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MEDIATING ROLE OF TEAM SIZE ON TASK CONFLICT AND EFFICACY OF INTRAGROUP TEAMS IN THE NIGERIAN FINANCIAL SECTOR: A STUDY OF ACCESS BANK PLC

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Abstract

The size of a team whether large or small and their interactions as human beings are bound to disagree as a result of incompatibilities arising from the nature of their work. The coming together of workers from different background, philosophies, views and perceptions as a result of merger is likely to trigger intragroup conflict among team members. This study was aimed at examining the mediating role of team size on task conflict and efficacy of intragroup teams in the Nigerian Financial Sector, a study of Access Bank. A descriptive survey design was adopted to examine 491 permanent staff members of Access Bank marketing team in South-East states of Nigeria. A sample size of 220 was determined using Taro Yamane formula while, Bowleys' proportional allocation method was used to ascertain the copies of questionnaire allocated to each branch of the banks across the South East States. Descriptive statistics and mediation regression analyses were used to analyze data and test the hypothesis formulated. The study found that team size significantly mediates the task conflict-efficacy of teams in Access Bank and recommends that the management should formulate regulations and policies that will reduce conflicts within the organization.

Keywords: Conflict, Mediating, Intragroup, Team size, Task Conflict, Group Efficacy.

Introduction

Developing approaches to the management of humans in organisations for overall performance has been the concern of managers and policy makers. This is consequent upon the fact that there are always struggle over resources, positions, status as team size increase, or when the goal directed behaviour of an individual or team blocks the goal directed behaviour of another to the extent that performance or targeted objectives are hindered, thereby giving rise to conflict situation. Conflict in this context is seen as a disagreement between two or more individuals or teams; an awareness of the parties involved of discrepancies, incompatible wishes, or irreconcilable desires (Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

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Organizational conflict as a branch of conflict has a lot of concerns lately, this is because interests generated by scholars, managers and policy makers show that conflicts within the workplace are real, and can have either detrimental or beneficial outcomes in organizations (Puck and Pregering, 2014 and Hong, Zhang, Gang and Choi, 2017). Unlike the general conflict process, organizational conflict has been operationalized as the combination of two (2) dimensions: task conflict and relationship conflict (Jehn, Greer and Levine, 2008; and Tekleab and Quigley, 2014).

Whereas task conflict is concerned with the disagreements that arise with the contents of the task (job), relationship conflict involves those disagreements that arise as a result of interpersonal incompatibility among group members (Pearson, Ensley and Amason, 2002). Drawing from the above, it would therefore be erroneous to view conflict from an outright negative perspective only. This is because according to Litter and Whyte as mentioned in Hayes, (2018), "conflict within the organization does not necessarily signify organizational weakness, rather it signifies a healthy organization". The size also tends to affect groups whether small or large based of control, divergent opinions and interests.

Meanwhile, mediation represents the process of intervention between two conflicting variables or parties in order to foster or promote reconciliation or reach a compromise (Choi and Cho, 2011; Puck and Pregering, 2014). In ascertaining the role mediation plays in conflict mechanism, this paper investigated the mediating role of team size on task conflict and efficacy of intragroup teams in the Nigerian Financial Sector with a focus on Access Bank of Nigeria plc in the South Eastern States, Nigeria.

Literature Review

In this section, the conceptual model adopted from Hayes, (2018) and concepts such as task conflict, mediation and team size were reviewed.

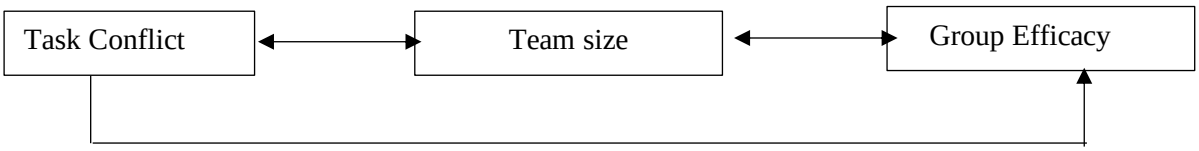


Figure 1: *Conceptual model on the mediating role of team size on the effect of task conflict on group efficacy.*

Task Conflict

Task conflicts arise from the discordance that exists among the employees regarding the nature of the particular job at hand. These conflicts generally involve the members of the organization and the management of the concerned organization (De Wit, Jehn and Scheepers, 2013). Task conflict occurs when group members disagree about task issues such as goals, procedures, and the appropriate choice of group action (Pelled, Eisenhardt and Xin, 1999). In the previously mentioned study, Pelled and colleagues analysed the effects of task conflict on group effectiveness (performance) and found a positive relationship.

