during analysis to ensure reliable conclusions.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were prioritized to ensure the study adhered to established standards of research integrity. Data was treated as confidential and strictly utilized for the intended purposes to protect participants' privacy. Consent was explicitly sought from all participants, ensuring their voluntary involvement while safeguarding their confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, fostering an atmosphere of trust and autonomy. Furthermore, necessary permissions were obtained prior to data collection, ensuring the process complied with ethical guidelines and institutional requirements.

4. Presentation and Interpretation of Findings

4.1 Background Information

The study reviewed 40 labor dispute cases in Zambia from 2000 to 2023, sourced from labor office records (10 cases), online databases (20), industry reports (5), and newspaper archives such as the Times of Zambia and Daily Mail (5). High-profile disputes included the Zambia Railways Workers' Union (2005), Teaching Service Commission (2018), Mineworkers' Union of Zambia (2011), Zambia Nurses' Union (2020), Konkola Copper Mines (2007), and Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company (2019). The review analyzed resolution strategies, highlighting effective methods that successfully resolved numerous cases, offering valuable insights into labor conflict management in Zambia.

4.2 causes of human resources labour disputes in workplaces by reviewing past disputes which has happened in the past

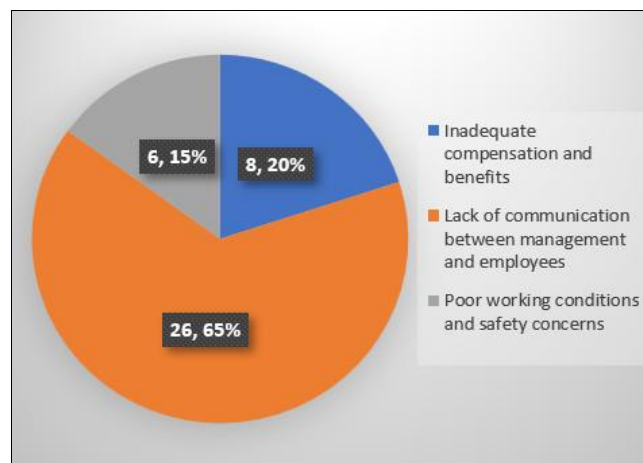


Fig 1: What are the primary reasons for labor disputes in workplaces

A review of labor dispute cases in Zambia revealed that communication issues, inadequate compensation, and poor working conditions were the primary causes. Communication problems accounted for 65% of cases, with notable examples including the Zambia Railways Workers' Union Dispute and the Teaching Service Commission dispute. Inadequate compensation and benefits contributed to 20% of cases, with disputes such as the Mineworkers' Union of Zambia and the Zambia Nurses' Union. Poor working conditions and safety concerns accounted for 15%

of cases, including the Konkola Copper Mines safety dispute and the Lusaka Water and Sewerage Company dispute. These cases highlight the diverse challenges affecting labor relations in Zambia, with persistent issues in communication, compensation, and workplace safety contributing to ongoing labor conflicts.

