

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AND WORKERS' COMMITMENT IN SELECTED OIL COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE

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**Abstract** *The present study examines the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and workers' commitment in selected oil companies in Rivers State. Cross-sectional research design was adopted. Target population for this study consists of oil companies registered with Rivers State Ministry of Commerce & Industry. Ten (10) oil companies make up the accessible population using simple random sampling technique. Copies of questionnaire were used for data collection. 210 workers were surveyed from 10 oil companies. A sample size of 136 was ascertained using Krejcie and Morgan (1978). Face and construct validity was employed. Reliability of instrument was determined using cronbach alpha test. Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was used as statistical tool with the aid of SPSS 22.0. The study found that conflict resolution strategies have a strong positive relationship with workers' commitment. The study concludes that conflict resolution strategies measured in terms of integrating (problem solving) strategy, obliging (smoothing) strategy and compromising strategy enhances workers' commitment in the selected oil companies in Rivers state. One of the recommendations is that managers in the oil companies should adopt integrating (problem solving) as a conflict resolution strategy in their workplace.*

**Keywords** *Conflict, Conflict Resolution Strategies, Integrating, Obliging, Compromising, Workers' Commitment, Social Exchange Theory*

## INTRODUCTION

Workers are the fuel that propel the vehicle of every organisation and deserve to be treated with dignity and fairness to avoid voluntary turnover that will result to low production as well as total closure of business activities. The commitment of workers depends on how well they are being treated in the workplace. A worker who feels there is imbalance in terms of motivational packages, non-compliance with organisational procedural policies, and promotions will be uncommitted compared to his counterpart who receives manager's blessings. When this feeling arose, there will be divisions amongst the workers; and social loafing will be manifested in group tasks. If this is well managed, the end result will be conflict which sometimes maybe good or bad depending the industry.

Drawing from the above, workers' commitment is significant as it has proven to increase productivity, effectiveness and efficiency (Robins, Judge, & Sanghi, 2009). Attachment to organisational life makes workers see themselves as stakeholders and as such give their best to ensure there is sustainability (Luthans, 2011). The speedy delivery of goods and services from the point of production to their destinations at the right time can only be made possible

when workers are committed. Supporting this argument, Jones and George (2006) postulate that organisational expansion and diversification are results of commitment of workers. Finally, Eketu and Edeh (2015) elucidate that workers can only be committed to achieving organisational goals if their employer responds to their welfare and treats them as stakeholders of the organisation.

Nevertheless, aside being committed in the organisational activities, workers always demand too much from their employers knowing full well that resources were used for the establishment of the enterprise where they are working. Therefore, workers should be made understand what the organisation stands to achieve and what they stand to gain at the end of the day to avoid unexpected conflict. In other words, when there is dispute between employees and the employer in the organisation, the administrator or manager's leadership competency will be tested on how best the manager or administrator can handle the issue. But even when such conflict occurs, several options are always on the table for the administrator to choose from, since organisation does not exist in a vacuum but on a design template called mission statement. Knowing what the mission of the organisation stipulates, the administrator can now maintain the reputation of the enterprise by inviting the warring workers on the table

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where resolution strategies can be ascertained.

From the foregoing arguments, the critical and manifestation of the problems in the oil and gas companies in Rivers state, Nigeria is the inability of employees to display commitment to their organisation. The reason is that most oil companies in the Niger delta region of Nigeria always want to avoid dispute settlement between them and their employees but rather prefer to settle the paramount rulers and youth presidents of the host communities with juicy monetisation believing that all will be well after that. In spite of all these, problem still persists in the oil and gas industry especially with The Nigerian Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), Independent Petroleum Marketers Association of Nigeria (IPMAN), Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN), Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), and United Labour Congress (ULC) which recently emerged as a major oil and gas workers' union. These unions have the capacity of crumbling the Nigeria's economy under a week if nothing is done by their employers or the Nigerian government.

Drawing from the above maladies, most oil companies in Rivers state, Nigeria have adopted the conflict resolution approaches to avoid shortage of petroleum product supply as well as unproductivity and turnover. This study therefore sought to resolve these maladies by examining how conflict resolution strategies will enhance workers' commitment in the oil and gas companies in Rivers state, Nigeria.

## AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and workers' commitment. However, the specific objectives were to:

1. examine the relationship between integrating strategy and workers' commitment.
2. examine the relationship between collaborating strategy and workers' commitment.
3. examine the relationship between compromising strategy and workers' commitment.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were formulated in line with the above specific objectives.

**HO1:** Integrating strategy does not have significant relationship with workers' commitment.

**HO2:** Collaborating strategy does not have significant relationship with workers' commitment.

**HO3:** Compromising strategy does not have significant relationship with workers' commitment.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Baseline Theory

Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016) submitted that baseline theory provides a theoretical foundation for social science research for organisational analysis. This study therefore is anchored on social exchange theory. The underlying assumptions of social exchange theory are that human behaviour and social interactions is basically an exchange of both tangible and intangible activities (Homans, 1961 in Ahiauzu & Asawo, 2016). Homans (1961) cited in Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016) also contended that social exchange theory treats the exchange of benefits, i.e. giving others something more valuable to them than is costly to the giver. This theory therefore is in consonants with conflicts resolution between aggrieved parties and what to do to enhance commitment of workers in the workplace. Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016) buttress further that in social exchange theory; individuals establish and continue social relations on the basis of rational value-maximising choice.

### The Concept of Conflict

Conflict remains an indispensable factor in the organisation circle. There is no organisation where one can say that conflict does not occur or exist. What then is conflict? Stoner and Freeman (1989) perceived conflict as a dispute between two or more organisation members or groups as a consequence of the need to work in positions that require functional codependency and that differ in status, purpose, value or perception. Authors like Griffin and Morehead (2013), Thomas (1976), Vecchio (2000), and Wall and Callister (1995) contended that conflict is a process resulting in the perceptions of two parties that they are working in opposition to each other in ways that produce feelings of discomfort and/or animosity. Thomas (1976) argued that conflict is a process whereby one party perceives that the other is frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his. In line with Thomas perception, Vecchio (2000) viewed conflict as "the process that results when one person (or a group of people) perceives that another person or group is frustrating, or about to frustrate an important concern." Wall and Callister (1995) in their view also contended that conflict is "a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party." Thomas (1992) cited in Robins *et al.* (2009) viewed conflict as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about.

Moving away from the process schools of thought to behavioural perspective, Kinicki and Kreitner (2003) contended that conflict occurs when one party perceives its interest are being opposed or set back by another party. Other scholars perceived organisational conflict as the discord that arises when the goals, interests, or values of different individuals or groups are incompatible and those individuals or groups block or thwart one another's attempts to achieve their objectives (Litterer, 1966; Schmidts & Kochan, 1972; Miles, 1980). Having examined the submissions made by the above scholars, this study defines conflict as a disagreement between two employees, groups versus groups, team versus teams, employee versus employer or department versus another department in the same or another organisation.

## Types of Conflict

Conflict can be classified into functional and dysfunctional conflict. It is functional when it serves the interest of the organisation. When it becomes dysfunctional, it does not serve the interest of the organisation. Jones and George (2006) submitted that organisational conflicts are interpersonal conflicts, intragroup conflicts, intergroup conflicts, and interorganisational conflicts.

1. **Interpersonal Conflict:** This refers to conflict that arises between individual members of an organisation, because of differences in their goals or values. For instance, a manager may want certain policies to be implemented but another manager may differ from such implementation of that policy.
2. **Intragroup Conflict:** This refers to conflict that arises within a group, team, department, branch or division of the same organisation.
3. **Intergroup Conflict:** This refers to conflict that arises between two groups, teams or departments or branches.
4. **Interorganisational Conflict:** This refers to conflict that arises between one organisation and another organisation.

## Sources of Conflict

There are several factors that produce conflict in the workplace. Kinicki and Kreitner (2003) and Jones and George (2006) highlighted the following fourteen factors as the major sources of functional and dysfunctional conflicts in the organisation.

