

Examining How Makerere University Academic Deans Utilize Their Psychological Capital Resilience in the Management of Conflicts

Proscovia Nalwadda¹, Gerald Bwenvu²

¹School of Social Sciences, Uganda Christian University, Kampala, Uganda

²Lecturer East African School of Higher Education Studies and Development, College of Education and External Studies, Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda
Email: pnalwadda@ucu.ac.ug

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Abstract

This study examined how academic deans at Makerere University in Uganda utilize their psychological capital resilience in the management of conflicts. Employing a qualitative, phenomenological approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 14 deans (5 females and 9 males) across 9 colleges of Makerere University, using purposive sampling. Thematic analysis revealed that deans leverage resilience assets such as stable personality traits, confidence, emotional control, calmness under pressure, innovative problem-solving, and strong professional and personal networks. Additionally, adherence to ethical principles and faith-based evaluations contributed to their resilience. However, resilience risks were identified, including emotional and physical exhaustion, reduced motivation, diminished self-belief, and challenges in rational decision-making during prolonged conflicts. The study emphasizes the importance of values such as ethical adherence, empathy, persistence, and faith-based guidance in fostering resilience. We recommend policy reviews to create flexible conflict resolution mechanisms, promote leader preparation, and ensure equitable career advancement. These findings highlight the intricate interplay between resilience assets, risks, and values in shaping effective conflict management among university leaders.

Keywords

Psychological Capital Resilience, Conflict Management, Academic Deans, Utilization, Makerere University

1. Introduction

The current higher education environment is generally challenging due to the di-

verse cultural backgrounds of both teachers and students; conflicts between teacher and teacher, teacher and management, or student and teacher are inevitable. This study examined how Makerere University academic deans utilize their psychological capital resilience in the management conflicts between teacher and teacher; and teachers and management, requiring the selection of appropriate conflict management strategies, for which evidence shows depends on individual resilience levels (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Emerging evidence also indicates that resilience can enhance individuals' ability to cope with and respond to conflict (Ahmed et al., 2021), yet little is known about conflict management of university managers in relation to resilience. Moreover university managers, influenced by resilience, can adopt positive conflict management strategies that help them return to normal functioning and adaptation, a process that ideally develops over time (Southwick et al., 2014). Over generations, resilience has been recognized as a construct that significantly contributes to human life. Scholars have described resilient individuals as possessing an internal locus of control, pro-social behaviour, empathy, a positive self-image, optimism, and the ability to manage daily responsibilities (Reyes et al., 2015). Thus, it is logical that other studies consider such individuals as essential for implementing important initiatives and positively responding to shocks such as conflicts (Rockefeller Foundation, 2021). The characteristics of an individual and their appraisal of situations, particularly conflicts, are crucial for healthy coping with future stress or conflict encounters (Braun-Lewensohn & Mayer, 2020). This suggests that the way individuals, including resilient university managers, evaluate a conflict situation influences the strategies they employ to handle it.

Evidence from a quantitative study in Türkiye by Tosun and Dilmac (2015) using the relational screening model revealed that the conflict resolution styles individuals use vary according to their levels of resilience, with resilience being identified as the most significant variable affecting the choice of conflict resolution styles. Additionally, emphasizes that employee resilience, as a concept rooted in positive psychology theory, affects how managers adapt to challenges, conflicts, and changes. This adaptation likely includes selecting specific conflict management styles for particular conflict situations.

Scholars like Mohammadi and Mahdian (2016) studied the relationship between conflict management styles (compromise, avoidance, competing) with resilience in educational administrators in Asia. Adopting a quantitative approach had results that revealed a negative relation between the avoidance style of conflict management and the resilience of educational managers yet there was a positive relationship between the compromise conflict management styles and resilience of educational managers. In this regard, Mohammadi and Mahdian's results can be supported by the fact that it only takes resilient managers with positive coping strength to choose the compromising strategy for conflict management otherwise less resilient individuals will always choose negative conflict management styles like avoidance. After all, a study that measured the relationship between psycho-

logical resilience and positive coping styles revealed that higher psychological resilience is associated with a better positive coping style (Wu et al., 2020).

