
MANAGING CONFLICTS IN ENTREPRENEURIAL TEAMS IN RIVERS STATE (THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE)

By

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ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurial teams in Rivers State, Nigeria, operate within a complex socioeconomic and cultural environment, often characterized by resource constraints, high-pressure decision-making, and diverse team compositions. This study investigates the role of emotional intelligence (EI) in conflict management within these teams, aiming to understand how unresolved disputes affect team performance and explore strategies to enhance conflict resolution. Drawing on Emotional Intelligence Theory, Conflict Management Theories, and Team Dynamics frameworks, the research utilizes a mixed-methods approach, combining structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 200 participants across entrepreneurial sectors. Results reveal that conflicts frequently stem from resource allocation, personality clashes, and work style differences. The findings underscore that unresolved conflicts negatively impact productivity, trust, and innovation. Conversely, diversity in professional and functional backgrounds positively influences conflict resolution, fostering collaboration and innovative problem-solving. Emotional intelligence emerges as a pivotal factor in managing interpersonal dynamics, with high EI levels significantly improving team cohesion, communication, and conflict resolution outcomes. This study concludes by highlighting the need for targeted training in EI and structured conflict management strategies to enhance team performance in entrepreneurial contexts. The insights contribute to the broader understanding of team dynamics and conflict management, offering practical implications for entrepreneurs and policymakers in similar environments.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Management, Entrepreneurial Teams, Team Dynamics, Rivers State, Organizational Performance.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship in Rivers State represents a critical component of Nigeria's economic landscape, characterised by dynamic small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that contribute significantly to regional economic development. About 12.7% of Nigeria's informal sector economic activity is concentrated in Rivers State, where entrepreneurial endeavors span industries like trading, agriculture, oil and gas services, and technology-enabled services (Ndem et al., 2023).

The complicated socioeconomic climate of the Niger Delta places the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem in a unique position, offering both opportunities and challenges for new company endeavors. According to empirical research by Nie (2024), entrepreneurial teams in this area deal with a variety of difficulties, including as unstable economic conditions, resource competition, and political unpredictability. In entrepreneurial firms, these contextual elements have a big impact on interpersonal connections and team dynamics.

Successful teams are essential to an organization's success, especially in entrepreneurial environments where things change quickly and are unpredictable. According to research by Badriyah, Sulaeman, Wibowo, and Anggapratama (2024), high-achieving business teams have better capacities for cooperation, communication, and handling conflict. These team dynamics are made more difficult in the Rivers State environment by the team members varied professional backgrounds, ethnic heterogeneity, and cultural diversity.

Conflicts are common in entrepreneurial contexts, which raises serious concerns for the sustainability and functioning of the firm. According to a thorough study by Ekanem, Jackson, and Munasuonyo (2021), resource allocation, strategic decision-making, and communication breakdowns are the main causes of the moderate to high levels of interpersonal conflicts that affect roughly 67.3% of entrepreneurial endeavors in the Niger Delta region. These disputes have the ability to compromise company goals, lower output, and produce poisonous work environments.

Unresolved disagreements have significant economic ramifications, according to empirical data. According to Okeke, Ojukwu, Azotani, and Mgbemena (2024), inefficient dispute resolution may cause SMEs in Nigeria to lose 20% to 35% of their production. Effective conflict management and resolution skills are crucial for organizational resilience and success in Rivers State, where entrepreneurial endeavors operate in a cutthroat and difficult commercial environment.

Rivers State's entrepreneurial landscape is distinguished by a wide variety of companies, ranging from established trading firms to tech-driven startups. Approximately 72% of the 3,500 registered entrepreneurial entities found in a survey by Amah & Amah–Cletus (2024) were small and medium-sized businesses. An estimated 45% of the state's non-agricultural workforce is employed by these companies, making them a major economic force.

Emotional intelligence is becoming more widely acknowledged in current studies as a critical component of conflict resolution and team dynamics management. The development of adaptable leadership tactics, effective communication, and resilient corporate cultures are all highlighted in Goleman's (2018) groundbreaking work on emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is a potential tool for reducing interpersonal conflict and improving team performance in the entrepreneurial environment of Rivers State.

The significance of comprehending conflict management techniques is further highlighted by Rivers State's distinct sociocultural setting. To manage possible conflicts, entrepreneurial teams need to cultivate advanced interpersonal skills due to the region's complicated

historical backdrop of resource struggle and more than 40 different ethnic groups (Engelsberger, Cavanagh, Bartram & Halvorsen, 2021). A theoretical and practical framework for handling these intricate interpersonal dynamics is offered by emotional intelligence.

Technological developments and economic shifts have made Rivers State's entrepreneurship environment even more complex. More complex methods of managing teams and resolving conflicts are required due to the rise of digital platforms, globalization, and heightened market competitiveness. More collaborative and adaptable approaches that emphasize interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence are gradually replacing traditional hierarchical management structures.

Even though the value of good team dynamics is widely acknowledged, little is known about the precise processes by which emotional intelligence affects dispute resolution in entrepreneurial teams in the Rivers State setting. Previous research has mostly concentrated on more general national or regional viewpoints, ignoring the complex local dynamics that define this particular geographic and cultural setting. By thoroughly investigating the ways in which emotional intelligence affects conflict resolution techniques in entrepreneurial teams, this study seeks to close this crucial gap. The study aims to produce theoretical understandings and useful suggestions for business owners and organizational leaders in Rivers State by examining the complex connections among emotional intelligence, team dynamics, and conflict resolution.