1. Different goals and time horizons
2. Incompatible personalities or value systems
3. Overlapping or unclear job boundaries
4. Competition for limited resources
5. Interdepartment/ intergroup competition
6. Inadequate communication

7. Interdependent tasks
8. Organisational complexity
9. Status inconsistencies
10. Unreasonable or unclear policies, standards, or rules
11. Collective decision making
12. Decision making by consensus
13. Unmet expectations
14. Unresolved or suppressed conflicts

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES

There are many alternative ways of handling conflicts at the workplace but it all depends on the industry and the person in charge of such settlement. This study explores the various approaches of resolving conflicts as outlined by researchers. Organisational behaviourists Kinicki and Kreitner (2003), Robins *et al.* (2009) elucidated that conflicts can be handled using integrating (problem solving) strategy, obliging (smoothing) or accommodating strategy, dominating (forcing) strategy, competing strategy, collaboration strategy, avoiding strategy and compromising strategy.

1. **Integrating (problem solving) Strategy:** This refers to when parties involved in a conflict confront the main root cause of their disagreement and choose the best way out.
2. **Obliging (smoothing) or Accommodating Strategy:** This is when one party neglects its own interests just to satisfy the other party.
3. **Collaborating Strategy:** This is when the each of the conflicting parties desires to fully satisfy the concerns of all parties and there is cooperation and search for mutually outcome.
4. **Dominating or Forcing Strategy:** This is when one party places more value to his own interest and lesser value to the other.
5. **Avoiding Strategy:** This is when one aggrieved party withdraws from resolving the conflict or adds more to the contending issue.
6. **Compromising Strategy:** This refers to a situation where the warring parties agreed to settle their differences equally without one side gaining advantage.

## The Concept of Workers' Commitment

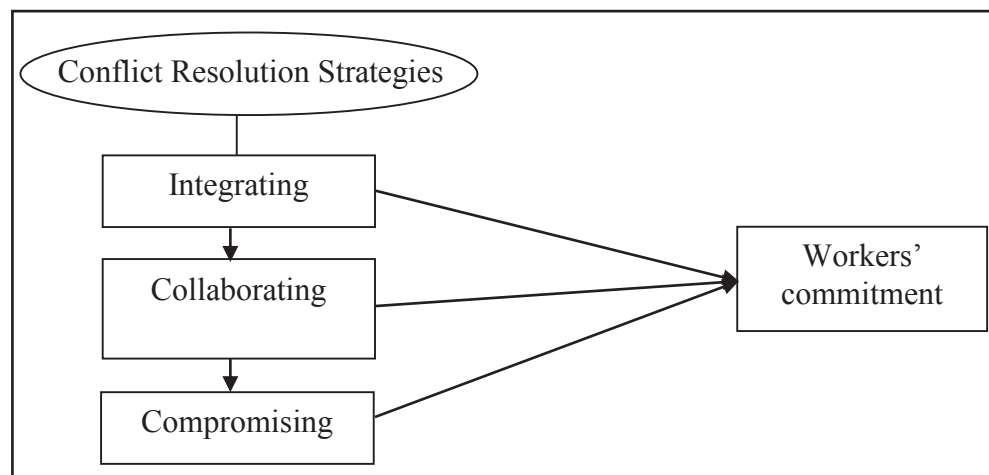
Commitment is an organisational construct that has received scholarly attention amongst researchers in virtually multidisciplinary fields of study. However, it gained ascendance into management as a result of organisational ineffectiveness especially in the areas of manufacturing

of goods and quality service delivery. This study presents various submissions from researchers on their view on commitment, workers as well as organisational commitment in general. Cohen (2003) perceived commitment to be a force that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more goals. Dost and Khan (2012) also viewed employee commitment as the level at which an employee attaches himself to the job or organisation and sees its success or failure as his own.

In line with the above submissions, Newstrom and Davies (2002) argued that workers' commitment is the degree to which a worker identifies with the organisation and wants to continue actively participating in it. In another dimension, Narteh (2012) viewed employee commitment as a felt state of employees' attachment to their organisations, including their willingness to internalise the values of the organisation and abide by the rules and regulations therein. Generally, commitment is always associated with organisational activities. O'Reilly (1989) viewed organisational commitment as an individual's psychological bond to the organisation, including a sense of job involvement, loyalty and belief in the values of the organisation.