In this context, a correlational study found that individuals prone to stress and low in stress resilience scored high on deficiencies in conflict situations; they were above the 60th percentile for avoiding and accommodating behaviours and were less likely to use competing or collaborating strategies to manage conflict (Pines et al., 2011). Conversely, a cross-sectional analytic study by Ahmed et al. (2021) found that individuals with low total resilience often used competing strategies, while those with high total resilience frequently used compromising, avoiding, and collaborating strategies to resolve interpersonal conflicts. This finding contradicts Mohammadi and Mahdian (2016), who reported that individuals with low resilience typically adopt avoidance and other negative conflict management strategies.

In addition, numerous scholars have extensively discussed the role of resilience in helping managers cope with adverse situations and manage conflicts and crises across various sectors of human life and well-being. For example, Baykal (2018) explains that resilience enables managers to withstand adversities, solve problems flexibly, and achieve better outcomes than their starting points. This capability is partly because resilience has been found to significantly and positively affect motivation for achievement (Herdem, 2019) by stimulating motivational factors within organizations, including higher education institutions. This, in turn, generates positive energy among managers towards achieving desired goals (Chance, 2022). Additionally, heightened resilience is associated with public service motivation, leading to constructive leadership by supervisors (Plimmer et al., 2022), who act in alignment with the organization's legitimate interests.

A qualitative study by Fernandez et al. (2022) at a U.S. university investigated how a team of resilient administrators support organizational resilience in response to natural disasters, crises, and conflict. The study found that university administrators demonstrated resilience by effectively communicating and processing information, utilizing material resources, and focusing on extending emotional or relational resources across multiple administrative levels to achieve university goals. The evidence from this study indicates that resilient individuals, particularly managers, will always strive to explore positive options that lead to the organization's desired outcomes, including effective conflict communication and information sharing.

Moreover, studies by Pines et al. (2011) in the U.S. and Chen et al. (2017) in Europe highlight the role of resilience in managing capacity-building programs within organizations and the subsequent benefits, particularly in enhancing effective and efficient conflict management at all levels. Pines et al. found that strengthening stress resilience among individuals through repeated practice using various conflict management strategies tailored to situational factors enhances effective conflict management. Similarly, Chen et al. found that enhancing individual resilience within an organization's workforce can reduce conflict-related negative safety outcomes. This suggests that resilient managers can foster resilience within

the organizations they lead (Bento et al., 2021). In the context of conflict management, resilient organizations can gradually develop new competencies to handle crises at all structural levels as they grow (Oeij et al., 2016).

Furthermore, scholars emphasize that resilience is dynamic, multi-dimensional, and multi-scale; no single type can function in isolation, as all types enhance each other. Similarly, Prayag et al. (2020), for instance, identify three types of resilience: psychological, employee, and organizational resilience. These types work together to improve the work environment. Their study reveals significant and positive relationships between psychological and employee resilience. They also emphasize that while employee resilience contributes to both life satisfaction and organizational resilience, managers' life satisfaction contributes to organizational resilience. Therefore, it is beneficial for organizations, including universities, to undergo a process of anticipation, coping, and adaptation (Shaya et al., 2022) to achieve social-ecological resilience for effectively handling conflicts.

Evidence from a Brazilian study by Bento et al. (2021) aimed at building system resilience among faculty members during the challenges and conflicts brought on by the pandemic, particularly in the context of inequality, provides compelling results. The findings reveal that when university faculty were briefed by their managers about the impending crises and conflicts, they exhibited ecological cooperation. They became flexible to emergent organizational changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, embraced new learning from previous experiences and emerging knowledge, and adopted new practices and conflict management strategies such as open communication among staff and across organizational levels. This serves as a practical example of resilient managers fostering employee resilience for better conflict management within the university. After all, employee resilience is defined as the capability to use psychological resources to continually adapt and thrive at work, even under challenging circumstances (Plimmer et al., 2022).

In a quantitative study by Price (2023), it was found that resilience building in higher education significantly contributes to the well-being of the institutional community. Evidence showed that populations in higher education, including students, experience rates of depression and anxiety that are substantially higher than those in the general population. Further research findings indicate that intrapersonal conflict is significantly positively related to stress (Amandeep et al., 2020), and interpersonal disagreements arising from individual stress led to conflict (Omene, 2021). Additionally, Rines (2021) emphasizes that unaddressed stress and the resulting relational conflicts at work and home can cause serious mental health problems for employees. Consequently, Price recommends integrating resilience-building sessions to mitigate conflicts arising from emotional distress, which can be understood as mental suffering.

