

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE OF GHANAIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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**ABSTRACT:** *The paper reports preliminary findings from an ongoing research analyzing the purported resolution of promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The purpose of the study was to examine how promotion-related conflicts in HEIs are being resolved. It sought to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the processes and procedures with the view to recommend ways of improving the resolution of promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian HEIs. The data is drawn from questionnaires administered to two hundred and forty (240) randomly sampled Faculty members, while 18 senior administrators were also purposively sampled for semi-structured interviews. Promotion policy documents were also analyzed. The data reported in this paper highlights that Ghanaian Universities have processes and procedures for conflict resolution, although the quality of the procedures may be debated. It further suggests that 'process' is a critical factor in resolving promotion-related conflicts in HEIs.*

**KEYWORDS:** Higher Education, Promotion, Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Faculty, Process

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## INTRODUCTION

The university and academia are by their nature and structure breeding grounds for conflict, and therefore the manner conflicts are handled in universities should be fully developed to enhance job performance. This research examined the resolution of promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In pursuance of this objective, this research explored views of faculty and senior administrators, and interrogated policy documents (including the Conditions of Service for Senior Members of Public Universities, the Statutes, and Criteria for Promotion of Academic Staff of Public Universities) and other related documents to understand how faculty promotion-related conflicts are resolved.

Despite a longstanding assumption that not all conflicts are necessarily bad (Pierre and Pepper, 1976; Shani and Lau, 2000) it is still a fact that conflicts can be incredibly destructive to collaborative work within institutions. Actually, the term conflict has negative connotations-revolving around words such as rivalry, anger, tension, hatred and violence (Mankoe, 2007; Esquivel and Kleitner, 1996; Caudron, 1999). Thus how conflict is perceived and reacted to is critical.

The assumption underlying this research is that promotion is an emotional process, both for successful applicants and for those who are negatively impacted. Unsuccessful applicants may become stressed up and disappointed; with potential negative consequences for performance and social relationships that are vital for institutional progress. It is general knowledge that promotion changes one's status and recognition and should therefore be seen as a need. Needs, as Burton (1990) asserts, is at the centre of every conflict and as such every conflict must be handled properly. Burton explains that the denial of a need, without reasonable explanation, can lead to conflicts. If an employee is upset or demoralised because of an unpleasant promotion experience and as such is not co-operative at the workplace, the perceived conflict must be resolved early enough to avoid its protraction (Billson, 2000).

### **Problem Statement**

There is evidence that conflict has been part of academic life since ancient times (Holton, 1995). Hearn and Anderson (2002) contend that most research on organizational conflict have been conducted in non-academic settings. However, the university and the academic departments within it are not immune to conflict. In Ghanaian public universities, faculty are mainly recognised through promotions that are based on evaluation reports. Although there is the assumption that universities have credible promotion policies with an in-built procedural appeal system, there is little knowledge for both administrators and faculty about how these operate in practice and how tensions surrounding faculty application for promotions are resolved.

The concern for this study is that the resolution of promotion-related conflicts should be a priority to administrators, because Mankoe (2007) argues that promotions and advancements in salary constitute the most important devices available to administration for encouraging effort and rewarding merit. Mankoe (2007) adds that merited promotion is not only a reward to the recipient but also serves as a spur to colleagues, whilst an unmerited promotion is distinctly discouraging to the institution as a whole. Part of the underlying assumption of this study is that in university administration, faculty promotion-related conflicts could affect individual staff performance, and interactions among staff. Hanson (1991), comments that conflicts that emanate as a result of ill-feelings negatively affect work performance and therefore should not be considered as personal problems that victims must personally address.

Given that conflicts sometimes engender strife, feelings of resentment, aggressiveness, tension and hostility within an institution, it is important to investigate and improve on how faculty promotion-related conflicts are resolved. The main concern of this study, then, is how Ghanaian public universities resolve faculty promotion-related conflicts. The underlining concern of this research is not so much on the promotion-related conflicts that occur in Ghanaian public universities, but how those conflicts are handled to ensure faculty commitment and productivity.

### **Significance of the Study**

A search for literature on the ways that promotion-related conflicts are managed and resolved in higher institutions of learning in Ghana returns little results. Although there is substantial international literature on conflict and conflict resolution in general which could provide valuable information for others (The World Bank, 2005; Volpe and Chandler, 2007), there is

very little to find in relation to faculty promotion-related conflicts. Therefore this research has both theoretical and practical importance.

Given the dearth of literature, this research will add substantially to the literature; aside from opening up space for debate and discussion of conflict resolution processes in higher education institutions in Ghana. The study will hopefully prompt more researches in the area of administrative conflict and conflict resolution in general and faculty promotion-related conflicts in universities in particular. Besides generating academic knowledge and theoretical debates, the results of this study will provide a rich source of material and framework of analysis concerning promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian public universities.

The results of the study will draw the attention of policy makers and other stakeholders to various issues in the conflict resolution processes in public universities; and possibly offer proposals on how to address problematic issues. The critique to be offered in this study will most likely provide a point of reference for higher education policy reformers in the review of conflict resolution procedures.