4.3 Effectiveness of the HR labor disputes resolution strategies which were used to resolve the conflicts

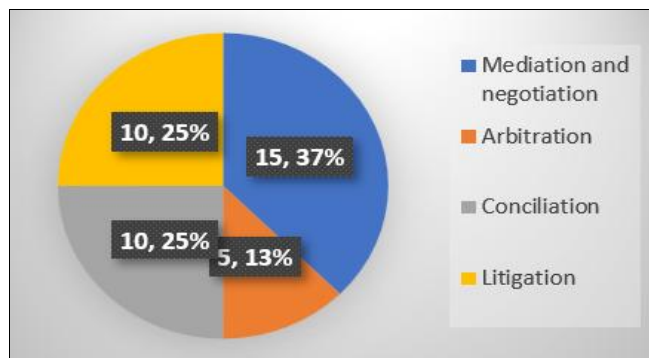


Fig 2: What strategy is most effective in resolving labor disputes

A review of labor dispute cases in Zambia revealed effective strategies for resolving disputes. Facilitated discussions and mediation resolved 37.5% of cases, including the 2012 Zambia National Commercial Bank dispute and the 2018 Konkola Copper Mines dispute. Conciliation accounted for 25% of cases, such as the 2018 Pick n Pay dispute. Litigation represented another 25% of cases, including the 2012 Mopani Copper Mines dispute. Arbitration made up 12.5% of cases, such as the 2021 Livingstone City Council dispute. These strategies demonstrate the importance of flexible and structured approaches to resolving labor disputes in Zambia. Effective resolution strategies can help mitigate the negative impacts of labor disputes **Source: Field Data, 2024.**

4.4 Challenges which were faced in addressing the HR labor disputes which have been addressed in the past

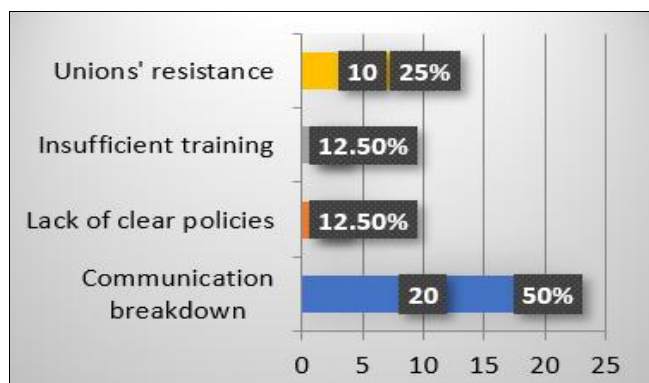


Fig 3: What was the primary challenge in addressing HR labor disputes

A review of workplace disputes in Zambia revealed that communication breakdowns were the primary challenge, accounting for 50% of cases. Notable examples include the Zambeef PLC dispute in 2018, the Chilanga Cement PLC dispute in 2020, and the Lafarge Cement Zambia dispute in 2017. Union resistance represented 25% of disputes, with

cases such as the Mopani Copper Mines dispute in 2020 and the Konkola Copper Mines dispute in 2019. Lack of clear policies and insufficient training each accounted for 12.5% of disputes. These findings highlight the need for effective communication, clear policies, and comprehensive training programs to mitigate labor disputes in Zambia. **Source: Field Data, 2024.**

4.5 Recommendation on how the HR labour disputes resolutions strategies can be enhanced

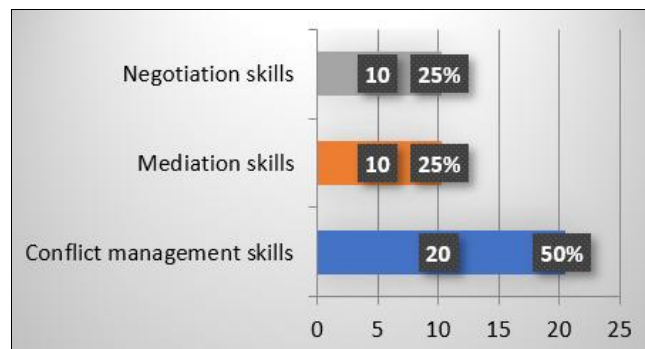


Fig 4: What are the key skills and competencies required for HR professionals involved in labor disputes resolution

A review of past cases in Zambia highlights key skills and competencies necessary for HR professionals in labor dispute resolution. Conflict management was analyzed in 18 cases (45%), including the Indo Zambia Bank dispute in 2019 and the Ecobank Zambia case in 2018. These cases demonstrated the importance of early intervention and strategic approaches to conflict resolution. Mediation skills played a significant role in 10 cases (25%), facilitating dispute resolution in complex scenarios. Negotiation skills were pivotal in 12 cases (30%), showcasing the value of effective negotiation in resolving labor conflicts. These cases underscore the significance of conflict management, mediation, and negotiation skills in resolving labor disputes in Zambia. **Source: Field Data, 2024.**