In the context of higher education at the international level, Sood and Sharma (2020), using the transactional theory of stress and coping, discovered that resilience significantly predicts psychological well-being both directly and indirectly.

Similarly, [Versteeg and Kappe \(2021\)](#) found that resilience mediates the relationship between higher education support and student-perceived academic stress, suggesting that resilient students perceive university support as a buffer against academic stress and depression, unlike their non-resilient counterparts. Additionally, [Chen et al. \(2021\)](#) revealed that increased resilience reduces the strength of the relationship between perceived stress and dietary behaviours. This underscores the importance for university managers to provide higher education support for student well-being and highlights the critical role of resilience in helping individuals buffer various life challenges.

Other scholars including [Argyros and Johnson \(2018\)](#) and [Durso et al. \(2021\)](#) focused on examining factors that can undermine resilience promotion and measures university managers can use to enhance resilience in higher education. Using qualitative and quantitative approaches respectively, [Argyros and Johnson \(2018\)](#) applied the Academic Resilience Model (ARM) and found that self-esteem, grit, agreeableness, openness to experience, and neuroticism were significant predictors of resilience scores. They also identified that factors originating from individual, academic, and external systems can undermine resilience. External factors may include higher education institution policies and management styles, which [Versteeg and Kappe \(2021\)](#) cited as crucial for promoting well-being among individuals.

Regarding student retention management in higher education institutions, [Bittmann \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that resilient individuals tend to have more positive academic trajectories, lower dropout intentions, better grades, and higher life satisfaction. These effects are stable over time, statistically significant, and of considerable magnitude. Further, [Nantsupawat et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Sihvola et al. \(2023\)](#) assert that resilience reduces individuals' intentions to leave by directly decreasing psychological distress. This link between resilience and better outcomes in university students is well-documented. For instance, [de la Fuente et al. \(2017\)](#) found a positive and significant linear relationship between resilience and the deep learning approach, as well as problem-centered coping strategies, which together lead to academic achievement. Similarly, [Backmann et al. \(2019\)](#) identified a positive relationship between student resilience and study progress, while [Prickett et al. \(2020\)](#) demonstrated that the Nicolson McBride Resilience Quotient (NMRQ) is significantly linked to attendance, individual subject performance, and year average marks. Given this evidence, university managers are encouraged to focus on increasing resilience levels among those they manage to address academic performance challenges in higher education.

Regarding faculty management, existing evidence demonstrates how resilience aids faculty responses to educational reforms as stressors in higher education. For instance, [Ross et al. \(2022\)](#), in a qualitative study utilizing Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model, found that resilient academics are capable of learning from challenges to meet the expectations of educational reforms. This suggests that resilient individuals can navigate hardships to fulfil their roles effectively. This study un-

derscores some of the crises and challenges faced by contemporary higher education and illustrates how resilient individuals have successfully navigated them.

Studies from the African region have predominantly focused on resilience as a crucial factor in training and performance, which in turn helps individuals achieve significant goals despite challenging circumstances. These studies often investigate issues of student management related to academic performance and success. For example, [van Wyk et al. \(2022\)](#) in South Africa and [Calvin et al. \(2022\)](#) in Nigeria, using a correlational study design, found a significant positive relationship between various components of resilience and academic performance and turnover intentions ([van Wyk et al., 2022](#)).

Scholars like [Ang et al. \(2021\)](#), through a systematic review and meta-ethnography of qualitative studies, reported that resilience is linked to individuals' internal resources and can be developed and nurtured by educational institutions. Several other researchers have identified both individual internal resources and external factors as essential in enhancing resilience. While [Iyanu and Omolola \(2020\)](#) highlighted self-efficacy, [Kumi-Yeboah \(2020\)](#), in a qualitative study, found self-regulation, technology, religious faith, past experiences, parental support, and safety issues as factors that enhance educational resilience and academic achievement. Similarly, [Abukari \(2018\)](#), using the Social constructivism framework in Ghana, found that social support systems, such as collective family/kinship values, future orientation, and the individual characteristic of "not giving up," emerged as protective factors supporting academic resilience. Moreover, [van Breda \(2018\)](#) identified community relationships and family financial security as individually significant.