Jehn (1995) defined task conflict as disagreements among group members about the content of tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoint, ideas, and opinions. According to Jehn, the effect of task conflict was found to be dependent on the task performed. For example, when groups performed routine tasks, task conflict was detrimental to group effectiveness (performance) because it interfered with standardized processes and distracted the groups from what needed to be accomplished. When the task was non-routine, task conflict did not result in performance decrements and, in some cases, was beneficial, as it promoted critical evaluation of problems and decision options, in addition to an absence of task conflict when doing non-routine tasks was associated with complacency about problems and decisions.

Task conflict is expected to be beneficial for group effectiveness, increasing the quality of decision as well as the acceptance of decisions and satisfaction with the group outcome, while relationship conflict has a negative impact on group effectiveness, group satisfaction and commitment within the group, due to the fact that it increases stress and anxiety and therefore limits the information processing abilities of the group members (Jehn, 1995). Although intuitively appealing, these differential effects were not supported by the meta-analysis exploring the impact of task versus relationship conflict on group effectiveness (efficacy and mind), and group members' satisfaction which showed that both types of conflict have detrimental effects for group outcomes (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003).

Conversely, the study of Hinds and Mortensen, (2005), Lau and Murnighan, (2005), and Raver and Gelfand, (2005), suggested that task conflict has the potential to benefit a broad variety of group outcomes. However, much research as mentioned earlier has found that task conflict do impair both proximal and distal group outcomes (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). The negative effects of task conflict on proximal outcomes, such as satisfaction, can be explained by self-verification theory (Swann, Polzer, Seyle and Ko, 2004), which suggests that group members become dissatisfied when they interpret challenges confronting them with respect to their viewpoints and when such viewpoints are opposed or seen by other group members as a negative assessment of their own abilities and competencies.

Accordingly, this dissatisfaction felt by members for instance, can cause people to ruminate and experience stress as a result of task conflict. This assumption was noted by Dijkstra, Van, and Evers, (2005), and Yang and Mossholder, (2004). Their findings of the negative effects of task conflict on more distal group outcomes, such as group performance, support for the information-processing perspectives corroborated with the positions of Carnevale & Probst, (1998), which suggests that task conflicts are a distraction and require resources that cannot be directly invested into task performance. The meaning as observed indicates that as task conflict increases cognitive load, it also interferes with effective cognitive processes and may result in narrow, black and-white thinking capabilities and, thereby, obstruct distal group outcomes, such as group effectiveness, creativity, and decision making (De Dreu, 2008).

On the positive side, task conflicts often have been suggested to potentially benefit group outcomes and distal group outcomes, such as group effectiveness, in particular as espoused by Amason, (1996), Jehn, (1995) and Olson and Boswell, (2008). Task conflict may benefit proximal group outcomes as task conflict tends to facilitates group members to voice their own

perspective of the task at hand (Simons & Peterson, 2000). Similarly, task conflict may also be positive for task commitment and member satisfaction (Behfar, Mannix, Peterson and Trochim, 2011). From the above, one could therefore argue that task conflict has a positive and negative outcome on group effectiveness even though the current effort here is to determine their association and mediating effects.

Team size

Team size, normally referred to the optimal composition of members of a group/team, working together with aspirations and set objectives appears to be the mediating variable for this study. Mediation generally is seen as a conflict resolution strategy employed to solve the disagreement, remove negative emotional and interference phenomenon occurring between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived incompatibilities, disagreements and interferences with the attainment of their goals as increases or decreases. However, team size is employed in this study to examine and ascertain the emotional interference of task conflict on team efficacy when mediated by team size (team size to task conflict efficacy and team size to task conflict of teams mind). For example, the question may be succinctly put; can task conflict lead to efficacy of teams when mediated, in terms of flexibility in executing tasks (contents of the job), collaborative and interdependent on one another? Or does it lead to divergent views, complacency, rumination, arguments, disagreement, perceptions and incompatibilities, thus leading to low or decreased effectiveness?