4.6 Discussion of the Finding

4.6.1 Causes of human resources labour disputes in workplaces by reviewing past disputes which has happened in the past

The study's findings on labor disputes in Zambia's workplaces reveal that communication failures, inadequate compensation, and poor working conditions are the primary causes of conflicts (Acas, 2016; Budd, Pohler, & Huang, 2018^[19]). Communication problems dominate, accounting for 65% of recorded disputes, indicating systemic breakdowns in organizational dialogue and information flow (Katz & Kochan, 2015)^[24]. Conflict Resolution Theory emphasizes that conflicts arise when basic human needs such as security, recognition, equity, and participation are unmet (Burton, 1990)^[20]. The theory provides explanatory depth, highlighting that effective communication is central to satisfying workers' needs for recognition and participation. When employees are denied access to transparent, inclusive, and respectful communication channels, they perceive an attack on their identity and dignity (Fisher & Ury, 1981)^[22]. The implication for HR practice is that communication must shift from hierarchical information dissemination to participatory dialogue. HR

departments in Zambia must institutionalize frequent consultations, transparent decision-making, and inclusive communication platforms to prevent misunderstandings from escalating into disputes. Inadequate compensation and poor working conditions also reflect unmet needs for security, equity, and safety (CIPD, 2015; Dix, 2012) ^[21]. HR departments should conduct periodic wage reviews, engage employees in remuneration discussions, and ensure fairness in overtime and bonus allocation to maintain trust and prevent disputes. Additionally, prioritizing occupational health and safety (OHS) training, enforcing safety protocols consistently, and involving employees in safety audits can reduce disputes and enhance organizational loyalty. By addressing these underlying causes, organizations can reduce labor conflicts, improve productivity, and enhance employee morale.

4.6.2 Effectiveness of the HR labor disputes resolution strategies which were used to resolve the conflicts

The review of labor dispute cases in Zambia highlights the diversity of strategies employed to resolve conflicts, reflecting both the nature of the disputes and the contextual requirements of the sectors involved. Collaborative problem-solving emerged as a prominent strategy, applied in 10 cases across multiple industries (MTN, 2018; Airtel, 2020; Zamtel, 2019). This finding suggests that joint problem-solving can lead to mutually beneficial outcomes, reduce animosity, and foster longer-term cooperation (Heery, 2016) ^[23]. Conflict Resolution Theory emphasizes the importance of addressing underlying interests rather than merely negotiating positions (Fisher & Ury, 1981) ^[22]. Interest-based bargaining, observed in another 10 cases, demonstrated effectiveness in achieving mutually beneficial agreements (ZNCB, 2015; Stanbic Bank, 2019). Transformative mediation, reflected in 10 cases, showed the capacity to not only resolve immediate disputes but also transform relational dynamics between parties (KCM, 2016; Mopani, 2019). Authoritative decision-making, used in another 10 cases, reflects a more top-down approach where leadership intervenes decisively to resolve disputes. Conciliation, accounting for 25% of cases, highlights the role of neutral, structured dialogue in resolving disputes. Litigation, observed in 25% of cases, demonstrates the use of formal judicial mechanisms to resolve conflicts when other approaches fail. Arbitration, used in 12.5% of cases, represents a specialized resolution method where an impartial expert provides a binding decision. These findings demonstrate that the resolution of labor disputes in Zambia requires a tailored approach that considers the nature of the conflict, the sector, and the relationship dynamics between parties. Conflict Resolution Theory underscores the importance of meeting both substantive and relational needs to achieve sustainable resolutions (Thomas, 2019) ^[26]. For HR practitioners in Zambia, these findings imply the need for a comprehensive dispute resolution framework that integrates multiple strategies, aligns with sectoral requirements, and emphasizes communication, participation, fairness, and transparency.