### **Research Objective**

The objective of this study is to examine the purported resolution of promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian higher education institutions.

### **Research Questions**

Based on the above - stated study objective, this article provides answers to the following questions:

- What are the mechanisms for resolving promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian Public Universities?
- What are the inadequacies or shortfalls of the identified mechanisms currently in place?
- How can the mechanisms be modified or improved to enhance efficiency in the Universities?

### **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Strategies**

This research views resolution mechanisms and strategies as models or means, as well as the posture institutions adopt to handle conflict. There are perhaps as many mechanisms and strategies for resolving conflict as there are types of conflict, ranging from formal or complex models to more simple problem-solving techniques. These mechanisms may offer many creative approaches to resolving conflict in various settings. Lencioni (2005) asserts that possibly the most important part of conflict resolution process is using the most appropriate resolution for conflicts at hand. He further highlights some issues to be considered when handling conflict. These issues include: (a) Environmental obstacles, (b) Relationship obstacles and (c) Individual obstacles.

Environmental obstacles refer to issues that border on the atmosphere in which the conflict is taking place. This includes issues like office politics, individual's moods, institutional culture (e.g. collegiality vs. accountability) and such other issues that can have an effect on the resolution process. Relationship obstacles include all issues between the people involved in

the conflict and prior unresolved legacies or events among the parties, their reputation, or even position in the institution may affect how people handle conflict. This category includes issues of mentor-mentee, godfather syndrome, and tribal cleavages. Individual obstacles on the other hand are issues that are specific to each person in the conflict. Individuals' experiences, knowledge, self-esteem, and value and motives all play a part in causing and eventually resolving conflict (Lencioni 2005, p.125).

Lencioni (2005) explains that the key to this model is to understand that the three obstacles as earlier mentioned exist and therefore should be considered when resolving conflicts. He asserts that when a conflict arises because of a particular obstacle, the group should consider the model to decide whether to address the issue or not. However, he cautions that if parties choose not to address and resolve an issue, they should agree not to let it affect their ability to resolve a bigger conflict. Lencioni also indicates that obstacles outside the realms of a real problem are more difficult to resolve, largely because they involve personalities and other issues that are not easy to change. In this way, these conflict resolution model resembles Furlong's (2005) circle of conflict model as they both reveal hot-button issues. Parties that are able to talk about these types of issue (hot-button issues) must trust each other because doing so involves some type of personal risk (Lencioni, 2005).

Scholars, including Biggs (1992), propose models that recognize that conflict-related factors interact with a complex mix of factors to determine how a conflict is resolved. Biggs's model is seen as 'Presage-Process-Product model' where issues of conflict are traced to the route. The 'presage' variables are the conflict related factors (e.g. interpersonal tensions, ethnic cleavages, interpretation of policies and norms, inefficient and ineffective administrative processes and leadership styles) which underlie the conflict. Presage variables work into 'process' variables (the conflict resolution procedure, the nature of the conflict resolution mechanisms and posture of those using the mechanisms) to determine whether a conflict is successfully resolved or otherwise. Conflict resolution is the 'product' of the interactions between the presage-process variables. Therefore, the analysis of conflict resolution in higher education institutions should focus on understanding how conflict resolution processes, procedures or mechanisms intricately knit with conflict dynamics arising from the presage variables (factors that promote or are likely to cause conflict).

Nnadi (1997) also highlights some basic strategies for dealing with conflict. These are: (a) Win-Lose (b) Lose-Lose (c) Win-Win (d) Withdrawing (e) Smoothing (f) Compromising (g) Forcing and (h) Confronting.

The Win-Lose method, according to Nnadi, creates winners and losers, often similar to the results achieved through majority vote. He intimates that an administrator who views conflict as a personal threat may use the Win-Lose approach, using administrative authority to impose a decision on employees. He contends that the administrator feels like a winner, while the employees, who may not be in a position to complain, end up becoming the losers. Such a strategy, according to Nnadi, gives the supervisor a sense of being in control in negotiations with employees, causing one-way communication patterns. Such situations create frustrations for employees. This method, according to Nnadi, creates a we-versus-them situation in problem solving and should be avoided because it polarizes those involved in a conflict situation. This is to say that although conflict, in itself, may be seen as having some beneficial potential for organisations; this mode of dealing with it is viewed almost universally as being destructive. According to Machingambi and Wades (2012), in a

university environment, Win-Lose approaches to conflict management largely find expression in the disputes occurring between a department chairperson and a lecturer, a lecturer and another lecturer as well as a student and another student and the attendant efforts to settle the disputes. In the present study, the dispute occurs between management or university administration, a Head of department or a Dean of faculty on the one hand and the Faculty staff on the other. McNamara (2007) identified the following as the major limitations associated with win-lose solutions to conflict management: (a) its emphasis on victory implies that it is a closed approach that is fraught with bias and prejudice; and (b) it intensifies antagonism and hostility between the winning and losing groups.