When examining these studies, it is evident that out of the numerous studies on resilience, conflict management, and conflict management strategies, very few, such as those by [Ahmed et al. \(2021\)](#), [Fernandez et al. \(2022\)](#), [Mohammadi and Mahdian \(2016\)](#), and [Pines et al. \(2011\)](#), focused specifically on the context of higher education. These studies primarily examined higher education students, except for [Ahmed et al. \(2021\)](#), [Fernandez et al. \(2022\)](#), and [Mohammadi and Mahdian \(2016\)](#), who included higher education managers in their study populations. My study addressed these gaps by focusing on the contextual and population sample type, specifically by studying the utilization of psychological resilience and conflict management among university managers. Additionally, most of the aforementioned studies adopted a quantitative research approach, with only a few employing qualitative methodologies. To bridge this gap, my study adopted a qualitative approach.

Furthermore, there are some contradictory findings among these scholars. While [Ahmed et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Pines et al. \(2011\)](#) both linked the collaboration conflict management style to individuals with high resilience levels, there were inconsistencies. For instance, [Ahmed et al. \(2021\)](#) reported a positive relationship between the avoidance style and resilience, whereas [Mohammadi and Mahdian \(2016\)](#) and [Ahmed et al. \(2021\)](#) found a positive relationship between the com-

promise conflict management style and resilience of educational managers and other individuals. This contradicts Pines et al. (2011), who found that individuals with low resilience predominantly used the compromising conflict management style. These observations suggest that low-resilience managers may force their employees to resolve conflicts, while highly resilient individuals in conflict management positions, like university managers, tend to seek win-win situations or sometimes avoid conflict altogether (Adham, 2023).

Reviewed empirical evidence is also inconsistent. While some studies link high resilience to specific conflict management strategies, others refute these findings (Ahmed et al., 2021; Mohammadi & Mahdian, 2016; Pines et al., 2011). This inconsistency highlighted the need for further research to harmonize these contradictions. Although emerging evidence suggests that resilience can strengthen individuals' ability to cope with conflict (Balafkan et al., 2023), there is limited knowledge about how resilience is utilized by university managers when managing conflict, particularly at Makerere University. Therefore, in this study, we examined how Makerere University academic deans utilize their psychological capital resilience in conflict management.

2. Methodology

For this study, we adopted an interpretivism worldview (Creswell, 2003), as it aligns with a naturalistic, subjective, and qualitative paradigm. This approach was selected to explore and understand the perceptions and actual experiences shared by participants in their natural environment (Fouché et al., 2021). It was specifically chosen to comprehend the views of Makerere University deans on conflict management within their respective schools. The study focused on how psychological capital resiliency influences university managers' decisions in conflict management, given their daily involvement in handling conflicts. Consequently, this approach facilitated understanding of participants' experiences and opinions, considering their interaction processes, and their work context (Makerere University), and their historical and cultural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As well as supporting the mapping and development of a psychological strengths-driven framework to enhance the psychological capital of the deans for effective conflict management.

We adopted the interpretive phenomenological research design for this study. This design allowed the identification and understanding of the experiences of Makerere University deans. Further, the interpretive phenomenological research design enabled us to understand and describe the universal essence of utilising psychological capital resilience in conflict management phenomenon, while also keeping my preconceived assumptions about these phenomena. It also offered us an opportunity to delve into the meanings that Makerere University academic deans attribute to the phenomena of conflict management in their schools (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and their experiences and opinions on the utilization of psychological capital resilience in managing conflicts (Creswell & Creswell,

2018). Lastly, this design provided us with unique perspectives for developing a framework to enhance the use of psychological capital in conflict management (Nashwa & Kinchin, 2023).

The Makerere University academic deans were the parent population. These make a total of 28 schools based in 9 Colleges and 1 constituent School of Law. Academic deans were the targeted population for this research specifically due to their role in overseeing an academic unit in higher institutions like Makerere University, yet they are also accountable for the overall supervision and administration of its affairs (Uganda Government, 2001). With such a mandate, they are better positioned to confront and manage both task and relationship-related conflicts in their schools.