Statement of the Problem

Although entrepreneurial teams are essential for economic growth and innovation, they frequently struggle to successfully handle disagreement. Conflicts are more likely to occur in high-pressure settings since these teams usually work with few resources, strict deadlines, and unpredictability. Constructive conflict management can foster innovation and decision-making, while badly handled or unresolved disagreements frequently result in decreased trust, poor team performance, and venture failure (Ausat, Risdiyanto, Arfah & Jemadi, 2023). The particular difficulties faced by entrepreneurial teams—such as the lack of official conflict resolution procedures and the diversity of team members' backgrounds and values exacerbate this problem.

The absence of established conflict resolution procedures is one of the main obstacles to managing conflict in entrepreneurial teams. Entrepreneurial endeavours frequently use informal and irregular dispute resolution techniques, in contrast to larger businesses with structured human resource policies (Shepherd, Souitaris & Gruber, 2021). Emotional responses, prejudices, and power dynamics can cause disputes to escalate as a result of this lack of framework. For example, Gregori & Parastuty (2020) stress that entrepreneurial teams usually find it difficult to distinguish between personal and professional conflicts, which leads to protracted tensions and decreased productivity.

Entrepreneurial teams are inherently diverse, which makes dispute resolution even more difficult. In addition to encouraging creativity, team members' diverse cultural and professional backgrounds can raise the possibility of miscommunications and conflicts (Yousef, 2024; Schmidt, Steigenberger, Berndtson & Uman, 2023). Because entrepreneurial environments are high-stakes, disagreements over resource allocation, strategic direction, and decision-making procedures are especially prevalent. According to Park & DeShon (2018), perceived unfairness in decision-making and exclusion from important conversations can exacerbate interpersonal conflicts and threaten team cohesiveness.

The performance of the team and the success of the endeavor as a whole are significantly impacted by unresolved disputes. One significant result is the decline in team member trust, which is essential for productive cooperation and decision-making (Yoo, Lee & Lee, 2021). Team effectiveness is hampered by compartmentalized habits, low morale, and increased turnover rates brought on by a lack of trust (Dimas, Torres, Rebelo & Lourenço, 2023). This is especially harmful to entrepreneurial teams because it restricts their capacity to stay creative and flexible in cutthroat markets (Park, Kim, Kim & Geum, 2024). Unresolved disputes can also cause decision-making paralysis, in which groups postpone or steer clear of important choices out of fear of conflict. This delay not only hampers operational efficiency but also results in missed opportunities in rapidly changing markets (Ganeshkumar, 2021).

Another important concern is the psychological cost of unsolved disputes. Long-running disagreements cause team members to get stressed and burned out, which lowers productivity and raises the risk of a business failing (Ganeshkumar, 2021). Unresolved disputes about strategic priorities frequently resulted in indecision, which eventually jeopardized market performance, according to a study of start-up teams conducted by Maynard et al. (2020). Research on conflict management techniques designed especially for entrepreneurial teams is lacking, despite the obvious effects of unresolved disputes. Entrepreneurial endeavors lack access to evidence-based solutions since the majority of current research focuses on larger firms (Kanova, Kryvobok & Omarov, 2024).

To enable entrepreneurial teams to resolve disputes in a positive way, this research vacuum must be filled. The informal nature of entrepreneurial endeavors, their varied team compositions, and the high-pressure settings in which they function must all be taken into consideration by effective conflict resolution techniques. Researchers can offer practical insights to improve team performance, encourage collaboration, and guarantee the long-term success of business endeavors by creating novel approaches to conflict management.

Aim and Objectives of the study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the specific challenges of conflict management in entrepreneurial teams and evaluate the impact of unresolved conflicts on team performance.

To support the aim, the study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the most prevalent types of conflicts within entrepreneurial teams.
2. Assess the existing conflict resolution mechanisms employed by entrepreneurial teams.
3. Examine the role of diversity (e.g., cultural, professional, and functional) in exacerbating or mitigating team conflicts.
4. Analyze the relationship between unresolved conflicts and key team performance metrics, such as productivity, innovation, trust, and decision-making effectiveness.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between unresolved conflicts and key team performance metrics (e.g., productivity, innovation, trust, and decision-making effectiveness) in entrepreneurial teams.
2. Team diversity (e.g., cultural, professional, and functional) does not have a significant correlation with the occurrence or resolution of conflicts in entrepreneurial teams.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Three fundamental theories the theories of emotional intelligence, conflict management, and team dynamics form the basis of this study's theoretical framework. Understanding the

dynamics of conflict management in entrepreneurial teams and the effect of unresolved disagreements on team performance is made easier by these theories.

Emotional Intelligence Theory

Goleman (1995) popularized the Emotional Intelligence (EI) Theory, which highlights the capacity to identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions as well as those of others. Emotional intelligence (EI) is essential for managing conflict, especially in entrepreneurial teams where a variety of personalities and high-pressure situations can cause emotional reactions.