According to Nnadi (1997), Lose-Lose strategy results from compromise where individuals in the conflict do not achieve all they wanted. The individuals get only part of what they require, based on the assumption that half a loaf is better than none, and that the avoidance of conflict is preferable to personal confrontation. This means that, in this case, no one emerges a winner. Nnadi (1997) further intimates that this strategy is often used when employees have a definite solution to a problem but feel that those in charge of operations would not accept it. What happens here is that the employees and the supervisors try to compromise to avoid offending each other. For Nnadi, this strategy revolves around personal perspectives rather than organisational perspective. This is so because the individual as an entity, other than ways of finding a solution to a problem, is what is considered most under such circumstances. Thus, according to Nnadi, there is a clear distinction between the needs of the conflicting parties and the solutions that would be acceptable to each other. Nnadi (1997), however, points out that while compromise may sometimes be necessary; it is not the best means of managing conflict. The Lose-Lose method of conflict resolution, according to Nnadi, is ineffective in dealing with problems that require solutions of high quality and high acceptance.

The Win-Win approach seeks to produce solutions acceptable to all parties involved in the conflict. Nnadi (1997) points out that the Win-Win strategy not only focuses on consensus but requires individuals to express their needs and ideas. He claims this can be achieved when all parties are open and honest about facts, opinions and feelings, whereas defensiveness, apprehension and aggression are diminished. He based his argument on the fact that one can hardly solve conflict without having the required information. Nnadi admonished further that to achieve a Win-Win solution in conflict resolution, supervisors should adopt and practise a problem-solving style of approaching and resolving conflict that allows open participation and commitment to a solution that is acceptable to all. He cautioned further that when one is elusive regarding the reasons for sturdily supporting a position, mistrust tends to arise. This approach allows both parties to a conflict to benefit something (though not necessarily equally) because this strategy involves elements of bargaining and compromising. Weaver (2003) views this strategy as providing the parties involved in a conflict an opportunity to be subjects. Onsarigo (2007) alludes to this view by adding that it involves the process of collaboration in which parties work together to define their problems and then engage in mutual problem-solving. The crux of the issue here is that parties participate in the search for a solution and where possible they are persuaded to see each other positively and to see each other's position as legitimate.

In terms of the Withdrawal, Nnadi (1997) asserts that in withdrawing from a conflict in order to resolve it, action is initiated only on pressing issues, and only when it is very necessary. He asserts that withdrawal is like trying to sweep conflict under the carpet and hoping that it



will die. Nnadi (1997) therefore sees Withdrawal as being inaction. According to Shani and Lau (2000), the avoidance orientation implies an aggressive, disobliging approach in which both parties ignore the concerns involved by evading the issue or postponing the conflict by deciding not to deal with it. Ruble and Thomas (1976) contend that avoidance as a strategy is usually expressed by apathy, withdrawal, and indifference. They explain that people who use this technique simply Withdraw from the conflict and attempt to ignore it. According to them, this does not mean that there is an absence of conflict, but that it has been conceptualised as something not to deal with. Ruble and Thomas (1976) assert further that since nothing is done to eliminate the reasons for the conflict, it is likely to resurface and in a more serious manner. They observe that supervisors and employers feel uncomfortable bringing conflict into the open for discussion, and therefore resort to the frequent use of avoidance. They caution that avoidance is the most ineffective technique for dealing with conflict in that, when conflict is mismanaged or avoided, bad ideas can go unchecked, leading to poor decision-making and unconstructive outcomes. Krietner and Kinicki (1998) are also of the view that avoidance provides a temporary fix that sidesteps the underlining problem. Ruble and Thomas (1976) are, however, of the view that avoidance might still be appropriate if the issue is trivial, or if one perceives little chance of winning.

Nnadi (1997) asserts that a smoothing person is one who often has a low tolerance for disagreements and expression of negative emotions. He explained further that such a person would always want people to look at the bright side of issues. Nnadi, however, contended that this does not necessarily result in an effective working setting. He goes on to say that employees can become frustrated because issues are not confronted, and the supervisor is generally too nice a person to deal with them effectively. Kreitner and Kinicki (1998), on the other hand, explain that smoothing involves playing down disparities while stressing commonalties. It therefore "encourages co-operation but is inappropriate for complex or worsening problems" (p. 462). Stoner (1978) sees smoothing as a more diplomatic way of suppressing conflict. He went on to explain that instead of forcing acceptance of a solution, the supervisor tries to talk one faction into giving in. He saw this strategy to be effective where the supervisor has more information than the other factions and is only making a reasonable suggestion. He however cautioned that where the supervisor is merely favouring one side, the losing side is likely to be resentful. Kreitner (1998) asserted that a supervisor who relies on smoothing says to the conflicting parties something like, "Settle down. Don't rock the boat. Things will work out by themselves". He also cautioned that this strategy may tone down conflict in the short run, but does not solve the underlying problem. This is confirmed by Krietner and Kinicki (2001) in their observation that smoothing is a temporary fix that fails to confront the underlying problem. Kreitner (1998), however, saw smoothing to be useful when management is attempting to contain things until a vital project is accomplished or when there is no time for problem solving or compromise and forcing is deemed unsuitable. According to Krietner and Kinicki, obliging may become useful when it is possible something good may be derived from it. A

