

# Compromising Strategy and Workplace Harmony of Public Universities in Rivers State

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**Abstract:** *This study examined the relationship between compromising strategy and workplace harmony of public universities in Rivers State. Cross-sectional research design was adopted in the study. Copies of the research instrument were administered to 296 Deans, HODs, Admins and principal officers of public universities in Rivers State, and 218 responded; representing 74(%) percent response rate. Structural Equation Modeling was used to test the hypotheses. The outcome of the analyses revealed that there is a significant relationship between compromising strategy and workplace harmony of public universities in Rivers State. The analyses specifically revealed that compromising conflict management approach has significant relationship with the measures of workplace harmony (communication and grievance handling). On the basis of the findings, it was considered plausible to submit that compromising conflict management approach has significant impact on workplace harmony of public universities in Rivers State. Consequently, it was recommended that the management of public universities should: be responsive in objectively arresting any conflict situation with appropriate strategies such as compromise and accommodation; institutionalized dialogue and explore dialogue strategy as a foremost step among others in managing conflict.*

**Keywords:** Conflict Management, Compromising Strategy, Workplace Harmony, Communication, Grievance Handling, Institutionalized Dialogue, Explore Dialogue.

## Introduction

Maintaining a peaceful atmosphere that encourages collaboration between departments and the administration is essential to the success of all educational institutions. The social landscape of the Nigerian universities, however, has seen its share of confrontations that have hampered academic progress (Ndum & Okey, 2013). Students, professors, and administrators all bring unique personalities to the classroom and offices, but they must learn to coexist peacefully. Consequently, the organizational structure permits for the free flow of information between teachers and teachers, students and students, and teachers and students, etc. Therefore, it is critical that the phenomena of workplace harmony be evaluated.

In order to achieve their goals, organisations are formed with a certain end in mind. Managers and their subordinates make up the workforce, and they are the organization's driving power. The degree of success in accomplishing these goals depends on the interplay between the many people involved in the process. Especially in the field of education, the success of an institution depends on the employees; (Teaching and Non-teaching Staff) being able to work in harmony with the government in the case of public schools; whether federal/state owned and the owners of the school in the case of private schools (Adim & Okwudiri, 2020). Elangovan and Xie (2000) buttressing this assert that increased organizational productivity and growth are dependent on a harmonious workplace that assures fulfilment of workers' and employers' ambitions.

Discord in the workplace manifests when people are at odds with one another over some aspect of group life, be it a person, a concept, a hobby, or a circumstance (Nwinyokpugi & Albert, 2019). Peace and cooperation among employees and supervisors are essential for the success of any business. Harmony in the workplace boosts productivity, which in turn boosts the success of businesses, this leads to higher wages and a better standard of living for everyone (Adim & Okwudiri, 2020). It establishes a calm atmosphere at work that encourages open communication and various methods of conflict resolution (such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration, conciliation, and litigation or court adjudication) while dealing with industrial or labour problems in Nigeria (Adim & Okwudiri, 2020).

For this research, we utilized measures of workplace harmony that were previously identified as proxies in the works of Rajhans (2018) and Gomathi (2014), namely, communication and effective grievance handling. Organizations cannot function without communication, which acts as a conduit for the exchange of ideas, information, and knowledge between individuals, groups, and departments (Arop et al., 2018). De Los Reyes (2017) claims that when grievances are handled properly, it makes for a more pleasant workplace overall, which is good for both employers and workers.

Existing research on conflict management have identified compromise as a strategy for resolving workplace disagreements (Nwofia, 2015; Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2019). A willingness to negotiate and be adaptable are hallmarks of a person who is good at compromising. Burnside (2008) argues that parties in disputes are more likely to accept win-lose results if they take a compromise attitude.

Although many studies have attempted to assess the possible predictors of workplace harmony (e.g., George & Tamounmiebi, 2020; Nwinyokpugi, 2015; Nwinyokpugi & Albert, 2019), there appears to be a dearth of research examining the relationship between compromising and workplace harmony, especially at public universities in Rivers State. There is also a methodological and conceptual void since so few research has used structural equation modelling to examine the relationship between the variables. As a result, the purpose of this research is to determine if compromising strategy has any relationship with workplace harmony at public universities in Rivers State.