According to the idea, a person's capacity to resolve conflicts amicably is directly influenced by five essential elements: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 1995). Emotionally intelligent leaders are better able to resolve conflicts, build trust, and keep the team together in entrepreneurial teams. Emotional intelligence (EI) is a crucial component of team dynamics, according to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004), who also contend that higher EI levels among team members improve collaboration and lessen the possibility of interpersonal disputes.

Conflict Management Theories

Theories of conflict management provide information about the procedures and tactics employed to resolve disputes amicably. Responses are divided into five categories under Rahim's (2002) model of conflict management styles: integrating, complying, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. These techniques offer a framework for comprehending how entrepreneurial teams resolve conflicts and the outcomes of their decisions.

Another important viewpoint is the Dual care Model (Blake & Mouton, 1964), which holds that a person's care for their results against their concern for others influences conflict management tactics. It can be difficult for entrepreneurial teams to strike a balance between these issues, especially when making important decisions. To lessen the detrimental effects of disagreements, these theories emphasize how crucial it is to match conflict resolution techniques with the objectives and values of the team.

Team Dynamics Theories

Theories of team dynamics, like Tuckman's (1965) Stages of Team Development, offer a prism through which to view how teams change and resolve disputes. Each of the five stages identified by the model forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning has unique obstacles and chances for resolving conflicts. As team members negotiate power relations and emphasize their positions, disputes frequently occur during the storming stage. To move on to the norming and performance stages, where cooperation and output reach their highest points, effective conflict resolution during this phase is essential.

Hackman's (2002) model of team effectiveness is another pertinent theory that emphasizes how task design, group norms, and team composition interact to shape performance. Entrepreneurial teams, with their diverse expertise and fluid structures, rely on strong interpersonal dynamics to manage conflicts and sustain high performance.

Application of Theories

Integrating these theories provides a holistic understanding of conflict management in entrepreneurial teams. Emotional Intelligence Theory offers insights into the personal attributes necessary for effective conflict resolution, while Conflict Management Theories highlight strategic approaches to addressing disputes. Team Dynamics Theories provide a broader context for understanding how conflicts emerge and are resolved within the lifecycle of entrepreneurial teams.

2.2 Conceptual Review

Entrepreneurial Teams

Groups of people working together to find, develop, and seize business opportunities—often in the face of uncertainty and resource limitations are known as entrepreneurial teams (Huang, Sun, Liu, Yan & Li, 2022). These groups are essential to business endeavours because they use a variety of skill sets, common goals, and group decision-making to accomplish their goals. Entrepreneurial teams are essential to the success of entrepreneurial endeavours because of their capacity for innovation, risk-taking, and adaptation to changing circumstances (Joel & Oguanobi, 2024).

Entrepreneurial teams are distinguished by a number of traits. Since team members frequently contribute a range of experiences, viewpoints, and areas of expertise, diversity is a defining characteristic that encourages innovation and creativity. Another characteristic is shared leadership, in which individuals share decision-making duties and cohesiveness is maintained through trust and good communication. Since these teams work in dynamic contexts that need resilience and adaptability, flexibility is also a crucial quality. Furthermore, as cooperation and conflict resolution are crucial for negotiating the uncertainties that come with business endeavors, entrepreneurial teams mostly depend on solid interpersonal bonds.

Despite its advantages, management presents special difficulties for entrepreneurial teams. Conflict management is one of the main difficulties brought on by the variety of personalities, experiences, and skill sets. If left unresolved, disagreements over objectives, tactics, and resource allocation may impede creativity and production. Another problem is role ambiguity, which can result from the flexible nature of entrepreneurial endeavours and cause miscommunications and conflict among team members. Additionally, the demanding atmosphere of entrepreneurship, which is marked by unpredictability and little resources, raises stress levels and raises the possibility of interpersonal disputes. Because personal objectives might occasionally take precedence over team priorities, teams may also find it difficult to strike a balance between individual aspirations and group goals.

Additionally, shared leadership structures, while promoting collaboration, can lead to power struggles or ineffective decision-making if clear mechanisms for resolving disputes are absent.

Entrepreneurial teams in Rivers State, Nigeria, encounter extra difficulties that are influenced by their local surroundings. Rivers State is a center for entrepreneurship, especially in the manufacturing, service, and oil and gas industries. Nonetheless, the socioeconomic environment of the state is characterized by both substantial obstacles and potential. For example, cultural diversity has two sides: it encourages innovation but can also result in cultural miscommunications within groups. The region's reliance on the oil sector creates economic volatility, which adds stress and increases the likelihood of conflict within teams. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure, such as shoddy transit systems and unstable utilities, makes teamwork more difficult and raises the possibility of conflicts over resource allocation. Teams also face regulatory challenges, as navigating complex and inconsistent policies can create additional pressures, undermining collaboration and focus.

Despite these obstacles, Rivers State's entrepreneurial teams have shown incredible fortitude and inventiveness, substantially contributing to the local economy. Their success in overcoming these obstacles emphasizes how crucial good dispute-resolution techniques are. Resolving these disputes is crucial for promoting sustainable company growth in the area as well as for strengthening team camaraderie. The purpose of this study is to offer insightful

information about how to improve teamwork and conflict resolution techniques in entrepreneurial teams, especially in the distinct socioeconomic setting of Rivers State.