According to Stoner (1978), through compromise, managers try to resolve conflict by finding a middle ground between two or more positions. He highlighted forms of compromise which include separation, in which conflicting parties are kept apart until they agree to a solution; arbitration, in which conflicting parties submit to the judgment of a third party; and bribing, in which one party accepts some compensation in exchange for ending the conflict. Schnake (1987) also observed that compromise occurs when both parties try to satisfy some of their concerns. That is, a situation where each side is willing to give in to the other somewhat, so

that both gain something from the management of the conflict. Thus, the premise behind compromise is that partial victory is better than winning nothing at all. Ideally, in a compromise, each side gives up something of lesser value in order to achieve or retain a great goal. Schnake intimated that a compromising strategy often prevents the conflict from escalating to more perilous stages. Kreitner and Kinicki (1998) contend that compromise should be a give-and-take affair involving moderate concern for both self and others. This is in confirmation of Shani and Lau's (2000) assertion that compromise reflects the mid-point between the styles, and involves give-and-take by both parties. They explained that in the compromising orientation, both conflicting parties gain and give up something they want. Nnadi (1997), in support of the afore-mentioned, also saw compromise as a strategy similar to the Lose-Lose method in that the supervisor decides on a position in which all individuals feel moderately contented. However, Kreitner (1998) felt supervisors approach compromise situations with a win-lose attitude. This, according to him, makes the approach to be disappointing, leaving one or both parties feeling cheated. He pointed out further that conflict is only temporarily suppressed when people feel cheated. The basic limitation of a compromise, according to Nnadi, is related to the aim of finding a reasonable solution. This, according to Krietner and Kinicki, makes compromise to be a temporary fix that can stifle creative problem solving. Nnadi, again, pointed out that while compromise may sometimes be necessary, it is not the best means of managing conflict. Stoner (1978) also observed that this method will not lead to a solution that will best help the organisation achieve its goals. He observed further that, instead, the solution reached will simply be the one that both conflicting parties can live with.

Other strategies or mechanisms for resolving conflicts include the Contingency Approach or Measures (Machingambi and Wades, 2012), Integrative Problem Solving (Kreitner and Kinicki, 1998), and Third-Party Intervention (Alcover, 2009; Volpe and Chandler, 2008 Antunes, Relvas & Borges, 2007). Alcover (2007) proposes the use of an Ombudsman whilst Volpe and Chandler (2007) advocate the use of what they term as Pandemics (the term 'pandemics' was coined to describe academics who are scholars and teachers in the field of dispute resolution and actually practise what they preach in their university. They can be seen as indigenous dispute resolvers in the academic culture. The Contingency Approach to conflict resolution in tertiary institutions is different in many ways. Unlike the Win-Lose and Win-Win approaches, which seek to prescribe blue print for conflict resolution, Contingency Approach as described by Machingambi and Wades (2012), is non-prescriptive. The approach stems from the simple observation that no one particular strategy or approach can suit all types of conflict at all times. As Pang, Jin & Cameron (2007) accurately point out, "...it should not be assumed that one strategy is any more correct than the other or that any one approach represents the truth about conflict management." Machingambi and Wades (2012) argue that it is incumbent upon leaders in tertiary education institutions to take into account the nature and circumstances surrounding a conflict when deciding how best to resolve it.

Musembi and Siele (2004) assert that conflict in universities takes many forms and arises out of the interaction of complex conditions. Consequently, conflict is not manageable through the application of simple prescriptions. Effective diagnosis will bring to the fore, the true causes of a conflict and this will lead to a careful selection of an appropriate strategy or mechanism of conflict resolution (Fisher 1993). Machingambi and Wades (2012) advice that leaders in tertiary educational institutions should learn to become less impulsive in the way they handle conflict and should always think of considering alternative resolution strategies.

Citing an example to make their case, they argue that a central administrator at Midlands State University may have succeeded in 2004 in resolving faculty conflict by effecting changes in the organisational structure of the faculty. However, this same method may prove disastrous in the same faculty a few years later because the context will have radically changed. Thus, instead of effecting structural changes to the faculty, this time the situation may be brought under equilibrium by striking compromise and bargaining among members. Machingambi and Wades (2012) conclude that the Multi-Perspective Approach to conflict management in tertiary education has been depicted as one in which no one approach is presented as right or wrong in itself. Nevertheless, educational administrators are at liberty to make preferences or choices in favour of one perspective over others. It is partly because there is no general agreement as to how conflict should be managed that there is an on-going theoretical debate in this area. The crucial issue is that when conflict occurs in an educational establishment, the manager/leader must not prescribe before properly diagnosing. This implies that he or she should not put the answer before the problem.