### Aim and Objective

The aim of this study is to ascertain the relationship between compromising strategy and workplace harmony of public tertiary institutions in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- i. Determine the relationship between compromising strategy and communication.
- ii. Examine the relationship between compromising strategy and grievance handling.

### Hypotheses

To guide the remaining part of the study, the following hypotheses were formulated:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between compromising strategy and communication.

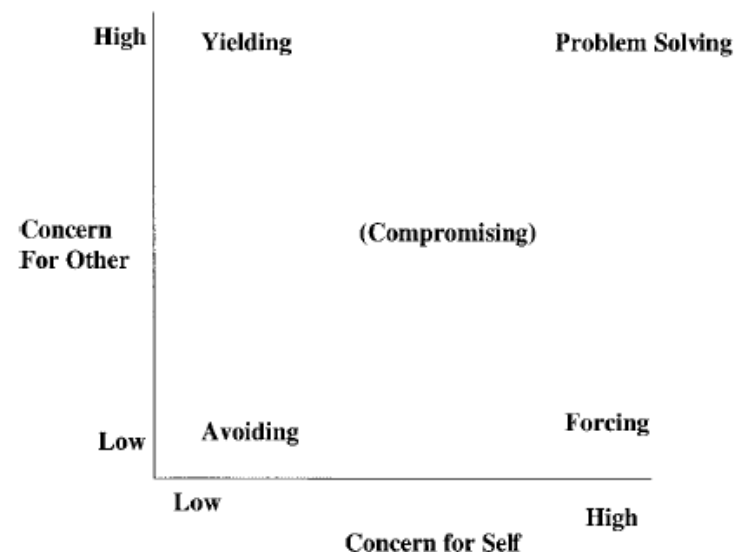
**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between compromising strategy and grievance handling.

### Literature Review

#### Theoretical Framework

##### Dual Concern Theory

Prior work by Blake and Mouton (1964) and Deutsch's Theory of Cooperation and Competition both have connections to Dual Concern Theory (1973). It says that how one handles conflicts depends on whether or not they have a high level of self-concern in addition to a high level of concern for others. According to this view, resolving conflicts effectively involves striking a delicate balance act between looking out for one's own interests and those of others and preserving positive interpersonal connections (Sadri, 2012). Workers, depending on where they fall on the spectrum between these two worries, will often utilize one or more of the following core conflict management strategies (Sadri, 2012).



**Figure 1.1:** Theoretical representation of the five conflict management dynamics as a function of concern for self and concern for others adopted from De Dreu et al. (2001).

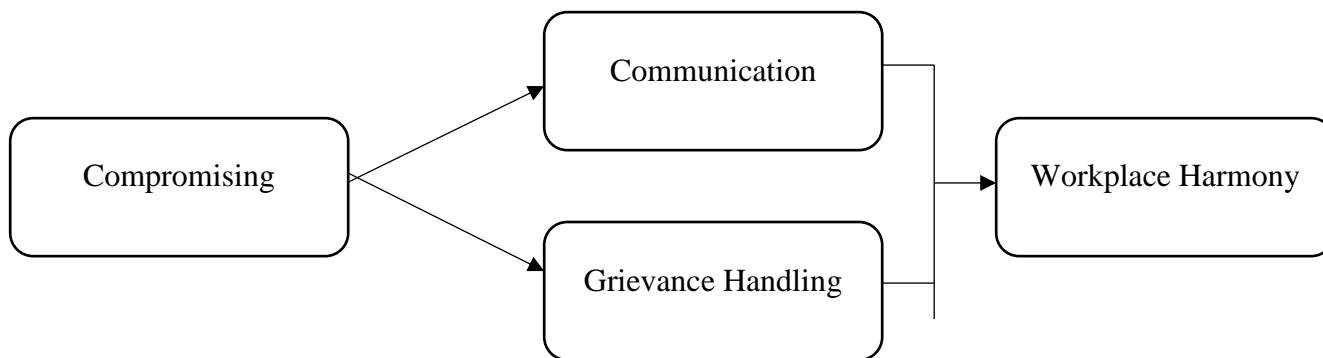
Figure 2 illustrates how a preference for forcing—centered on putting one's will on others—emerges when an individual has high