Conflict in Entrepreneurial Teams

Conflict is a natural part of team dynamics, particularly in pressure-filled entrepreneurial teams. While certain conflicts can foster innovation and improve decision-making, others can negatively impact team cohesion and performance if left unresolved. Understanding the different forms of conflicts, their causes, and their outcomes is essential to promoting fruitful collaboration in corporate activities.

Types of Conflicts

Task conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, and process conflicts are the three main categories into which disputes in entrepreneurial teams fall (Kozusznik, Aaldering & Euwema, 2020). Disparities in viewpoints, concepts, or methods pertaining to the task at hand give rise to task conflicts. Disagreements on objectives, tactics, or priorities are frequently at the heart of these disputes. By fostering a diversity of viewpoints, task disputes can improve creativity and problem-solving when handled well. Unmanaged task conflicts, however, have the potential to worsen, resulting in annoyance and decreased output.

Conversely, interpersonal tensions, personality conflicts, or emotional disagreements among team members are the primary causes of relationship difficulties. Because they damage trust, impede cooperation, and foster a hostile work atmosphere, these disputes are usually harmful to team dynamics. Lastly, differences about how tasks should be carried out, such as those involving the distribution of resources, decision-making, and role assignments, give rise to process conflicts. Especially when roles and duties are unclear, these disagreements can lead to inefficiencies, delays, and discontent among team members.

Sources of Conflict

Teams of entrepreneurs deal with a number of particular difficulties that might lead to conflict. Because team members frequently originate from a variety of functional, professional, and cultural backgrounds, diversity in the team's makeup is an important consideration. Although this diversity encourages originality and creativity, it can also result in miscommunications and divergent viewpoints. Another element of conflict in entrepreneurial endeavors is resource scarcity. Insufficient material, human, and financial resources frequently lead to rivalry among team members, which exacerbates disagreements over distribution and priorities.

Conflict in entrepreneurial teams is also exacerbated by role uncertainty. Uncertain or overlapping tasks can cause misunderstanding and conflict in dynamic and fluid team setups. Another important factor is leadership dynamics; shared leadership models can lead to power struggles and uneven decision-making even while they encourage collaboration. These tensions are increased and interpersonal conflicts are more likely to occur in high-stress situations, which are defined by the need to accomplish ambitious goals in competitive marketplaces.

Potential Impacts of conflicts on Team Performance

Depending on how they are handled, disagreements can have varying effects on the effectiveness of entrepreneurial teams. The drawback is that unresolved disputes can drastically cut down on production by taking up time and effort that could be used for more important duties. Long-term relationship problems erode team members' confidence, which hinders cooperation and communication. Increased turnover can also result from high levels of unresolved conflict since disgruntled team members may quit the project, upsetting the

stability of the team. Frequent disagreements can also hinder innovation by fostering a hostile and uncooperative workplace.

On the other hand, when handled well, disputes can be advantageous. For instance, by promoting the sharing of various viewpoints and ideas, task conflicts can foster innovation (Kiernan, Ledwith & Lynch, 2021). Constructive conflict resolution can also enhance decision-making and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, by encouraging respect for one another and enhancing team member communication, conflict resolution can improve interpersonal connections.

These effects are exacerbated for entrepreneurial teams in Rivers State by outside factors including unstable economies and inadequate infrastructure. The region's distinct socioeconomic situation makes effective dispute-resolution techniques even more crucial. Entrepreneurial teams can improve performance and promote long-term company growth by addressing the causes and effects of conflict. The purpose of this study is to shed light on workable methods for resolving disputes to facilitate entrepreneurial success in such trying circumstances.

Emotional Intelligence

The ability to identify, comprehend, control, and affect one's own emotions as well as those of others is known as emotional intelligence (EI) (Goleman, 1995). Effective leadership, teamwork, and conflict resolution have all been found to be significantly impacted by emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional intelligence (EI) is essential for facilitating effective communication, building strong bonds with others, and resolving disagreements in entrepreneurial teams, where high levels of engagement and decision-making are typical.

Conceptual Definition

According to Bru-Luna et al. (2021), emotional intelligence is commonly defined as a collection of competencies that enable people to recognize, communicate, and control their emotions in a way that improves interpersonal relationships and individual wellbeing. Emotional intelligence (EI) goes beyond traditional cognitive intelligence (IQ) by emphasizing social and emotional skills that support both professional and personal success. In an entrepreneurial context, emotional intelligence (EI) is crucial for the capacity to empathize with others, control emotions under duress, and settle disputes amicably.

Components of Emotional Intelligence

The concept of emotional intelligence is typically broken down into four key components, as outlined by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) and later popularized by Goleman (1995). These components are:

1. **Self-awareness:** The ability to recognize and understand one's emotions and their effect on thoughts and behavior. Self-aware individuals are better equipped to manage their emotional responses, which is crucial in high-pressure entrepreneurial environments.
2. **Self-regulation:** The capacity to control or redirect disruptive emotions and impulses. Entrepreneurs and team members with high self-regulation can maintain a calm demeanor, especially in conflict situations, allowing for more reasoned decision-making and effective problem-solving.
3. **Motivation:** A strong drive to achieve goals for reasons beyond external rewards, such as personal satisfaction or the success of the team. Motivated individuals are often more resilient and persistent in the face of setbacks, fostering a positive team atmosphere.
4. **Empathy:** The ability to understand the emotions of others and respond appropriately. Empathy helps individuals to build strong relationships, resolve conflicts amicably, and

support others in achieving shared goals. It is especially important in entrepreneurial teams, where emotional dynamics can influence decision-making and collaboration.