The Biglan's classification of academic disciplines (Biglan, 1973a, 1973b) was used to purposively (Maree & Pietersen, 2016) select 14 schools from a total of 28 schools together with their respective deans. The selected 14 schools constituted the total sample. The deans of the selected schools then constituted the selected sample of participants. A list of deans was obtained from the Directorate of Human resource which informed us on the genders of different deans, hence this selection included 5 females and 9 males, based on the belief that experiences could vary due to biological differences. The number of female deans was lower than their male counterparts for several reasons: some selected schools had no female deans, some female deans had less than two months of experience in their roles, and thus lacked substantial conflict management experience, and other female deans were too busy to participate in the study.

For data collection, we employed semi-structured interviews, crafted in alignment with the objectives and research questions of this study. According to Ruslin et al. (2022), semi-structured interviews are particularly potent in qualitative research as they enable the researcher to gather comprehensive information and evidence from interviewees, capturing their perspectives from multiple angles. These interviews were predominantly conducted face-to-face in the deans' offices at their respective schools, using primarily interview guides with 16 open-ended questions. The interview guide facilitated the collection of qualitative data from the university deans, allowing them to share their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) regarding the types of conflicts they handle and their methods for managing these conflicts, which aided in exploring how they leverage psychological capital resilience in conflict management. Additionally, the interview guide permitted deviations from the predetermined question sequence (Creswell & Plano-Clerk, 2018), enabling me, as the interviewer, to pose supplementary questions for clarification or to probe further into participants' explanations and responses.

To accommodate the deans' demanding schedules and to remain flexible amidst frequent and sudden changes, the interviews were scheduled accordingly. Given the complexity of this study's focus, extra time was dedicated to explaining the concept of psychological capital resilience to any deans who requested clarifi-

cation. The interview sessions were digitally recorded to capture contextual nuances beyond the spoken words, gain insight into participants' perspectives, and obtain data that cannot be directly observed, with verbatim transcripts subsequently produced. Field notes were also compiled during the interviews to supplement the recorded data.

The data obtained from the field was inductively analyzed and interpreted. Given the interpretive phenomenological design we adopted to study deans' experiences in handling relationship and task-related conflicts, thematic analysis strategy was employed for data analysis, following the approaches outlined by Braun and Clark (2006) and (Creswell, 2014). According to Braun and Clark (2006: p. 78), "thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the data." Besides being widely employed within qualitative methodological traditions, it represents a versatile analytical tool (Braun & Clark, 2006).

The data analysis included data organization involving the transcription of interviews and the researcher's interview notes; categorization of data into separate categories; reading and re-reading of transcripts and notes to identify meaningful and credible information; data coding; and the establishment of themes and sub-themes. Initial codes were developed based on emerging information and insights from the interview participants, as well as pre-determined codes informed by the theoretical framework (Creswell, 2014). By combining elements from both Creswell's and Braun and Clark's models, a comprehensive and adaptable data analysis strategy was effectively created. Themes were mapped and evaluated against the research purpose and the specific objectives.

Ethical Considerations

Adhering to national and international research ethical standards, including UNCST (2014, 2016) and Makerere University (2008), this study upheld a fundamental ethical framework based on principles of respecting human rights and avoiding harm. Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Makerere University School of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee and was granted, Ref. No: MAKSHSREC-2024-745. Other key ethical considerations included strategies to promote the involvement of relevant participant groups, ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, safeguarding anonymity, protecting human dignity, and preventing plagiarism. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and potential benefits, with assurances that participation would not result in harm.

3. Results

This study was meant to answer the question; how do Makerere University academic deans utilize their resilience in managing conflict? This study found that Makerere University academic deans used various factors that contributed to or hindered the development and usage of their resilience in conflict management including assets, risk factors and values. The study findings highlight the complex

interplay between resilience assets, risk factors, and values in shaping how academic deans at Makerere University manage conflicts, with each dean employing unique strategies influenced by their backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences.

Resiliency assets

These are measurable characteristics in a group of individuals or their situation that predict a positive outcome in the future on a specific outcome criterion (Masten & Reed, 2002: p. 76). This study identified several factors that deans thought led to the enhancement in their usage of resilience in conflict management. These included temperaments, positive self-perceptions, emotional stability, self-regulation, self-reflection, creativity, relationships, morality, and initiative. Dean D exemplifies this resilience through his proactive and culturally informed approach to conflict resolution, leveraging his strengths and belief in his ability to overcome challenges saying.