In the same vein, it was also necessary drawing from the mediation role employed by this study to query the emotional disagreement and personal incompatibility perspectives of relationship conflict on group mind when mediated by team size (team size to relationship conflict efficacy of teams and team size to relationship conflict mind of teams). For example, can relationship conflict affect the minds of teams when mediated, to the extent that it reduces effectiveness or task efficacy of team? Or does it lead to interpersonal incompatibilities like antagonism, polarization, tensions, negative feelings, annoyance, anger, dislikes and quarrelsomeness, and to ascertain whether team size as mediator is actually dependent on the type of conflict in question as espoused by Jehn, (1995), You, et al, (2008) and Puck and Pregering, (2014), or whether relationship conflict directly predicts efficacy?

Although, the effect of intragroup conflict on team outcomes has been investigated and questioned over the years. Early conflict theorists have considered intragroup conflicts to be an impediment to effective team functioning (Argarys, 1962, Blake and Mouton, 1984; Pondy 1967). However, for the purpose of this study, mediating role of team size, its effects on task and relationship conflict and their corresponding negative and positive perspectives are highlighted with a view to understanding their dynamic nature and association.

A number of research investigations have focused on the effect of team size on member cohesion and intimacy (Bogart & Lundgren, 2014; Seashore, 2014). The findings indicated that as size increased, cohesion and intimacy decreased. Members of larger teams perceived those teams to be more competitive, less unified, and more argumentative. As team size increased, member satisfaction decreased (Steiner, 2012). It could be true that the merger brought with it

the attendant situation of decrease in cohesion and intimacy in Access bank, but does large team size decrease cohesion and intimacy always? The effect of team size on the participation levels of individual members also has been investigated (Bales and Borgatta, 2006; Callahan, Owen, and Renzulli, 2004; Gentry, 2000; Hare, 2002; Hawkins, 2002; Schneider and Zimet, 2009). All of these studies reported that as team size increased, the amount of communication initiated by individual members decreased.

Gibb (2011) in his study found that as size increased, members reported more feelings of threat and inhibition, more disagreements and dissatisfaction with the team which were found in larger versus smaller teams as well (Berkowitz, 2008; Slater, 2008). Therefore what may relatively affect task and relationship conflict as well as efficacy and group mind may largely depend on the surrounding circumstances within the organization. This brief review suggests considerable consensus with regards to the influence of team size on these processes; for example, team intimacy and cohesion, members' satisfaction, participation, and expressed disagreement are all affected by increased team size. However, research findings on the influence of team size on productivity and effectiveness remain equivocal. Whereas some studies concluded that small teams are more efficient and productive than large teams, (Gibb, 2011; Gist, Locke, and Taylor, 2007; Wheelan and McKeage, 2013), other studies found that as size increased, productivity and performance increased as well (Fink and Thomas, 2013; Fox, Herrold, Lorge and Weltz, 2013).

Reviewing the works of Wanous and Youtz, (2016) was suggestive of the fact that increased size broadened solution diversity, which in turn led to better decisions and enhanced productivity. While we subject some of these assertions to further investigations, a number of studies also reported no differences in the quality of solutions or productivity in small teams versus large teams (Cummins and King, 2013; Dickinson and Stoneman, 2019; Kidd, 2018; Lorge and Solomon, 2009). Similarly, in an attempt to resolve these contradictory results, some researchers have proposed that the influence of size on team productivity depends on the type of task a team is working on (Anderson and Frank, 2011; Littlepage and Silbiger, 2012; Shaw, 2016; Steiner, 2012).

Group Efficacy

Group efficacy is an extension of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy concept to groups. It is understood to be the group's sense of its capacity to complete a task successfully or to reach its objectives. However, an impediment to the development of the group efficacy construct is that there is still limited agreement on how it should be measured (Gibson, Randel, and Earley, 2000).

Group efficacy as a measure of group effectiveness is a task oriented measure of the ability of a group to successfully handle activity centred tasks at work. Group efficacy implies that members of a group believe in the ability of the group effort to yield an optimum result in accomplishing set organizational tasks (Solansky, Singh, and Huang, 2014). The concept of group efficacy is known to stem from that of self-efficacy; which is both a subjective norm and the known antecedent of entrepreneurial behaviour (Hockerts, 2015 and Wang, Chang, Yao, and Liang, 2016). This implies the belief of confidence in members of the group and in their

ability to fulfil set goals through adequate planning, organizing and execution (Stajkovic, Lee, and Nyberg, 2009).