### **GHANAIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR RESOLVING PROMOTION-RELATED CONFLICTS**

Public Universities in Ghana are publicly funded and have their mandates from the government. These universities use common policy documents, including Conditions of Service for Senior Members of Ghanaian Universities. This document is prepared by the National Centre for Tertiary Education of Ghana (NCTE) for all public universities in Ghana. Other documents include the Statute and Criteria for Academic Staff Promotion, which provides guidelines for addressing faculty promotions. These universities have commonalities in their promotion policies since they adopt their policies from a common source (i.e. NCTE). These documents support commitment to University Strategic Plans and acknowledge the critical importance of career progression and recognition of Faculty members in the effective and efficient operation of the University. In consonance with international university practices, the universities have the responsibility to develop world-class faculty members to meet national development needs and global challenges. This is to be done through quality teaching and learning, research and publication and the rendering of community services. Excellence in these three main areas is the basis for Faculty promotion at the University.

In recognition of the fact that conflict is inherent in human settings and as such part of organizational life, Ghanaian university have policy documents such as Conditions of Service for Senior Members, Statutes and Criteria for Faculty Promotions that make provision for promotion-related conflicts. These documents empower a faculty member who for one reason or another feels he/she was not treated fairly regarding his/her promotion, to request for reconsideration of a decision on his/her application. According to these documents, the resolution mechanism employed to handle Faculty Promotion-related Conflict is the Appeal System.

An examination of the criteria for academic staff promotion reveals that all these universities have instituted a Procedural Appeal System to handle promotion-related conflicts. The modalities of the Appeal System are that:



- i. Aggrieved applicants may appeal to the Appointment and Promotions Board for a review.
- ii. The Board may review its own decision affecting the application. For this purpose, a meeting shall be summoned at which there shall be not less than two thirds of the membership of the Board.
- iii. Appeals shall lie from the Appointments and Promotions Board to the University Council. In considering such appeals, Council may be assisted by an expert or experts appointed by Council.

Investigations revealed that the appeal system seem not to be working because the appeal passes through the hands of the same people who might have created the conflict. Therefore this type of resolution mechanism is debatable.

### **Research Design**

The design adopted for this research is the descriptive design. The main aim of descriptive research is to provide an accurate and valid representation of the factors or variables that are relevant to the research questions. This research selects faculty members and administrative leaders from the general population of senior members of the university community and used questionnaire as the main research instrument. Considering the research problem under investigation, both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were adopted. Documents were also analyzed for information. The main reason for adopting mixed method approach was to compensate weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative research. Thus, in this approach, one set of data compliments the other, helping to overcome any weakness associated with the other (Creswell, 2009).

### **Population and Sampling**

The target population for this study is senior members in Ghanaian public universities (faculty members and senior/key administrators). Six institutions were sampled based on the fact that they have been in existence for more than ten years. It is therefore assumed that they have credible policies and institutional structures. A sample size of 258 senior members, comprising 240 randomly sampled faculty members and 18 purposively sampled senior administrators from the six Public Universities were considered for the study. Specifically, forty (40) faculty and three (3) administrators were selected from each of the six Universities involved in the study.

### **Data Collection and Instruments**

Questionnaires and interview guides were the main instruments of data collection. Questionnaires were used in the survey from which quantitative data was gathered, while in-depth interviews were used for gathering qualitative data. The questionnaire comprised both open-ended and closed-ended questions, and was used to elicit information on the dynamics of promotion-related conflicts and how they were managed and resolved in Ghanaian public universities in Ghana. Interviews were used to clarify information in documents about mechanisms instituted to handle promotion-related conflicts in the administration of higher education institutions. As noted by Cohen, Gottlieb, and Underwood (2000), interviews allow for two-way communication between interviewer and interviewee, and allow for supplementary questioning to follow up on interesting statements and issues as they emerge.

In addition, the information sought in this research is best obtained from people in key positions or with informed knowledge of systems and practices of promotions within the institutions.

### Data Analysis and Presentation

The quantitative data was coded and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) versions 20 programme for Microsoft Windows. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, simple percentages, standard deviation and mean, were used to present the results of the data analysed. Tables are the major ways by which the quantitative output is illustrated. The qualitative data on the other hand was subjected to thematic analyses based on emerging ideas from interview responses. Specifically, some classical responses from respondents were quoted for vivid description of the issues under consideration.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In exploring the mechanisms for resolving promotion-related conflicts in the various Public Universities in Ghana, the 240 faculty who participated in the study were asked to choose from a list, the modalities that exist in their respective institutions. In this case, the respondents could select as many modalities that apply in his or her institution. The modalities from which they made their choices are: Procedural Appeal System, Standing Committee, Advisory Committee, Ad-hoc Committee, Smoothing and Confronting. The responses of the faculty were subjected to multiple responses analyses in SPSS, and the outcome is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Institutional resolution mechanisms for faculty promotions**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Conflict Resolution Modalities <sup>a</sup>	Procedural appeal systems	167	43.3%	81.1%
	Standing committee	54	14.0%	26.2%
	Advisory committee	95	24.6%	46.1%
	Ad hoc committee	47	12.2%	22.8%
	Smoothing	4	1.0%	1.9%
	Confronting	19	4.9%	9.2%
<b>Total</b>		<b>386</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>187.4%</b>

Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

From the multiple responses of the respondents on the modalities for resolving promotion-related conflicts as illustrated in Table 1, it can be inferred that the most common modality for resolving promotion-related conflicts is Procedural Appeal Systems. This is based on the fact that it was selected by 167 faculty representing 43.3% of the total responses, and 81.1% of all the cases under consideration. Advisory Committee was the next most preferred modality of the faculty as it was chosen by 95 persons, representing 24.6% of all responses and 46.1% of all the cases. Standing Committee was the next most preferred by the faculty for resolving promotion-related conflicts in their institutions. It was selected by 54 academic

faculties, which represents 14% of the total responses and 26.2% of all cases. Ad hoc Committee, Confronting and Smoothing were chosen in that order of preference by the faculty as modalities used for resolving promotion-related conflicts in their respective universities. Specifically, they were chosen by 47, 19 and 4 respondents, and represent 12.2%, 4.9% and 1% of all responses and 22.8%, 9.2% and 1.9% respectively, of all cases considered. It should be noted that the total here exceeded the sample of 240 because each respondent had the opportunity to choose more than one modality for resolving promotion-related conflict in their respective institutions.

The results in this section suggest that Academic faculty in Ghanaian Public Universities rely on the laid down procedures and appeal systems for resolving promotion related conflicts in their institutions. According to the criteria for Appointment and Promotion of Academic Faculty of the University of Education, Winneba for instance, Section 9(i) states that *“aggrieved applicants may appeal to the appointments and Promotions Board for a review”*. It is however worrying to note that the Condition of Service of Senior Members of the Public Universities of Ghana do not make any such explicit provision, which imply that the Universities have the liberty to determine how this systems should work within their institutions, and in some cases where it is not in place, faculty promotion-related conflict may continue to persist in such institutions. This was further reinforced in the opinion expressed by one of the Senior Administrators of the Universities in the interview who asserted that *“the normal process for resolving promotion-related conflict is to make an appeal against the decisions; however, this option is sometimes not followed by faculty”* (Senior Administrator 1). Indeed, this was found to be the case in one of the Universities whose Senior Administrator revealed through the interview that *“faculty are not given the chance to appeal once a decision is taken on their promotion”* (Senior Administrator 5). This suggests that faculty may have resort to the other resolution options such as confronting and smoothing, hoping that they will get a favourable outcome.

The result under this theme explored the laid down modalities that are employed in resolving faculty promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian Public Universities. It emerged from the multiple responses of the faculty that Procedural Appeal System is the most common modality instituted in resolving promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian Public Universities. It was followed by Advisory Committee, Standing Committee, Ad hoc Committee, Confronting and Smoothing; in that order of relevance. However, data from interviews with Senior Administrators revealed that although the main institutional mechanism is the Appeal System, faculty prefer using alternative conflict resolution methods such as mediation and contingency approach. This further suggests that there are some shortfalls or inadequacies so far as the existing mechanisms for resolving promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian Public Universities are concerned.

### **Preferred resolution mechanisms for resolving faculty promotion-related conflicts**

Exploring further the modalities for resolving promotion-related conflict, the faculty were asked to indicate their extent of agreement preferred to some conflict resolution mechanisms to be considered in dealing with promotion-related conflicts. The result is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Descriptive statistics for preferred resolution mechanisms**

Statements/factors	N=240	Mean	Std. Deviation
Contingency approach		3.72	.970
Good communication skills		4.39	.690
Positive attitude that support a climate of openness, trust and frankness		4.36	.708
The strategy should be non-prescriptive because one particular strategy cannot resolve all types of conflict		4.18	.816
Conflict parties should deal in good faith and in truth with underlining causes of the conflict		4.54	.533
There should be verification steps to ascertain if the real causes of the conflict were stated truthfully or not		4.70	.495
When the resolution process starts, it is important that the team reverts to understand the modalities, procedures and presage factors that led to the conflict		4.08	.693
Contingency measures are adopted by resolution team		3.78	.845
The use of alternative conflict resolution to avoid universities from being dragged to court		4.32	.790
<b>Total</b>		<b>4.2306</b>	<b>.31000</b>

The results of the preferred resolution mechanisms for resolving faculty promotion-related conflicts, as shown in Table 2, suggest that the respondents generally agree that all the items that they responded to are indeed factors or ways their respective Universities consider in handling or resolving promotion-related conflicts. This can be seen in the high mean value of 4.23, which was recorded generally for all the statements in this regard. Significantly, its corresponding standard deviation was found to be low (at .31), showing that the faculty have been very consistent in their responses they gave to the various items under consideration. In specific terms, apart from two factors that bordered on contingency approach and contingency measures adopted by resolution team, that had relatively lower mean scores of 3.72 and 3.78 respectively, all the other factors identified recorded high mean values between 4.08 and 4.70. It is again interesting to know that all the mean deviation values were low, even though they appear to be higher than what was recorded for the general data. This is an indication that the respondents in giving their responses were consistent.

In conclusion, the faculty through their responses indicated that they agree that their respective Universities should consider the following when resolving promotion-related conflicts: Contingency Approach, Good Communication Skills, Positive Attitudes that support climate of openness, Non-Prescriptive Strategy, Conflicting parties should deal in good faith and in truth, Verification of steps to ascertain if real cause of conflict was stated truthfully, Reverting to understand the modalities and procedures that led to the conflict, Contingency measures adopted by resolution team and the use of Alternative Conflict Resolution to avoid universities being dragged to court.