5. **Social skills:** The ability to manage relationships and build networks effectively. Socially skilled individuals are adept at negotiating, influencing, and resolving conflicts, all of which are vital in an entrepreneurial setting where teamwork and communication are essential for success.

Role in Conflict Resolution

Emotional intelligence is crucial for managing and settling conflicts in entrepreneurial teams. People with emotional intelligence (EI) are better able to handle the emotional aspects of conflicts, which may often spiral out of control if not managed appropriately. Team members with high EI approach conflicts with a problem-solving mindset rather than an emotional response, which leads to more fruitful outcomes.

Self-control and self-awareness are essential in conflict resolution. Self-aware team members are better able to recognize when their emotions are affecting their judgment and can regulate their responses to prevent unnecessary escalation. For instance, an emotionally intelligent person can remain composed throughout a conflict, ensuring a calm and effective reaction.

In conflict resolution, empathy is also essential since it enables team members to comprehend the feelings and viewpoints of those engaged in the dispute. This comprehension promotes respect for one another and makes it possible to solve problems more cooperatively. Instead, then only focusing on their own interests, people can actively listen to others and work toward solutions that meet everyone's needs and feelings by developing empathy.

Lastly, team members that possess great social skills are able to communicate effectively during disagreements. In order to resolve conflicts, people with high EI must be able to listen intently, express their opinions clearly, and negotiate to establish common ground. In entrepreneurial teams, where the stakes are often high and collaboration is critical, the role of EI in managing conflicts cannot be overstated.

In summary, a key component of successful conflict resolution in entrepreneurial teams is emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EI) helps people to manage the complexities of team interactions and work toward solutions that improve overall team performance by cultivating self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. Because of this, emotional intelligence (EI) is crucial for encouraging teamwork, upholding wholesome relationships, and cultivating long-term success in business endeavors.

Empirical Review

The empirical review examines previous studies that focus on emotional intelligence (EI) and conflict management, highlighting relevant research findings from similar contexts, particularly within entrepreneurial teams. This review also identifies gaps in the existing literature that warrant further exploration.

Previous Studies on Emotional Intelligence and Conflict Management

The impact of emotional intelligence on conflict management has been extensively researched in a variety of organizational settings, and research has consistently demonstrated that higher EI is linked to better conflict resolution outcomes, particularly in teams where effective collaboration is critical. For example, Salovey and Mayer (1990) suggested that EI helps people understand and manage their emotions, which is important in conflict resolution; Goleman (1995) expanded on this idea by highlighting how EI improves leadership, interpersonal relationships, and the capacity to resolve conflicts within teams.

According to a study by Xiao, Liu, Yao, and Banerjee (2023), team members' capacity to resolve interpersonal problems was significantly impacted by emotional intelligence. According to their research, people with greater EI were better at settling disputes in ways that were advantageous to the team as a whole as well as to individual members. Similarly, a study by Norin (2024) showed that effective conflict resolution in organizational teams was substantially correlated with emotional intelligence (EI). When dealing with disagreements, people with high EI preferred to employ problem-solving techniques as opposed to avoidance or confrontation.

The significance of emotional intelligence (EI) in conflict management is even more crucial in entrepreneurial teams, where emotional dynamics are especially noticeable because of high stakes and ongoing decision-making constraints. For instance, team members with high EI were better at resolving conflicts, upholding a favorable work environment, and guaranteeing team cohesion, according to a study conducted by Crespo, Belchior, and Costa (2018) in the context of entrepreneurial endeavors. These results highlight the usefulness of emotional intelligence (EI) in entrepreneurial contexts, where disagreements over personal values, resource limitations, and varied viewpoints can lead to conflict.

Research Findings from Similar Contexts

The crucial role that emotional intelligence (EI) plays in conflict resolution is supported by empirical studies conducted in organizational and entrepreneurial environments. A study by Valderrama, Santillán, and Arce (2023) showed that executives with high EI were better at handling conflict and fostering a cooperative work environment in the setting of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs). They came to the conclusion that EI is especially crucial for SMEs, as these teams frequently deal with a lack of resources, a high degree of uncertainty, and the requirement for flexible leadership.

Emotionally intelligent team members were better at recognizing the emotional triggers of conflict and using this knowledge to reach mutually beneficial solutions, according to a similar study by Ehigie, Odunela, and Ehigie (2023) in Nigerian entrepreneurial teams. This was especially relevant in Nigerian entrepreneurship, where team dynamics are frequently influenced by cultural differences, interpersonal relationships, and external market pressures as well as other factors.

Furthermore, Zhang & Hao's (2022) study from the manufacturing industry shown that Emotional Intelligence (EI) training enhanced team cohesiveness and decreased conflict. According to this study, emotional intelligence (EI) training improved emotional regulation in teams, which improved conflict resolution and decision-making. These results imply that emotional intelligence can be used as a preventative strategy to avoid conflict in the first place, in addition to its role in conflict resolution.