Becker (1980) argued that organisational commitment deals with workers identification with and involvement in a particular establishment. Agba, Nkpoyen, and Ushie (2010) argued that it involves three components; workers' readiness to exert effort on behalf of the organisation; workers' acceptance of organisational goals and values; and workers' desires to remain with the organisation. Organisational commitment is the employee's psychological attachment to the organisation (Yubo, Ge, Fei, Tingrui, & Zhilan, 2011).

Allen and Meyer (1996) conceptualised organisational commitment to include affective, continuance and normative commitment. Since then, these dimensions or indicators have dominated management science research. Affective commitment refers to employee's emotional attachment to the organisation itself. Continuance commitment refers to a kind of attachment that is calculative in nature or any moment one can leave to another place. Normative commitment refers to normal attachment. However, commitment is an emotional exercise which can only be displayed by an individual personality with the right consciousness.



Source: Author's Conceptualisation (2017)

**Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework**

Fig. 1 depicts the relationship that exists between conflict resolution strategies and workers' commitment in the oil and gas companies.

## Empirical Review

Scholars has empirical examined both conflict and commitments in the workplace using different methodologies. This study therefore presents these studies with their findings. Salami (2009) investigated the relationship between conflict

resolution strategies and organisational citizenship behaviour and the moderating role of trait emotional intelligence in Southwestern Nigeria. Salami's results revealed that forcing and withdrawing strategies negatively and significantly predicted organisational citizenship behaviour while confronting (integrating), compromising and smoothing (accommodating) strategies significantly predicted organisational citizenship behaviour. Mehta and Sharma (2014) examined organisational conflict and its resolution strategies in India. Finding of their study shows that collaboration is the most appropriate strategy, whereas compromising

and smoothing were the other preferred conflict resolution strategies. Osabiya (2015) examined conflict management and resolution in Nigeria public sector. The findings of Osabiya showed that conflict can be resolved through compromise between the employee and management. Ibrahim, Bokkasam, and Jaba (2012) explored interpersonal conflict handling in different organisations in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Results of their study establish that "the mode of resolution of conflict" depends on "the frequency of conflict" and communication as a means of resolution of conflict. Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez, and Ajemunigbohun (2010) investigated the effect of organisational conflict on organisational performance in Nigeria. Results of their study show that limited resources is the major cause of conflict and that conflicts have both negative and positive effects on organisation, but when managed properly, the positive effects can be used to encourage organisational innovativeness and build cooperation among the employees.

Saduman (2010) examined the impact of conflict resolution education (peer mediation) in schools, on the behaviours of students. The findings of Saduman's study revealed that peer mediation provider students found the process and effects of the process highly satisfying whereas the peer mediation receiver group found the process moderately satisfying experience in all assessed dimensions. Lastly, Sevket, Burcu, and Nursel (2015) examined conflict management and conflict resolution in hospitality organisations in Turkey. Results of their study indicate that an effective management of the conflict within an organisation plays an important role in the efficient operation of in-house systems.

Agba *et al.* (2010) examined the relationship between career development and employee commitment in industrial organisations in Calabar, Nigeria. Finding of their study revealed that, career advancement, career counseling and career opportunities significantly influence workers' commitment. Afsanepurak, Hossini, Seyfari, and Nasab (2012) examined the relationship between organisational socialisation and organisational commitment in physical education departments employees in Mazandaran-Iran. Results of their study revealed that there was a significant relationship between organisational socialisation and organisational commitment. Gholamreza, Ali, and Hamid (2011) explored the impact of job security on employees' commitment and job satisfaction in Qom municipalities. Results of their study show that there is a significant difference between hired/contractual employees and organisational commitment. Dost and Khan (2012) examined how job enrichment causes high level of employee commitment during the performance of their duties from four major cities of Pakistan. Their findings show that if the jobs of the employees in any kind of organisation are enriched, their commitment level would increase positively and that ultimately increases their productivity level in both, the