Haaa! I always sit down and get a framework that could help me resolve the conflict at hand. I always ask myself, "Why is this happening!", I try to gather information and interface with the conflicting parties at a personal level. "I am never broken down; I believe there is no conflict that I cannot solve or manage!" Some things come, and you feel that it is the end of the world, but I sleep over it, and the following morning, I have an answer. Omukama akuwa ekkubo weritali (God gives you a way where it is non-existent.) If you are a dean, and you cannot solve problems, then, you are not fit to be one! (December 20, 2023, Makerere).

Dean D's resilience shines through in his approach to conflict management. Given his cultural background as a Muganda, his approach seems to emphasize peace and harmony which are some of the cultural values in Buganda, he also leverages his familiarity with conflict dynamics in Makerere University given his upbringing in the Central region. This supports his resilience and pushes him to engage in data gathering before confronting a conflict. Borrowing from Dean D's proactive methodical approach to conflict management, university deans' resilience assets like strong temperament, positive self-perception, self-reflection and positive outlook, can be instrumental in helping deans to have and retain the zeal and patience in finding out the root causes of conflict situations for better intervention design, and lastly to resolution. They in turn come to have their resilience developed in the due process as they continue to believe in their abilities to successfully overcome any challenges.

Resiliency risk factors

These are such factors that cause an elevated probability of an undesirable outcome which may include less obvious, gradual, but eventually detrimental factors, such as stress and burnout. Risk factors may differentially expose individuals to frequent and intense undesirable events and thus increase the probability of negative outcomes (Masten & Reed, 2002: p. 76). The conflict poses significant negative effects on some deans, female and male alike. They include diminished morale, confidence, and decision-making abilities, as well as stress and emotional

turmoil causing adverse outcomes. These not only afflict the deans personally but also permeate the organizational environment, fostering toxicity and demoralization among faculty and staff. Dean B illustrates this by acknowledging the detrimental impact of conflicts and emphasizing the importance of avoiding them whenever possible. He stated:

No one wishes to have conflicts; Number one, it kills the morale of work. You feel you are not liked, you are hated, you lose your confidence, you feel whatever you are doing is wrong! And the moment you lose confidence, you lose direction, and you now start making more mistakes. That's why you always must find ways of keeping away from conflict. I don't like them at all. They can trigger negative performance in you. Conflicts bring negative energy make you become irrational in decision making and even the irrationality makes you misinterpret even obvious things. And the moment you become irrational you make a precursor for more conflicts. I do a self-reflection and then you say, what am I doing now! If I focus on this one individual yet I am leading over 80 staff and other 50 support staff, and you punish all these because of this one individual. People come to your office and you, and you tell them; don't come to my office, you meet people and don't greet them. So, you make a self-reflection and say, what is the general good, you then, dwell on the positives and ignore the negatives, suppress the negative and look for the positive attitudes in yourself if you are looking to make peace. (December,14, 2023, Makerere).

Dean B acknowledges the detrimental effects of conflict and his proactive approach to managing it. This is probably caused by his background as an ex-seminarian and upbringing in a peaceful family. No wonder he values peace and harmony, which likely influences his preference for avoiding conflicts whenever possible, and his emphasis on self-reflection. In such scenarios as the one of Dean B, university deans need to have a thoughtful approach to leadership, considering both individuals and the organizational cultural dynamics from which they can get support. In this study, some deans especially the female deans and a few male professors emphasized the need for the university management's support to deans to overcome some of these resilience risk factors. Some of their suggestions included a request for decentralization of conflict management policies, training, and orientation of deans in their tasks before taking up office, and optimization of equal opportunities for career growth among the faculty.

According to this study results, however, in a way, some deans never considered the presence of conflict situations as a necessary and invaluable opportunity for growth and self-actualization for them, their followers, their schools at large and Makerere University in general. However, amidst these challenges, some deans fail to use the resilience assets to overcome the resilience risks and instead demonstrate resilience by adopting strategies of detachment from the conflict situation. They consciously distance themselves from the negative impacts of conflicts and

refuse to let such conflicts dictate their well-being, as they prioritize emotional and academic equilibrium. By doing so, they miss out on gaining insight to overcome the risk of complacency, explore new domains, and further exploit their existing talents and strengths, hence, viewing adversities and setbacks as both risk factors and challenging opportunities for growth and success beyond the normal state. For instance, Dean L. mentioned this:

In conflict situations, that is negative energy, I don't pay attention to negative energy. You die for nothing and leave other people eating meat! Even from myself. For what! I have just joked with you, and I said, with stress, you die for nothing, and you leave others eating meat-you die with stress! I still need to enjoy meat! No need, we have policies, the university has given us enough policies, so if those policies exist, you can use them. But as I told you, as much as possible, it is very good to run a conflict-free environment and allow conflicts to minimum levels. If you make it to bigger levels, then, you know that you have failed to manage, and you are going to start fights in corridors and so on ...! (January 8, 2024, Makerere).