In this study, group efficacy is expected to be predicted by both task and relationship conflicts, either as primary predictors or mediators. The logic here lies in the fact that the mental rigors involved in the resolution of task conflict is known to enrich the task, thereby leading to a much more highly performing group (You, Chen, Hua, and Wang, 2018), whether same can be said when task conflict leads to relationship conflict is a subject of empirical enquiry. On the other hand, while it is not a prior expectation of relationship conflict to directly predict group efficacy, it was necessary to empirically investigate the effect of relationship conflict through task conflict on the level of group's efficacy to enable decision making in the organisation understudy.

One of the many methods that holds promise to increase the performance or effectiveness of groups is the building of group efficacy. Group efficacy therefore, is defined as the group members' collective estimate of the group's ability to perform a specific task (Gibson, 1999). Group efficacy differs from general confidence in that whereas confidence is a general affective state, efficacy is extremely task specific. Group efficacy has the ability to affect a group's mission and commitment, the manner in which group members work together, and the group's resilience in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1997).

How, then, is group efficacy initially developed? Bandura, (1997) proposed four sources of information that can lead to the development of self-efficacy. The first of these is past performance accomplishment. In other words, an individual's past successes and failures will have a strong effect on self-efficacy for the particular task that one is facing at any given moment. If one has recently experienced success at a task similar to that which one is currently facing, then one is likely to experience high levels of self-efficacy. Conversely, if one has recently experienced defeat at a task similar to that which one is currently facing, then it is likely that one will experience low levels of self-efficacy.

The second piece of information that Bandura (1997) proposed to have an effect on self-efficacy is that of vicarious experience. Vicarious experience is realized either through visualization of successful performance or through the modelling of successful performance by someone who is similar to the individual. When one sees someone who is similar to oneself perform a specific task successfully, one's self-efficacy for that task becomes higher. One sees that the other person can do it and begins to believe that he or she can perform the task as well. It therefore follows that one's own expectations for positive performance have been raised.

The third source of information that encourages self-efficacy is verbal persuasion. This is simply having other people consistently express the belief that one is capable of performing in the required manner. Therefore assertion here is that it is easier to sustain a sense of efficacy, especially when struggling with difficulties, if significant others express faith in one's capabilities. Although verbal persuasion is not the most effective manner of increasing self-efficacy, it often plays a key role in keeping an individual involved in a task long enough to experience either vicarious experience (others successfully modelling the behaviour) or

performance accomplishment (experiencing success at the behaviour ourselves). However, it is also argued that physiological and emotional arousal can affect self-efficacy. This negative assumption may depend primarily on whether the individual finds arousal to be a positive or negative condition and also on the level of success that the individual has achieved at the specific task.

Accordingly, arousal will have a different effect on performance of a task that requires learning than it will on a task that is well learned and simply requires performance, with extremely high levels of arousal facilitating the performance of task but disrupting the task that requires learning. Whereas the aforementioned sources of information affect perceptions of self-efficacy, there are no researches at this time that has directly focused on the antecedents of group efficacy.

Bandura (1997) have attempted to address this area by stating that "both (personal and collective) efficacy beliefs, have similar sources, serve similar functions, and operate through similar processes". However, the first two sources of information are thought to be more effective at developing efficacy, they are more difficult to access. This difficulty in access as observed can be especially true for groups in organizations that are operating under strict time deadlines or are operating in new or unusual circumstances. Many times in organizational contexts, there simply is not the time for rehearsal or the luxury of being experienced at the task.

Consequent on the increasing speed of business and the increasing speed of change within businesses, more and more groups within organizations are finding themselves forced to perform in critical contexts without time to either practice (develop performance accomplishments) or experience the situation vicariously (through modelling). Therefore, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal are not thought to be as effective as the other two sources of information in the development of efficacy, they are much more accessible to groups in today's organizational contexts.