public sector as well as in the private sector organisations.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Cross-sectional research design was adopted. Reasons for choosing a cross sectional research design is because data is gathered just once (one shot) and over a continuous period (Ahiauzu & Asawo, 2016). Target population for this study consists of oil companies registered with Rivers State Ministry of Commerce & Industry. Accessible population for the study consists of ten (10) selected oil companies using simple random sampling technique. Primary data was used to collect data from the respondents. Two hundred and ten (210) workers that comprise supervisors, middle level managers, top level managers, and low level employees were surveyed from ten oil companies. A sample size of 136 was ascertained using Krejcie and Morgan (1970). One hundred and thirty six (136) copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents and 124 copies of questionnaires were returned and used for data analysis. Face and construct validity was employed. Reliability of instrument was determined using cronbach alpha test. The dimensions of conflict resolution strategies and workers' commitment were measured with 28 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (undecided). Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was used as statistical tool with the aid of SPSS 22.0. Monette, Sullivan, and DeJong (2005) argued that Spearman's Rank ( $\rho$ ) correlation is the most popular measure of association for fully ordered data (i.e. ordinal data).

## DATA ANALYSIS

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data collected. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse respondents demographic and presented in percentages as shown here. 112 out of 124 were males which represent 90% of the population while 12 out of 124 respondents were females which represent 10% of the total population. This implies that most of the human resource in the oil companies selected were males. Age brackets revealed that 12 out of 124 respondents representing 10% were between the ages of 20-30 years; 75 out of 124 respondents representing 60% were between the ages of 30-40 years; 37 out of 124 respondents representing 30% of the total population fall between the ages of 40 years and above. Regarding educational qualifications, 15 respondents representing 12% hold WAEC/ NECO certificates; 88 respondents representing 71% hold B. Sc./ B. Engg. degrees; 16 respondents representing 13% hold M. Sc./ M. Engg. Degrees; 5 respondents representing 4% hold other educational certificates. This shows that majority of respondents in the selected oil companies hold B. Sc./ B. Engg. degrees.

**Table 1: Response Rate on Integrative Strategy**

Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Valid Strongly Agree	72	58
Agree	38	31
Disagree	7	6
Strongly disagree	3	2
Undecided	4	3
Total	124	100

Source: Field survey (2017)

Table 1 shows the degree of agreement by the 124 respondents on integrative strategy. 72 out of 124 respondents strongly agree that integrative (problem solving) strategy can resolve conflicts in the organisation if well implemented. 38 out of 124 respondents agree that integrative strategy can go a long way resolving organisational conflicts. 7 out of 124 respondents disagree that integrative strategy can resolve conflict effectively. 3 out of 124 respondents strongly disagree that integrative strategy will eliminate organisational conflicts. 4 out of 124 respondents were neutral, meaning they were not sure if integrative strategy can resolve organisational conflicts. This shows that 110 out of 124 agree that organisational conflicts can be resolved if managers will adopt integrative (problem solving) strategy.

**Table 2: Response Rate on Collaborating Strategy**

Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Valid Strongly Agree	80	65
Agree	25	20
Disagree	9	7
Strongly disagree	5	4
Undecided	5	4
Total	124	100

Source: Field survey (2017)

Table 2 shows the degree of agreement by the 124 respondents on collaborating strategy. 80 out of 124 respondents strongly agree that organisational conflicts can be resolve through

collaborating strategy. 25 out of 124 respondents agree that conflicts can be resolve through the application of collaborating strategy. 9 out of 124 respondents disagree that organisational conflicts may be resolved using collaborating strategy. 5 out of 124 respondents strongly disagree that organisational conflicts will be amicably resolved using collaborating strategy, while 5 respondents were undecided. This implies that 105 out of 124 respondents agree that organisational conflicts can be resolved using collaborating strategy.