self-concern and low other-care. Threats, bluffs, convincing arguments, and firm promises are all part of the forcing process. A propensity for yielding, which is geared toward accepting and absorbing the will of others, derives from having low self-concern and high other-concern. It entails giving in first and making no demands in return while offering assistance. If you do not care much about yourself or other people, you will probably choose to avoid difficult situations by ignoring or minimizing them. An individual who cares deeply about himself and those around them will seek to find solutions to problems by negotiating terms that best meet their own and others' needs. It entails discussing values and opinions, demonstrating understanding, and weighing the relative weight of various concerns.

An author's inclination for compromise has been linked to a middle-of-the-road self-interest and social responsibility. To some, finding a middle ground is "half-hearted problem solution" (e.g., Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). However, there are many who view this as a separate tactic in which one party matches the concessions of the other, makes conditional promises and threats, and actively seeks a middle ground.

Both experimental studies in the field of social psychology (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1992) and studies in the field of organizational science (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1992) have found strong support for Dual Concern Theory (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; De Dreu et al., 2001). There are already various measures that use this idea as their foundation to evaluate workplace conflict management dynamics.

**Conceptual Review**



**Figure 1.2: A Model of the Relationship between Compromising and Workplace Harmony**

**Compromising Strategy**

When it comes to assertiveness and cooperation, compromising (sharing) strikes a happy medium. The goal here is to reach an expeditious, win-win solution that satisfies both sides to some degree. It is not quite accommodating, but it's not quite competitive, either. When compared to competing and accommodating, compromising is more giving. Similarly, it confronts a problem head-on rather than ignoring it, however it does not go into the subject in as much detail as does collaborating (Drakulevska et al., 2020). It is possible that finding a compromise in a given scenario requires only dividing the gap between the two sides, swapping concessions, or looking for a speedy middle ground solution. People who are willing to compromise are content if they can obtain a reasonable degree of satisfaction with agreements reached during times of conflict. People who are willing to make concessions are less likely to completely dodge the issue at hand or work together to find a solution that benefits everyone involved (Thomas, 1976).

Additionally, this approach is defined by its emphasis on negotiation and adaptability. An environment where both sides feel like losers is fostered when a compromise strategy is used, as argued by Burnside (2008). Due to the nature of dispute resolution, it is common for compromises to involve concessions on both sides, leaving no one feeling like they came out on top. This demonstrates that under this framework, no one is fully satisfied with their wants and aspirations, but that each partner receives some level of pleasure that is acceptable to them. Snell (2002) elaborated on this idea, noting that solutions achieved via this approach are more likely to be pleasing than optimal since they strike a balance between cooperation and assertiveness. However, Steyn (2001) argued that compromise is most appropriate when authority is evenly distributed or when scarce resources must be shared. This is because compromise necessitates striking a middle ground between competing priorities.

**Workplace Harmony**

Workplace harmony exists when both employers and employees are committed to mutual growth and success (Laden, 2012). According to Puttapalli and Vuram (2012), workplace and employment conditions are major factors in establishing peace inside an organisation. Simply said, it is when management and employees join forces to voluntarily advance the company's objectives. If you

want things to be peaceful at work, you need to make sure the big players are getting along. In a situation of organizational harmony, all members of the company or industry are provided with what they desire (or at least require) without having to advocate for it (Nwinyokpugi, 2015).

Akume and Abdullahi (2013) state that harmony in the workplace occurs when coworkers are able to put aside their differences and work together to resolve issues like how to enhance working conditions, set ground rules, and allocate responsibilities. The authors claim that many different activities, both official and informal, may be summed up under the umbrella word "process," which in turn shapes the nature of the relationship between superiors and subordinates.