Research Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive survey design. This design was adopted because it is most appropriate and helpful in determining and describing the perception of respondents on the variables studied. It is also a correlation research between the types of conflict toward the team effectiveness of financial institutions, intragroup dynamics of teams in terms of efficacy within Access Bank in the South Eastern States of Nigeria. Therefore, the study examined the direct, indirect and total effects of both task and relationship conflicts on group efficacy in the financial institution. The population of this study comprised 46 Access Bank Branches and 491 permanent staff members of the marketing teams/groups of Access Bank branches drawn from the three (3) Senatorial Districts from the five states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) in South East, Nigeria. Since available records showed that there are 491 permanent staff members of the marketing teams/groups of Access Bank branches in this zone and observing

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that it is not possible to deal with all the target population, the random sampling techniques was adopted in selecting the sample size using the Taro Yamane formula as shown below;

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N\,(e)^2} \qquad \ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots\ldots \qquad \textit{(Equation 1)}$$

Where:

N = total population size (491)

1 = is a constant

e^2=level of significance (0.05)

Substituting in equation 1;

$$n = \frac{491}{1 + 491\,(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{491}{1 + 491\,(0.0025)}$$

$$n = 220$$

Hence, a sample size of 220 permanent staff members of the marketing teams/groups of Access Bank branches were used for this study. A mediation regression analysis was conducted to determine the mediation, direct, indirect and total effects of the dimensions of intragroup conflicts (task and relationship) on teams' effectiveness (efficacy and group minds). The analysis was conducted with the IBM SPSS AMOS version 23 to ascertain positive or negative effects for decisions making. The simple linear regression was used to assess whether one continuous dependent variable can be predicted from an independent (or predictor) variable.

Results and Discussion

This section revealed the results on the mediating role of relationship conflict on the task conflict and group efficacy of intragroup teams in Access bank.

Table 1: Responses of intragroup teams on task conflict, relationship conflict and group efficacy

S/N	Task Conflict	TVLE (5)	TLE (4)	TSE (3)	SE (2)	NAA (1)	Mean Score	Remark
1	What extent of disagreement over different ideas have you had?	4	59	83	30	4	3.16	TSE

FUW-INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES.
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2	What degree of differences about the content of decisions did your group have to work through?	7	61	69	36	7	3.14	TSE
3	Are there many degrees of differences of opinions within your group?	9	61	59	48	3	3.13	TSE
	Relationship Conflict	**TVLE (5)**	**TLE (4)**	**TSE (3)**	**SE (2)**	**NAA (1)**	**Mean Score**	**Remark**
4	What is the extent of anger expressed by members of your team?	11	42	79	43	5	3.06	TSE
5	What is the degree of personal frictions among team during decisions?	2	42	87	49	0	2.98	TSE
6	Is there much degree of tension during team decisions?	2	39	95	49	0	2.94	TSE
	Group Efficacy	**SA (5)**	**A (4)**	**U (3)**	**D (2)**	**SD (1)**	**Mean Score**	**Remark**
7	I am confident about our ability to perform our tasks exceptionally.	21	134	6	9	10	4.00	A
8	I am self-assured about our capabilities to perform our activities amongst group	26	143	3	3	5	4.01	A
9	We have mastered the skills necessary for our tasks	22	142	4	5	7	4.00	A

Source: *Researcher's Survey, 2019;*
***Key**: NAA=Not at all, TVLE=To a Very Large Extent, TLE= To a large extent, TSE=To a Small Extent, SE=Small Extent, SA=Strongly Agreed, A=Agreed, U = Undecided, D = Disagreed, SD=Strongly Disagreed.*

Test of Hypothesis

H_{01}: Team size does not significantly mediate the task conflict-efficacy of teams' relationship in Access bank.

The hypothesis above was tested using the Mediation Regression Analysis
The mediation Analytical Model is defined by these formula; (Baron and Kenny, 1986)

$$y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \varepsilon_1 \quad (1)$$

$$m = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \varepsilon_2 \quad (2)$$

$$y = \alpha + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_1 m + \varepsilon_3 \quad (3)$$

Where:

y = the dependent variable (Group efficacy)
α= the intercept
$x_{1=}$ the independent variable (Task conflict)
m = the mediator variable (Team size)
β_1 = the regression co-efficient.
ε_{1-3}= the error term

Mediation Outcome

FUW-INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND SOCIAL SCIENCES.
Volume 8, No. 1, 2023 ISSN: 2384-6224

Full mediation – This exists if coefficient of the independent variable in *equation 1* is significant but the coefficient of the independent variable in *equation* 3 is not significant. Hence we reject the null hypothesis.