**Table 3: Response Rate on Compromise Strategy**

Degree of Agreement	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Valid Strongly Agree	108	87
Agree	10	8
Disagree	0	0
Strongly disagree	2	2
Undecided	4	3
Total	124	100

Source: Field survey (2017)

Table 3 shows the degree of agreement by 124 respondents on compromise strategy. 108 out of 124 respondents strongly agree that compromise is the best strategy to manage organisational conflicts. 10 out of 124 respondents agree that compromise strategy is the best conflict resolution strategys. 2 out of 124 respondents strongly disagree that compromise will resolve conflicts between warring parties. 4 out of 124 respondents were undecided on whether compromise will resolve organisational conflicts or not. This implies that 118 out of 124 respondents agree that compromise is the best conflict resolution strategies.

## ANALYSES OF HYPOTHESES

Spearman rank order correlation coefficient was employed to analyse the null hypotheses with the aid of statistical package for social sciences (SPSS, 22.0).

**Table 4: Bivariate Analysis between Integrating and Workers' Commitment**

			Integrating	Workers' commitment
Spearman's rho	Integrating	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.728**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	124	124
	Workers' commitment	Correlation Coefficient	.728**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	124	124

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

From the SPSS output (Table 4), spearman correlation coefficient (rho) is high and positive (.728\*\*). P-value is less than the level of significance (0.05) which means that the null hypothesis is rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted. The

study therefore states that integrating (problem solving) is positively associated with workers' commitment in selected oil companies in Rivers State.

**Table 5: Bivariate Analysis between Collaborating and Workers' Commitment**

			<b>Collaborating</b>	<b>Workers' commitment</b>
Spearman's rho	Collaborating	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.835**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	124	124
	Workers' commitment	Correlation Coefficient	.835**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	124	124

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows the correlation between collaborating and workers' commitment. The results revealed that collaborating has a significant relationship with workers' commitment because p-value (0.000) is less than the level

of significance (0.05). Null hypothesis is hereby rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted. The study therefore states that collaborating is positively associated with workers' commitment in selected oil companies in Rivers State.

**Table 6: Bivariate Analysis between Compromise and Workers' Commitment**

			<b>compromise</b>	<b>Workers' commitment</b>
Spearman's rho	Compromise	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.853**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	124	124
	Workers' commitment	Correlation Coefficient	.853**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	124	124

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows the correlation between compromising and workers' commitment. From the table, p-value (0.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05) which guides the decision to reject or accept the null hypothesis. Based on this, null hypothesis is hereby rejected and alternate hypothesis accepted. The study therefore states that comprising is positively associated with workers' commitment in selected oil companies in Rivers State.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Hypothesis 1's result shows that integrating (problem solving) is positively associated with workers' commitment. This implies that as integrating increases, workers' commitment also increases which means that when conflict is resolved workers will be committed towards achieving organisational goals. This is in line with the findings of Salami (2009). Salami's results show that confronting

(integrating or problem solving), compromising and smoothing (accommodating) strategies are significantly associated with organisational citizenship behaviour.

Hypothesis 2's result shows that collaborating is positively associated with workers' commitment. This means that as collaborating increases, workers' commitment also increases. It also implies that when one party in a conflict neglects his/her own interest just to satisfy the other party, commitment will increase in the workplace. This is in line with the findings of Mehta and Sharma (2014). Their finding shows that collaboration is the most appropriate strategy, whereas compromising and smoothing were the other preferred conflict resolution strategies.

Hypothesis 3's result shows that compromise is positively associated with workers' commitment. This shows that as compromising increases, workers' commitment also increases. This means that when two warring parties agreed to settle their differences equally without one side gaining

advantage over the other, commitment will increase. These results are in line with the findings of Osabiya (2015). Osabiya's finding showed that conflict can be resolved amicably through compromise between the employee and management.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion of findings, the study concludes that conflict resolution strategies measured in terms of integrating (problem solving), collaborating and compromising, enhances workers' commitment in the selected oil companies in Rivers State.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above conclusion, the following recommendations were made.

1. Managers in the oil companies should adopt integrating (problem solving) as a conflict resolution strategy in their workplace.
2. Human resource practitioners should employ collaboration in managing conflicts in their respective organisations.
3. Compromising as a conflict resolution strategy should be used to settle conflict in both government establishment and private firms.

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