According to Elangovan and Xie (2000), an environment of mutual respect and understanding between employees and management is necessary for a company to be productive and grow. Antagonism or competition over ideas, interests, people, or situations characterizes workplace discord and reveals deeper levels of social, organizational, or group incompatibility (Nwinyokpugi & Albert, 2019).

Good synergy and teamwork between managers and their subordinates (also known as "workplace harmony") are crucial to the growth and prosperity of any business. To achieve organizational goals, employees must be able to work together effectively, and leaders do this by creating an atmosphere that encourages this. The leader of an organization needs to depend on tried and tested methods and theories of organizational power in order to manage the organization's personnel and resources effectively and efficiently (Nwinyokpugi & Albert, 2019).

### **Communication**

The Latin word "communis," which means "to share," is where we get the English word "communication" (Ezezue, 2007). In this way, it's clear that sharing is a social activity because it allows for participation and cooperation. However, there is no communication if the exchange of symbols (verbal or non-verbal) does not lead to a shared understanding (Donnelly et al., 1984). The success of every organisation depends on its ability to communicate effectively. But if people in an organisation are not getting their questions answered and their concerns addressed, productivity might suffer. Therefore, it is crucial for managers to have open lines of communication with their staff. A manager's capacity for effective communication determines how far he or she will go in achieving organizational objectives (Herich, 2008). Strikes and lockouts are less likely to occur when there are open lines of communication between employees and management. Communication breakdowns may be disastrous for an organization's mission and objectives.

### **Grievance Handling**

The term "grievance" is used to describe an employee's expression of any discontent or unfairness he may feel over his job and its nature, regarding the management's policies and processes, and so on (Juneja, 2018). A lack of transparency in organizational policies and procedures can create employee dissatisfaction, which manifests itself in the form of complaints about one's work performance or interpersonal relationships (Garima, 2017). A person or a group of workers may make a formal or informal presentation about a problem at work that has the potential to change the way people feel about their jobs. Complaints and conflicts are inevitable in the workplace because of the many organizational shifts that have occurred and the resulting variations in employee behaviour and perspective. Workers may file a grievance if they feel their expectations from the company have not been met and they believe the company has violated the collective agreement between management and labour.

When an employee believes that his or her rights have been infringed or that the terms of the employment contract he or she has with an organisation (either individually or collectively through a union or related agencies) have been changed, he or she may experience feelings of grievance (Bean, 1994, as cited in Obiekwe & Eke, 2019). According to Bean, complaints typically stem from workers being discontent with some aspect of their jobs.

Averineni (2012) argues that the presence of an employee complaint indicates that certain employees are unhappy with their jobs. The most common cause of a complaint is unfair treatment. There has been a rise in this kind of discontent among those working in a variety of fields (Averineni, 2012). A rise in employee dissatisfaction is inevitable if corporate authorities consistently fail to uphold the real code of conduct and procedures at all organizational levels. According to Baumruk (2010), every business has its own set of protocols to make sure it meets its employees' needs (Baumruk 2010). The company's capacity to resolve the issues further decreases the likelihood that complaints will be filed.

### **Relationship between Compromising Strategy and Workplace Harmony**

Scholarly perspectives on organizational conflict suggests that employees who settle disagreement via compromise are more likely to create and nurture amicable relationships among workers (Likert & Likert, 1976; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989). Therefore, we discovered that a negotiation strategy has been effective in reconciling conflicts between management and employees at our educational institution (academic and non-academic). Overt confrontation such as industrial action (strike) is used by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Non-academic Staff Union of Universities (NASU) when they are unhappy with their

employer (the government) about their welfare and other linked issues (Wobodo, 2019). However, when government responds, there are so many demands in relation to the cost that government, seen as corrupt, insincere, and uncommitted to better education in the country, will not be willing to oblige to all the requests before it, and will instead resort to negotiation to provide some aspects of their demands while promising to provide other aspects subsequent, resulting in compromise as the best tool in resolving such cries for help (Wobodo, 2019).