Partial Mediation–This exists if coefficient of the independent variable in *equation 1* is significant and the coefficient of the independent variable in *equation* 3 is significant.

No mediation - Otherwise. Accept the null hypothesis

***Decision Rule*:** If p-value is less than or equal to 0.05 it is considered significant otherwise, it is not significant.

Presentation of Results

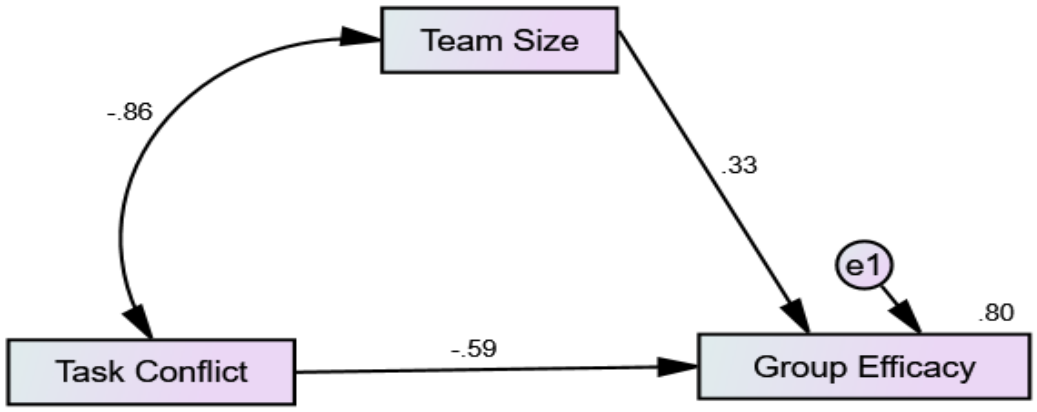


Figure 2: Mediating role of team size on task conflict and group efficacy

Table 2: Regression Weights: (Mediation model)

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
Group Efficacy	<---	Task Conflict	-.950	.105	-9.034	***	par_1
Group Efficacy	<---	Team Size	.283	.056	5.065	***	par_2
Team Size	<-->	Task Conflict	-1.020	.073	-13.954	***	par_3

Source: *SPSS AMOS Version 23,*** implies p-value<0.05*

Interpretation of Results

The correlation coefficient (R) in figure 2 showed the nature of the relationship between the three variables. Hence a negative relationship exists between task conflict and team size with

a correlation of -0.86, also a negative relationship exists between task conflict and group efficacy with a correlation of -0.59 while a positive relationship exists between team size and group efficacy.

The mediation regression table 2: above, was used to form the mediation model so as to determine the mediating role of team size on task conflict and group efficacy of intragroup teams in Access bank. Hence, the mediation model explains that task conflict has a negative significant impact on group efficacy while team size had a positive significant impact on group efficacy. Similarly, team size and task conflict had a significant interaction.

Mediation occurred since the coefficient of task conflict and team size is significant. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected, thus we conclude that team size significantly mediates the task conflict-efficacy of teams' in Access bank.

Discussion

Results from table 1 and 2 and hypothesis testing on the responses of respondents on the mediating role of team size on task conflict efficacy of intragroup teams in Access bank revealed that team size moderates the relationship between task conflict and group efficacy with a correlation of -0.59. The meaning is that team size interacts significantly with task and becomes a pointer to efficacy. It also implies that when the team is large, the greater the propensity for team members to achieve results in Access bank. This finding concurred with the work of Schneider and Zimet, (2009), and You, Chen, Hua and Wang, (2018) who reported that as team size increased, the amount of communication initiated by individual members decreased thereby enhancing group efficacy.

Recommendations

Timely interventions or quick response to conflict issues should be among the top priority of Access bank Management. Therefore, set of regulations such as interpersonal relationship, defined roles, collaborative discussions, availability of resources, follow up on clients; meeting targets that will ensure that conflicts that may occur (predictors as well as suppressors or mediators) within the organization are quickly resolved should be adopted. This is in agreement with some positions of You, Chen, Hua and Wang, (2018).

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