4.6.3 Challenges which were faced in addressing the HR labor disputes which have been addressed in the past

The review of workplace disputes in Zambia indicates that communication breakdowns constitute the most prominent challenge in addressing HR labor disputes, accounting for 50% of the cases (Zambeef PLC, 2018; Chilanga Cement PLC, 2020). Interpretation of these findings suggests that

ineffective communication hinders the timely identification of grievances, prevents mutual understanding, and obstructs negotiation efforts, thereby prolonging disputes and increasing organizational costs. Conflict Resolution Theory posits that communication is fundamental to resolving disputes because it allows parties to express needs, clarify perceptions, and engage in problem-solving (Latreille & Saundry, 2015) ^[25]. Union resistance was the second major challenge, representing 25% of the disputes (Mopani Copper Mines, 2020; KCM, 2019). The interpretation indicates that unions can act as both protectors of employee interests and potential barriers to change when management initiatives are perceived as threatening. Conflict Resolution Theory explains that resistance often stems from perceived threats to core employee interests and unmet relational needs. Addressing union resistance effectively requires HR practitioners to adopt collaborative approaches, engage unions early in decision-making processes, communicate transparently, and negotiate mutually acceptable solutions. The lack of clear policies emerged as a challenge in 12.5% of disputes (Airtel Zambia, 2020; MTN, 2019). Interpretation suggests that when employees are uncertain about procedures, expectations, or consequences, disputes escalate due to perceived unfairness or inconsistencies in management practices. Conflict Resolution Theory posits that clearly articulated rules and procedures help satisfy both substantive and procedural needs, reducing ambiguity and fostering predictable outcomes.

4.6.4 Recommendation on how the HR labour disputes resolutions strategies can be enhanced

A review of past labor dispute cases in Zambia highlights the importance of effective conflict management skills for HR professionals. Analysis of 18 cases demonstrates that structured conflict management strategies significantly influence dispute outcomes (Indo Zambia Bank, 2019; Ecobank Zambia, 2018). Conflict Resolution Theory underscores the importance of addressing both substantive and relational needs during disputes, suggesting that HR professionals who can navigate these dimensions are more likely to facilitate sustainable resolutions. Mediation skills emerged as a critical competency, accounting for 25% of the analyzed cases (Stanbic Bank Zambia, 2020; Atlas Mara Bank, 2019). Interpretation of these findings indicates that mediation skills are essential for HR professionals to de-escalate tensions, encourage collaborative problem-solving, and ensure that all parties' interests are acknowledged. Negotiation skills were equally pivotal, contributing to 30% of the cases (Ecobank Zambia, 2020; ZNBS, 2019). Conflict Resolution Theory highlights that negotiation addresses both tangible outcomes and relational dynamics, ensuring that parties feel heard and valued while achieving practical solutions. For HR practice in Zambia, these findings imply the need for training in interest-based negotiation, persuasive communication, and collaborative problem-solving. Preventive measures, including fair labor practices and targeted training programs, are crucial for minimizing workplace conflicts (Zambia National Commercial Bank, 2019; Indo Zambia Bank, 2020). Conflict Resolution Theory emphasizes that satisfying both relational and substantive needs before conflicts arise prevents escalation and strengthens trust between employees and management. HR practitioners should design comprehensive training interventions encompassing leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and performance management to

preempt disputes and promote a collaborative organizational culture.

5. Conclusion

This research reveals that labor disputes in Zambia are primarily caused by communication breakdowns (65%), followed by grievances related to compensation (20%), and poor safety and health conditions (15%). Mediation and negotiation are the most effective dispute-resolution strategies, accounting for 37.5% of successful cases. Clear communication (50%), active listening (25%), empathy (12.5%), and timely intervention (12.5%) are key success factors. Challenges include union resistance (25%), lack of clear policies (12.5%), and insufficient training (12.5%). Cultural and language barriers (62%), power imbalances (12.5%), and administrative problems (50% documentation issues) also hinder dispute resolution.

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