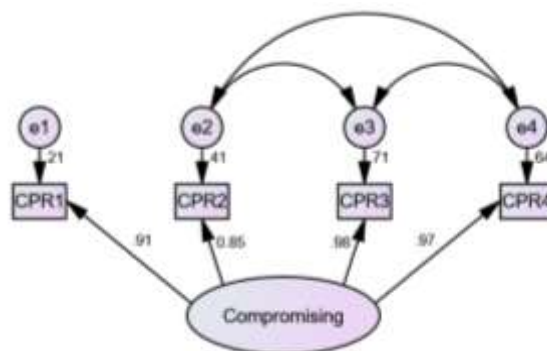
**Methodology**

Cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. Of the copies of the questionnaire distributed to 296 Deans, HODs, Admins and principal officers of public tertiary institutions in Rivers State, 218 responded. Representing 74 percent response rate. The study satisfied content, face and construct validity (see table 1.4); as well as the 0.7 reliability threshold. To test the afore-stated hypotheses on the relationship between compromising and the workplace harmony, structural equation modelling was used.

**Results and Discussion**

In this subsection, we evaluate the extent to which compromising serves as a predictor of workplace harmony. Using structural equation modelling (SEM), we compared two hypotheses on the relationship between the variables and the goodness of fit.

Goodness-of-fit indices were used to determine whether or not the aforementioned hypotheses should be supported. Root-mean-squared error of approximation (RMSEA), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and normed fit index (NFI) were used to assess the goodness of the fit (NFI). A satisfactory goodness of fit was established by the following values: RMSEA (0.06), CFI (0.95), TLI (0.95), and NFI (0.95). (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Salient factor loadings are those with a standardized value of at least 0.5. (Brown, 2014).



**Figure 1.3: Measurement Model of Compromising**

**Table 1.1: Measurement Model Analysis of Compromising**

Model	Chi-Square(df), Significance	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	Variable	Factor Loading Estimates	Error VAR
Compromising	(2df) =14.80, P<0.000	0.97	0.92	0.97	0.15	CPR1	0.910	0.21
						CPR2	0.851	0.41
						CPR3	0.981	0.71
						CPR4	0.971	0.64

**Source:** Amos Version 22.0.0 output on research data, 2023

Error variances were from 0.21 to 0.41 to 0.71 to 0.64 for indicators CPR1 to CPR4, with factor loadings of 0.910, 0.851, 0.981, and 0.971, respectively. These values demonstrate that the fit was improved by including a covariance between the error components for CPR2, CPR3, and CPR4. That these indications of the concept of compromise are reliable is supported by these criteria. The goodness of fit indices for the one-factor model (chi-square (2df) = 14.80, RMSEA=0.15, CFI=0.97, NFI=0.97, and TLI=0.92) all pointed to a very excellent match to the data. The model was over-identified with two degrees of freedom, but the p value of 0.000 showed an adequate fit. Goodness of fit indices, factor loading estimations, and error variances are all given in Table 1.1. Factor loading estimations demonstrated a high and statistically significant relationship between the four indices and latent factor

- compromising. Brown (2010) argues that "salient" factor loadings are often defined in terms of standardized scores of 0.3 (or 0.4) and higher.

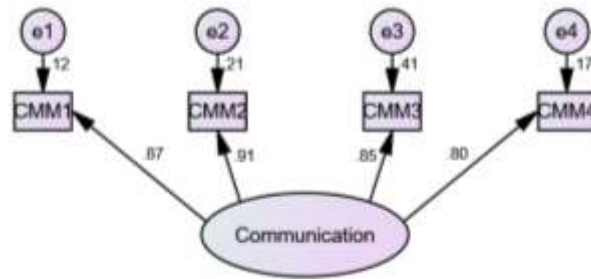


Figure 1.4: Measurement Model of Communication

Table 1.2: Measurement Model Analysis of Communication

Model	Chi-Square(df), Significance	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	Variable	Factor Loading Estimates	Error VAR
Communication	(2df) =14, P<0.005	0.95	1.07	0.95	0.26	CMM1	0.871	0.12
						CMM2	0.913	0.21
						CMM3	0.857	0.41
						CMM4	0.801	0.17