Gaps in Existing Literature

Although the literature now in publication offers insightful information about the function of emotional intelligence in conflict resolution, there are still a number of gaps that must be filled. First, there is little research that focuses on entrepreneurial teams specifically; instead, most studies concentrate on larger businesses or broader organizational settings. Since the dynamics of entrepreneurial endeavors—such as resource constraints, a high degree of uncertainty, and ongoing innovation—differ greatly from those of bigger firms, it is crucial to examine emotional intelligence and conflict resolution in this setting.

Second, the function of emotional intelligence (EI) among all team members has received less attention in the literature than leaders' EI and its effect on conflict resolution. Conflicts in

entrepreneurial teams are frequently caused by peer relationships as well as leadership styles. A more comprehensive understanding of how emotional intelligence (EI) affects conflict resolution in entrepreneurial teams may be obtained by looking into the team members' collective emotional intelligence.

Lastly, even though conflict management and emotional intelligence have been studied independently, more research is required to establish a direct connection between these ideas in the particular setting of entrepreneurial endeavors, especially in developing nations like Nigeria. For instance, little research has been done on the function of emotional intelligence (EI) in dispute resolution within Rivers State, Nigeria, entrepreneurial teams. Knowing how to use emotional intelligence (EI) to effectively manage conflict in entrepreneurial teams is essential given the socioeconomic difficulties and cultural dynamics of this area.

According to the empirical research, there is a substantial correlation between conflict management and emotional intelligence (EI), with multiple studies showing that EI improves team performance and conflict resolution techniques. More targeted studies on Emotional Intelligence (EI) and conflict resolution in entrepreneurial teams are necessary, nevertheless, especially when considering emerging nations like Nigeria. Future studies can offer a more sophisticated knowledge of how emotional intelligence can be used to settle disputes and promote cooperation in entrepreneurial teams by filling in the gaps in the literature.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to explore the relationship between emotional intelligence, conflict management, and team performance among entrepreneurial teams in Rivers State, Nigeria. The research combined quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to comprehensively analyse the study objectives.

Both primary and secondary data were used in the investigation. Semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data from team members and entrepreneurs. A comprehensive analysis of pertinent literature, including scholarly works, business reports, and official publications, was used to gather secondary data.

A standardized questionnaire intended to assess team performance, conflict resolution techniques, and emotional intelligence served as the main tool for gathering data. The survey used a four-point Likert scale, with the following possible answers: Positive items were scored as Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, whereas negative items were scored in reverse. Deeper understanding of the qualitative and contextual elements of team conflict and emotional intelligence practices was attained through semi-structured interviews. 200 participants were chosen for the study from Rivers State entrepreneurial teams using a stratified random sampling technique. Entrepreneurial endeavors were categorized into three main sectors—technology, services, and manufacturing—as part of the sampling process. Entrepreneurial teams were chosen at random from each sector. The 200 participants were split equally across these industries, with 67 respondents in each group.

For the study, a total of 200 completed and recovered questionnaires were examined. The Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, which was used to evaluate the research instrument's reliability, produced a respectable value of 0.83. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used to code and enter the questionnaire data into the computer for analysis (SPSS, version 27). To answer the research questions and evaluate the hypotheses, mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics like Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis were used.

Results of the study.

Objective One: The prevalent types of conflicts within entrepreneurial teams in the study area

Table 1 Perception of Respondents on types of conflicts within entrepreneurial teams

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remarks
		4	3	2	1			
1	Disagreements about roles and responsibilities are common in our entrepreneurial team.	79	112	7	2	3.34	.597	Accepted
2	Personality clashes frequently cause tension within our entrepreneurial team.	102	81	17		3.43	.645	Accepted
3	Conflicts over resource allocation (e.g., funding, equipment) often arise within the team.	109	89	2		3.54	.520	Accepted
4	Work style differences frequently lead to disagreements in our team.	55	124	12	9	3.12	.708	Accepted
Total						3.36	.618	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

Table 1 presents the perception of respondents regarding the types of conflicts within entrepreneurial teams. The findings indicate that conflicts over resource allocation (e.g., funding, equipment) were a significant issue, with a mean rating of 3.54 (SD = 0.520). Respondents also reported that personality clashes frequently caused tension, as reflected in a mean rating of 3.43 (SD = 0.645). Additionally, disagreements about roles and responsibilities were identified as a common source of conflict, with a mean rating of 3.34 (SD = 0.597). Lastly, work style differences were acknowledged as contributing to disagreements, with a mean rating of 3.12 (SD = 0.708).

All items had mean ratings above the criterion of 2.5, indicating that these factors were generally accepted as sources of conflict within entrepreneurial teams. These findings underscore the importance of addressing these issues to improve team cohesion and performance.

Objective Two: The existing conflict resolution mechanisms employed by entrepreneurial teams

Table 2 Perception of Respondents on conflict resolution mechanisms

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remarks
		4	3	2	1			
1	Our team effectively uses mediation or third-party intervention to resolve disputes.	64	67	45	24	2.85	1.004	Accepted
2	Open communication is encouraged within the team to address conflicts early.	73	105	14	8	3.21	.747	Accepted
3	Regular team-building exercises reduce the intensity of conflicts in our team.	115	67	7	11	3.43	.805	Accepted
4	Formal conflict resolution policies and procedures are implemented in our team.	96	88	13	3	3.39	.678	Accepted
Total						3.22	.809	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 presents the perception of respondents regarding conflict resolution mechanisms within entrepreneurial teams. The findings indicate that regular team-building exercises are highly effective in reducing the intensity of conflicts, with a mean rating of 3.43 (SD = 0.805). Similarly, formal conflict resolution policies and procedures were acknowledged as valuable tools for addressing disputes, with a mean rating of 3.39 (SD = 0.678).