### **Inadequacies in existing mechanisms for resolving promotion-related conflicts**

As indicated earlier the interview data further revealed that even though the main institutional mechanism for resolving promotion-related conflicts is the Appeal System,

faculty prefer using other alternatives such as contingency approach, withdrawal, confronting and the law court. This is a clear indication of inadequacies that are associated with the existing mechanisms for resolving promotion-related conflicts in the various institutions. This creates a lot of tension in the system because affected applicants wrongly accuse administrators or management. That is not to suggest that administrators or management are not part of the problem. The Faculty attributed their preference of other resolution mechanism over that of Appeal System to the fact that there is no fare deal in using the Appeal System. The Senior Administrators indicated that faculty often lament the Appeal System is all about Win-Win approach where the institution always wins.

Some of the comments of the Faculty and Senior Administrators were:

*The proper procedure to follow when you have an issue with your promotion is to use the appeal system .However ,if you choose to path with that, it yields no results and you end up even more frustrated (Faculty 57).*

*When you resort to the appeal system to solve promotion-related conflicts, you are perceived to be an all-knowing person, so you have to use other channels to resolve your concerns (Faculty 77)*

*The Appeal Systems is what one should use when there is a an issue about promotion but it is the same people who created the problem who are made to take the appeal and in most cases no new decisions are taken (Faculty 59)*

*Rather than using the Appeal System which is what the policy says, Faculty tend to resort to other methods like confrontation with Heads of Departments, Deans and we the Senior Administrators (Senior Administrator 2).*

*Most faculties tend to think that it is not possible to request that a decision taken earlier on an application because of a conflict. So using the Appeal System is of no effect (Senior Administrator 4)*

### **Improving resolution of faculty promotion-related conflicts**

In making suggestions for improving upon the resolution of faculty promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian public universities, a variety of opinions were expressed by the Senior Administrators and faculty. According to one of the Senior Administrators, “a discursive kind of problem solving should be introduced to let the applicant know what he or she was short of, that resulted in the decision taken”. Another Senior Administrator also opined that “orientations must take place at least once a year so that faculty would be made aware of these promotion policies and this would go a long way to remedy the situation of members on promotion policies in their institutions” (Senior Administrator 3). It was also the view of other Senior Administrators that “alternative dispute resolution methods like mediation should be resorted to in resolving faculty promotion-related conflicts”. Some further averred that “there is the need to set a resolution desk or committees to resolve such issues amicably to ensure faculty commitment and productivity”. Similarly, it was also the suggestion of some others that the Vice-Chancellors Association of Ghana (VCG) and the National Centre for Tertiary Education (NCTE) should constitute a committee to sometimes investigate issues that are not resolved at the institutional level.



The faculty on their part gave comments that border on the need to make faculty promotions transparent, open and fair to all faculty members so that promotion-related conflicts can be reduced. Others also commented on the need to treat faculty promotions with urgency, while others too made suggestions to the effect that promotion of faculty should be decentralized or given to independent bodies.

#### **i. Transparency**

Some of the faculty, in their responses, suggested that in order to improve upon the manner faculty promotion-related conflicts are handled in their institutions will largely have to do with transparency, fairness, truthfulness and honesty in the whole process. This they felt would surely do away with tensions and suspicions that largely characterize the process of faculty promotions in their respective institutions. One of the faculty mentioned that *“being open, fair and transparent in the processing and approval of promotion in the universities is the way forward for improving the situation (Faculty 11)”*. In a similar view, another faculty asserted that *“there should be openness, honesty, and trust in dealing with promotion issues (Faculty 29)”*. In the words of Faculty 14, *“there should always be transparency in all issues...the communication channels should always be open and not blocked” (Faculty 14)*.

#### **ii. Clear guidelines on modalities**

The faculty also made comments to the effect that there is the need to make the entire process of faculty promotion clear, without any ambiguities in the modalities or in their interpretations. In the opinion of a Faculty, *“modalities for faculty promotions must be spelt out clearly for all members without any ambiguities” (Faculty 5)*. Another faculty asserted that *“there is the need for clear guidelines that are appropriately interpreted” (Faculty 1)*. Similarly, Faculty 26 suggested that *“they should remove policy ambiguities and also deal immediately with conflicting parties” (Faculty 26)*.

#### **iii. Effective communication**

The faculty suggested that effective communication and flow of information is one of the ways through which the issue of promotion related conflict in their institutions can be reduced. They were mostly of the view that information flow, including making available to faculty, documents that relate to promotion of faculty. A faculty opined that *“there should be effective communication flow of policies/modalities and outcomes” (Faculty 76)*. Another faculty asserted that *“feedback should be provided for improvement of the publications (Faculty 101)”*. It was also the opinion of another respondent that *“reviewed documents on promotion should be made available to every member of the University” (Faculty 8)*, while in the view of faculty 115, *“all necessary documents on faculty promotion should be made available to faculty members when they are appointed” (Faculty 115)*.