Dean L's approach to resilience in the face of conflict reflects a strategic detachment from negative energy and a focus on maintaining emotional and academic equilibrium. As a middle-aged Muteso Professor and computer scientist, Dean L's approach likely reflects a combination of his professional background and personal disposition towards conflict resolution in that he is very limited in his ability to pay attention to detail and work with people. He seems reserved and straight to the point better off working with machines, yet conflicts are people centered. Despite the potential for conflicts to serve as opportunities for growth and self-actualization, Dean L prioritizes avoiding conflicts altogether, viewing them as disruptive to personal well-being and productivity.

Just like Dean L's scenario above, some Makerere University deans feel that conflict situations are entirely "negative energy" highlighting their resilience in refusing to let such negativity impact their school environment. They fail to assertively engage deeply with conflicts to leverage resilience assets. However, while such a strategy may effectively maintain a conflict-free environment, it also poses a risk of complacency and missed growth opportunities. Detaching from conflicts rather than actively engaging with them to explore new domains and further develop talents and strengths, may limit the potential for both the deans' personal and organizational innovation and advancement.

Values in resilience

Some academic deans utilize their underlying value systems to guide their actions in conflict management. Values such as integrity, compassion, perseverance, and religious beliefs help them navigate conflicts with clarity and determination. Such deans draw upon psychological capital resilience rooted in their values, seeking support through prayer, giving positive feedback, and exercising integrity to foster unity within their department and effectively manage conflict.

4. Discussion

In this study, we examined how Makerere University Deans utilize their psychological capital resilience in managing conflicts. Psychological capital resilience was defined as the internal emotional capacity of university managers to focus on assets, risks, and processes in conflict management and to rebound positively from adversities to achieve the university's desired outcomes constructively. The findings highlight components that contribute to or hinder the deans' resilience, emphasizing resiliency assets, risk factors, and values. The study identified several factors employed by resilient deans in conflict management, which in turn enhanced their resilience. These included stable and adaptable personality traits, confidence in their abilities, the ability to remain calm under pressure, control over emotions and actions, regular religious-led evaluations of actions and decisions, innovative problem-solving approaches, strong professional and personal networks, adherence to ethical principles, and a proactive, culturally informed attitude towards addressing issues.

These findings align with scholars such as [Ang et al. \(2021\)](#), who reported that resilience is linked to individuals' internal and external resources. According to [Plimmer et al. \(2022\)](#), [Ahmed et al. \(2021\)](#), [Braun-Lewensohn and Mayer \(2020\)](#), [Iyanu and Omolola \(2020\)](#), [Kumi-Yeboah \(2020\)](#), and [van Breda \(2018\)](#), these resources include self-efficacy, self-regulation, technology usage, religious faith, past experiences, parental support, safety issues, community relationships, and financial security, which enhance resilience and academic achievement. It is important to note that educational institutions can and need to develop and nurture these factors among their leaders, even if they do not possess all of them initially ([Ang et al., 2021](#)), for effective conflict management.

However, the study also found that most Makerere University academic deans (both female and male; junior and senior) faced resiliency risk factors, leading to undesirable outcomes in conflict management processes. These outcomes affected their resilience levels and included emotional and physical exhaustion from prolonged conflict, lower motivation and enthusiasm, reduced belief in one's abilities, and difficulty making rational choices. Despite these challenges, more resilient deans leveraged their resilience assets to overcome these risk factors and benefit from them in managing conflicts. This finding supports previous research, including [Wu et al. \(2020\)](#), who asserted that higher psychological resilience is associated with better positive coping styles. Yet [Ross et al. \(2022\)](#) found that resilience aids faculty responses to stressors in higher education, indicating that resilient academics can learn from challenges to meet institutional expectations. Such deans adopted positive conflict management strategies that facilitated their return to normal functioning and adaptation ([Southwick et al., 2014](#)).