Source: Amos Version 22.0.0 output on research data, 2023

The error variances for CMM1 - CMM4 were 0.12, 0.21, 0.41, and 0.17, and the factor loadings were 0.871, 0.913, 0.857, and 0.801. These values agree with the theory that they serve as solid indications of the nature of the communication system. One factor model specification is shown in its entirety in figure 1.2. There was no double-loading in the measurement model, and the erroneous readings were all assumed to be independent of one another. Two degrees of freedom were insufficient to prevent the model from being overidentified (2df). All the goodness of fit measures pointed to a single factor model being the best fit for the data (chi-square (2df) =14, p0.005, CFI = 0.95, NFI=0.95, TLI=0.87, RMSEA=0.13). Estimates of factor loadings showed that the four variables were statistically significantly linked to the latent factor of communication. Brown (2010) argues that "salient" factor loadings are often defined in terms of standardized scores of 0.3 (or 0.4) and higher.

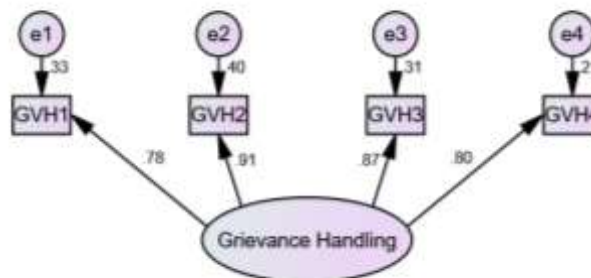


Figure 1.5: Measurement Model of Grievance Handling

Table 1.3: Measurement Model Analysis of Grievance Handling



Model	Chi-Square(df), Significance	NFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	Variable	Factor Loading Estimates	Error VAR
Grievance Handling	(2df) =12, P<0.005	0.95	0.97	0.95	0.13	GVH1	0.781	0.33
						GVH2	0.913	0.40
						GVH3	0.875	0.31
						GVH4	0.801	0.21

Source: Amos Version 22.0.0 output on research data, 2023

Findings showed that GVH1-GVH4 indicators had factor loadings of 0.781, 0.913, 0.875, and 0.801, and error variances of 0.33, 0.40, 0.31, and 0.21, respectively. This set of variables agrees with the theory that these are solid markers of the structure of grievance handling. The full specification of the one-factor model is shown in figure 1.3. There was no double-loading in the measurement model, and it was assumed that all measurement errors were independent. This model had just two degrees of freedom, and it was overidentified (2df). Chi-square (2df) = 12, p 0.005, CFI=0.95, NFI=0.85, TLI=0.87, RMSEA=0.13 all indicated that a single-factor model best suited the data. Using factor loading estimates, we found that the four indicators have a substantial relationship to the latent component of complaints' resolution. Brown (2010) argues that "salient" factor loadings are often defined in terms of standardized scores of 0.3 (or 0.4) and higher.

**Table 1.4: Correlations, Composite Reliability, Degree of freedom, Construct: Convergent and Discriminant Validity**

Variable	CPR	GVH	CMM	CR	Df	AVE
CPR	1.0	0.31	0.35	0.76	5	0.51
GVH	0.31	1.0	0.31	0.87	35	0.55
CMM	0.35	0.31	1.0	0.83	35	0.51

Where:

CPR = Compromising, GVH = Grievance Handling, CMM = Communication, CR = Composite Reliability, AVE = Average Variance Extracted, Df = Degree of freedom.