Respondents also recognized the importance of open communication within the team for addressing conflicts early, reflected by a mean rating of 3.21 (SD = 0.747). Additionally, the use of mediation or third-party intervention to resolve disputes was perceived as an effective mechanism, with a mean rating of 2.85 (SD = 1.004).

Overall, the total mean rating of 3.22 (SD = 0.809) demonstrates a general acceptance of these mechanisms as significant in resolving conflicts. These findings underscore the importance of fostering open communication, implementing formal policies, and engaging in regular team-building activities to create a harmonious and productive team environment.

Objective Three: The role of diversity in exacerbating or mitigating team conflicts

Table 3 Perception on the role of diversity in exacerbating or mitigating team conflicts

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remarks
		4	3	2	1			
1	Cultural differences within the team often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.	119	45	28	8	3.38	.871	Accepted
2	Diversity in professional backgrounds contributes positively to conflict resolution in our team.	107	79	14		3.47	.625	Accepted
3	Functional diversity enhances collaboration rather than conflict in our team.	126	65	9		3.59	.578	Accepted
4	Our team leverages diversity as a strength to find innovative solutions during disagreements.	98	94	8		3.45	.574	Accepted
Total						3.47	.662	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 presents the perception of respondents on the role of diversity in exacerbating or mitigating team conflicts. The findings reveal that functional diversity significantly enhances collaboration rather than conflict, with a mean rating of 3.59 (SD = 0.578). Respondents also noted that diversity in professional backgrounds contributes positively to conflict resolution, as indicated by a mean rating of 3.47 (SD = 0.625).

Additionally, respondents agreed that their teams effectively leverage diversity as a strength to find innovative solutions during disagreements, with a mean rating of 3.45 (SD = 0.574). However, cultural differences within the team were perceived as a source of misunderstandings and conflicts, with a mean rating of 3.38 (SD = 0.871).

The total mean rating of 3.47 (SD = 0.662) reflects the respondents' overall acceptance of diversity as a factor that can both mitigate and exacerbate team conflicts. These findings highlight the importance of managing cultural differences while leveraging professional and functional diversity to foster collaboration and innovation within entrepreneurial teams.

Objective Four: The relationship between unresolved conflicts and key team performance metrics.

Table 4: Perception of the Relationship between unresolved Conflicts and Team performance metrics

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remarks
		4	3	2	1			
1	Unresolved conflicts negatively impact our team's overall productivity.	167	33			3.84	.372	Accepted
2	Persistent conflicts reduce trust among team members.	95	102	3		3.46	.529	Accepted
3	Unresolved disputes hinder the team's ability to make effective decisions.	17	183			3.08	.280	Accepted
4	Team innovation is significantly affected by unresolved conflicts.	134	62	4		3.65	.519	Accepted
Total						3.51	.425	

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2024

Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of the relationship between unresolved conflicts and team performance metrics. The findings reveal that unresolved conflicts negatively impact overall team productivity, with a high mean rating of 3.84 (SD = 0.372). Respondents also indicated that team innovation is significantly affected by unresolved conflicts, reflected by a mean rating of 3.65 (SD = 0.519).

Additionally, persistent conflicts were noted to reduce trust among team members, with a mean rating of 3.46 (SD = 0.529). Furthermore, unresolved disputes were perceived to hinder the team's ability to make effective decisions, with a mean rating of 3.08 (SD = 0.280).

The total mean rating of 3.51 (SD = 0.425) underscores the detrimental effects of unresolved conflicts on various team performance metrics. These findings highlight the critical need for effective conflict resolution strategies to enhance productivity, decision-making, trust, and innovation within teams.

Result of Tested Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between unresolved conflicts and key team performance metrics (e.g., productivity, innovation, trust, and decision-making effectiveness) in entrepreneurial teams.

Table 5: Correlation Coefficient between the unresolved conflicts and key team performance metrics

Correlations		Unresolved conflicts	Team performance metrics
Unresolved conflicts	Pearson Correlation	1	.905
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	200	200
Team performance metrics	Pearson Correlation	.905	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	200	200

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient between unresolved conflicts and key team performance metrics, as presented in Table 5, was found to be highly positive and statistically significant ($r = .905$, $p < .001$). This indicates that unresolved conflicts are strongly associated with decreased team performance metrics. Hence, the hypothesis that unresolved conflicts negatively affect team performance is supported. This finding highlights the critical impact of conflict resolution on enhancing team productivity and effectiveness.

H₀₂: Team diversity (e.g., cultural, professional, and functional) does not have a significant correlation on the occurrence or resolution of conflicts in entrepreneurial teams.

Table 6: Correlation Coefficient between Team diversity and the occurrence or resolution of conflicts in entrepreneurial teams.