Conversely, the less resilient deans in this study did not utilize resilience asset factors to overcome resilience risk factors to achieve their conflict management goals. Instead, these deans recommended that university management address the resiliency risk factors hindering their progress. They suggested policy reviews for

more localized and flexible conflict resolution frameworks, thorough preparation of leaders before assuming deanship, and ensuring equal career advancement opportunities for all faculty. This aligns with findings by Pines et al. (2011), who noted that individuals prone to stress and low in stress resilience scored high on deficiencies in conflict situations. Yet, Fernandez et al. (2022) asserted that administrators should support organizational resilience in response to crises. Moreover, Pines et al. (2011) and Chen et al. (2017) highlighted the importance of capacity-building programs within organizations and the subsequent benefits of enhancing effective and efficient conflict management at all levels. Pines et al. specifically stressed the need for strengthening stress resilience through repeated practice using various conflict management strategies tailored to situational factors. Similarly, Chen et al. found that enhancing individual resilience within an organization's workforce can reduce conflict-related negative safety outcomes. This suggests that resilient managers can foster resilience within the organizations they lead (Bento et al., 2021) by streamlining organizational systems.

The study also found that values such as adherence to moral and ethical principles, empathy and concern for others, persistence in the face of challenges, and faith-based guidance and support play a critical role in the resilience of deans, especially during conflicts. These findings are consistent with Abukari (2018), who identified values such as collective family/kinship values, future orientation, and the individual characteristic of perseverance as enhancers of resilience. This means that university managers must make it a point to strengthen faculty and deans' values for effective conflict management.

5. Conclusion

This study explored how academic deans at Makerere University utilize resilience in managing conflicts, revealing a dynamic interplay of resilience assets, risk factors, and values. Resilience assets, including emotional stability, self-reflection, and cultural grounding, enable deans to navigate conflicts with confidence and adaptability. However, risk factors such as stress, burnout, and diminished morale pose significant challenges, sometimes leading deans to disengage rather than actively address conflicts. While some deans leverage their resilience assets to develop proactive conflict management strategies, others adopt avoidance or detachment as a coping mechanism, which, though effective in preserving immediate well-being, may limit long-term professional and institutional growth. Additionally, values such as integrity, perseverance, and religious beliefs play a crucial role in shaping deans' approaches to conflict resolution, reinforcing their ability to maintain harmony within their academic units. Overall, the study highlights the importance of balancing psychological capital resilience assets with effective institutional support structures, including conflict management training and policy decentralization. Encouraging deans to view conflict not just as a challenge but as an opportunity for growth can foster more adaptive and constructive leadership approaches in higher education institutions.

6. Recommendations

Recommendations for practice

Makerere University's human resource management department should enhance resilience by encouraging deans to build and maintain strong professional and personal networks, employ innovative problem-solving approaches, and regularly engage in self-evaluation practices. This approach leverages both internal and external resources to support effective conflict management. In addition, University management should advocate for ethical and empathic leadership, emphasizing adherence to moral principles, empathy, and concern for others in leadership practices. This will foster a culture of integrity and support, improving resilience and conflict management outcomes. The university should also conduct regular resilience training sessions focused on stress management, emotional regulation, and proactive conflict management strategies. These sessions will strengthen the capacity of deans to rebound from adversities and handle conflicts constructively.

Recommendations for future research

Future research should focus on identifying and understanding the specific resilience factors that contribute to effective conflict management in academic settings to develop a more nuanced understanding of how various resilience assets and risk factors influence conflict management practices.

Policy implications and recommendations

Makerere University management should develop and implement conflict management frameworks that are tailored to the specific cultural and organizational context of the university. This includes co-creating adaptable tools and strategies with deans to account for local conditions and individual differences in resilience. They should also implement comprehensive training programs for new deans before they assume office. These programs should equip future leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge to handle conflicts effectively, thereby enhancing their resilience from the start. Makerere University management should ensure transparent and equitable career advancement policies for all faculty members. By fostering a supportive environment, the university can mitigate resilience risk factors related to career progression and motivation. Further, the university should integrate values-based leadership principles into existing policies on resilience and conflict management. Emphasizing ethical principles, empathy, and faith-based guidance will enhance resilience among leaders.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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