#### **iv. Reducing delays**

Doing away with issues of delays that exist in the processes involved in resolving faculty promotion-related conflicts was another suggestion that some of the faculty put forward in solving promotion-related conflicts in their institutions. According to one faculty there should be *“avoidance of undue delays by channelling grievances through a whole lot of people before it is resolved” (Faculty 53)*. It was also suggested that *“he university must process faculty quickly and must make sure that assessors work fast” (Faculty 9)*, while

another faculty noted that *“if faculty promotion-related issues are redressed without unnecessary delays, it would reduce tension in the system that often result in conflict”* (Faculty 91).

As Shani and Lau (2000) sum up the appropriate conflict resolution strategy “depends on the nature of the situation, the task, and the people or parties involved” (p.193). University administrators must therefore be well-versed in the dynamics of personnel management, since they constantly deal with people from different backgrounds. They administrator’s role is to choose appropriate conflict resolution mechanisms and keep conflict at an appreciable level. Administrators, therefore, are to be active managers of conflict.

The views of the respondents on ways of improving upon the resolution of faculty promotion-related conflicts in Public Universities in Ghana, shows that the faculty are of the opinion that there is the need to adopt non-prescriptive or contingency approach, transparency on the part of management or administrators who handle promotion issues, clear guidelines on modalities to resolve promotion-related conflicts, effective communication and information flow; reducing delays in faculty promotions, are some of the ways of improving upon the resolution of promotion-related conflicts in public universities in Ghana to enhance faculty efficiency and productivity.

## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The major findings made in the paper are that:

- ❖ Existing institutional mechanisms for resolving faculty promotion-related conflicts need to be improved to cater for the dynamics of conflicts. Faculty and administrators together are of the opinion that there is the need for transparency, fairness, and honesty in faculty promotions; independent bodies within the institution; clear guidelines on modalities in faculty promotions; effective communication in dealing with faculty promotions; and doing away with delays in faculty promotions, are the ways to improve upon the resolution of promotion-related conflicts in public universities in Ghana. Conclusively, current and future administrators need to understand the dynamics of conflicts and know how to handle them effectively. If it is proven that a conflict does exist, then, it is appropriate to select a conflict management or resolution strategy from among the many options available.
- ❖ The Appeal System is the mechanism instituted for resolving promotion-related conflicts in Ghanaian Public Universities.
- ❖ Faculty in practice resort to other alternatives including confronting, smoothing and withdrawal; for resolving conflicts bordering on promotion, and not the Appeal System. This is because they find the Appeal system not to be problem solving in nature.
- ❖ The choice of faculty not to use the Appeal System in resolving faculty promotion-related conflicts is as a result of some inadequacies or shortfalls in the existing mechanisms including delays, communication lapses, lack of transparency and absence of clear guidelines on faculty promotion modalities.

- ❖ The preferred strategies of faculty for resolving promotion-related conflicts include Contingency Approach, Good Communication Skills, Positive Attitudes that support climate of openness, Non-Prescriptive Strategy; Conflicting parties should be dealing in good faith and in truth, and the use of alternative conflict resolution to avoid persistent conflict and unnecessary litigation.
- ❖ Some suggestions made by the both Faculty and Senior Administrators for improving the resolution mechanisms for faculty promotion include the use of dialogue, alternative dispute resolution and an independent body to oversee the process of appealing.

## CONCLUSION

Faculty staff professional progression has become the vehicle for meaningful change and plays an integral part in achieving university mandates and goals. It is through promotion and training and development activities that professionalism, productivity, organizational effectiveness and individual performance can be increased (Kaczynski, 2002). However, job performances of staff sometimes fall below the expected levels because of the manner promotion-related conflicts are handled. The central premise of this paper is that conflict is generally inevitable in organizations, and in higher education institutions. The literature reviewed revealed that conflict resolution within organizations is both a process and the product of a process. Specific to the understanding of the best way of adopting appropriate resolution mechanism is to understand the nature of the conflict. The resolution of promotion-related conflict involves the analysis of policy procedures and the posture of people involved in the resolution process. Higher education institutions provide higher brain power for every nation. It is therefore expected that universities and other related institutions would institute resolution mechanisms that are contingent and non-prescriptive to amicably and completely resolve conflicts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion of the result and the need to enhance institutional resolution mechanisms in HEIs with the view of enhancing productivity, the following propositions are made:

- The NCTE and Ghanaian Public Universities should organize seminars, workshops and conferences, on sustainable basis, to discuss conflict resolution in general and promotion-related conflicts in particular.
- University Management should provide a policy direction which is contingent in approach and transparent in nature.
- Universities should create a conflict resolution desk/unit in the Division/Directorate of Human Resource to take care of grievances, tensions, misunderstandings, that emanate as a result of promotions. This unit/desk will monitor parties that were involved in a resolution process to ensure that they are not harbouring ill feelings and the decision taken does not affect their productivity.

- Faculties and colleges should have a resolution expert to redress conflict at that level to avoid escalation.
- Management should ensure that Academic Board decisions pertaining to promotion policies reach faculty members and administrators in good time; and also through the appropriate channel.

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