Correlations		Team diversity	The resolution of conflicts in entrepreneurial teams
Team diversity	Pearson Correlation	1	.935
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	200	200
The resolution of conflicts in entrepreneurial teams	Pearson Correlation	.935	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	200	200

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficient between team diversity and the resolution of conflicts in entrepreneurial teams, as shown in Table 6, was found to be highly positive and statistically significant ($r = .935$, $p < .001$). This indicates a strong association between team diversity and effective conflict resolution within entrepreneurial teams. Hence, the hypothesis that team diversity positively influences the resolution of conflicts is supported. These results underscore the importance of leveraging diverse perspectives and backgrounds to foster effective conflict management in entrepreneurial settings.

Discussion of findings

Conflict management within entrepreneurial teams plays a crucial role in fostering productivity, innovation, and effective collaboration. The findings from this study provide insightful contributions to the existing body of literature on team dynamics and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Prevalent Types of Conflicts

The study identifies resource allocation disputes, personality clashes, role disagreements, and work style differences as the predominant sources of conflict within entrepreneurial teams. These results align with earlier studies emphasizing resource allocation challenges as a major contributor to team disputes (Brattström, 2023). The high mean ratings for personality clashes and disagreements over roles corroborate findings by Freedman (2019), who highlighted intrapersonal differences as a common factor in workplace conflicts. This underlines the critical importance of clear role definitions and interpersonal relationship management to mitigate tension.

Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Respondents acknowledged the effectiveness of team-building exercises, formal conflict resolution policies, and open communication channels in addressing conflicts. These findings are consistent with previous research that underscores the importance of structured mechanisms such as mediation and team-building activities to manage conflicts (Badriyah, Sulaeman, Wibowo & Anggapratama, 2024). Notably, the slightly lower mean score for mediation indicates potential challenges in the acceptance or application of third-party interventions, aligning with research that suggests mediation effectiveness may depend on team dynamics and cultural factors (Chen, Zhang & Zhang, 2022).

Role of Diversity in Team Conflicts

Diversity within teams emerged as both a challenge and an asset, echoing dual perspectives in the literature. While cultural diversity occasionally exacerbates misunderstandings, functional and professional diversity was found to enhance collaboration and innovative problem-solving. These findings align with Wang, Cheng, Chen & Leung (2019), who argue that the integration-and-learning perspective of diversity fosters creativity and resilience in teams. However, the study's emphasis on cultural misunderstandings reiterates the need for cultural competence training to address potential frictions (Jarrar et al., 2023).

Relationship between Unresolved Conflicts and Performance Metrics

Unresolved conflicts were shown to negatively impact key team performance metrics such as productivity, trust, innovation, and decision-making effectiveness. The strong correlation between unresolved disputes and performance degradation supports prior research that links unresolved conflicts to reduced team cohesion and operational inefficiency (Ganeshkumar, 2021). The finding that team innovation is significantly affected highlights the potential long-term consequences of neglecting conflict resolution in entrepreneurial settings.

Correlation between Team Diversity and Conflict Resolution

The positive correlation between team diversity and conflict resolution effectiveness demonstrates the value of leveraging diverse perspectives to address disputes. This finding resonates with research by Baruah, Burch & Burch (2022), which highlights diversity as a catalyst for creativity and problem-solving when properly managed. The results emphasize the importance of fostering inclusivity and implementing diversity-driven strategies to enhance conflict management capabilities.

Implications for Practice

The study's findings underscore the need for entrepreneurial teams to adopt proactive conflict resolution strategies, including clear role definitions, structured mediation processes, and regular team-building activities. The strong relationship between diversity and conflict resolution effectiveness also highlights the importance of inclusive leadership practices that embrace and manage diversity. Teams should prioritize training programs to build cultural competence and enhance communication skills, fostering a collaborative environment that minimizes conflicts and maximizes performance.

1. Conclusion:

The study highlights significant issues surrounding conflicts within entrepreneurial teams and the critical role of effective conflict resolution strategies. The results reveal that conflicts, particularly over resource allocation, personality clashes, and role-related disagreements, are common within entrepreneurial teams. These conflicts negatively impact team performance, particularly in terms of productivity, innovation, and trust. However, effective conflict resolution mechanisms such as team-building exercises, open communication, and formal policies are perceived as beneficial in mitigating these issues. Additionally, the study underscores the dual role of diversity in teams, where functional and professional diversity can enhance collaboration and innovation, while cultural differences can sometimes exacerbate conflicts. The strong correlation between unresolved conflicts and decreased team performance further emphasizes the importance of addressing conflicts promptly. Similarly, diversity is shown to positively influence conflict resolution, highlighting the value of leveraging diverse team backgrounds for effective problem-solving and conflict management.

2. Recommendations:

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made for improving team dynamics and performance in entrepreneurial settings:

1. Teams should adopt formal conflict resolution strategies that include regular team-building exercises, mediation, and third-party interventions. This can help reduce the intensity of conflicts and improve team cohesion.
2. Encouraging transparent and open communication channels within teams is crucial. By addressing conflicts early, teams can prevent escalation and improve overall collaboration.
3. Teams should actively manage diversity by leveraging functional and professional diversity to enhance innovation and problem-solving capabilities. At the same time, cultural differences should be addressed sensitively to prevent misunderstandings.
4. Provide training for team members on conflict resolution techniques, emphasizing the importance of understanding diverse perspectives and collaborating effectively despite differences.
5. Regularly assess the impact of unresolved conflicts on team performance metrics such as productivity, trust, decision-making, and innovation. This will help identify areas where conflict resolution strategies can be improved.

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