Source: Amos Version 22.0.0 output on research data, 2023

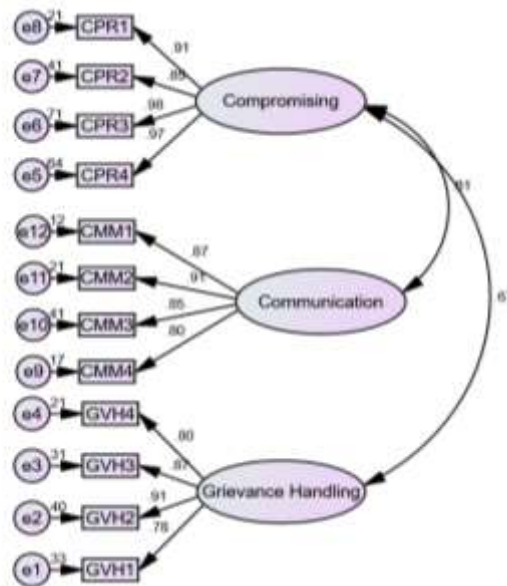


Figure 1.6: Structural Model Correlating Hypotheses 1 and 2

### Compromising and Workplace Harmony

Presented in table 1.5 is the result for the tests for the hypotheses of the study. The hypotheses 1 and 2, assessed the extent to which compromising impacts on the measures of workplace harmony (communication and grievance handling). They are listed as follows:

**H<sub>01</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between compromising and communication of public universities in Rivers State.

**H<sub>02</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between compromising and grievance handling of public universities in Rivers State.

**Table 1.5: Summary of Result on the Tests of Hypotheses Ho1 & 2.**

S/N	Moderation Stage	Relationship	Std. Beta	Actual Beta	S.E	C.R	P	Remark
1.	CPR → CMM (Hypothesis 1)	Compromising and communication	0.914	1.643	0.38	3.04	0.000	Not Supported
2.	CPR → GVH (Hypothesis 2)	Compromising and Grievance Handling	0.713	0.871	0.19	2.51	0.001	Not Supported

**Source:** Amos Version 22.0.0 output on research data, 2023

Hypothesis one (H<sub>01</sub>), states that there is no significant relationship between compromising and communication. However, table 1.5 suggests that compromising has a moderate and significant relationship with communication of public universities in Rivers State ( $\beta=-0.914$ ,  $r=3.04$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). Thus, H<sub>01</sub> was not supported. This means that the use of compromising approach in resolving conflict in public universities, could lead to effective communication among members in public universities. Statistically, it shows that when compromising goes up by 1 standard deviation, communication goes down by 0.914 standard deviation. In other words, when compromising goes up by 1, communication goes up by 3.04. The regression weight for compromising in the prediction of communication is significantly different from zero at the 0.005 level (two-tailed).

Also, hypothesis two (H<sub>02</sub>) states that there is no significant relationship between compromising and grievance handling. However, table 1.5 suggests that compromising has a moderate and significant relationship with grievance handling of public universities in Rivers State ( $\beta=-0.713$ ,  $r=2.51$ ,  $p<0.005$ ). Thus, H<sub>02</sub> was not supported. This means that the use of compromising conflict management approach in public universities, will lead to effective grievance handling. Statistically, it shows that when compromising goes up by 1 standard deviation, grievance handling goes down by 0.713 standard deviation. In other words, when compromising goes up by 1, grievance handling goes up by 2.51. The regression weight for compromising in the prediction of grievance handling is significantly different from zero at the 0.005 level (two-tailed).

The results from these relationships indicate that compromising is a significant predictor of workplace harmony of public universities in Rivers State. Thus, the two hypothetical statements of no significant relationships between compromising and the measures of workplace harmony (communication and grievance handling) are not supported, based on the lack of statistical evidence to show otherwise.

### Discussion of Findings

The result of the tested H<sub>01-2</sub> revealed the existence of a significant relationship between compromising and workplace harmony. This outcome is in tandem with the study of Mayowa (2015) who examined industrial conflict and its management strategies in selected manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that one of the causes of conflict in manufacturing companies in Lagos State, Nigeria is poor means of communicating grievances to top managers. Bamson and Zeb-Obipi (2019) examined the use of compromise conflict management style and its impact on organizational health of some selected Federal Agencies in Rivers, namely Niger Delta Development Commission, Niger Delta Basin Authority, Ministry of Niger Delta and National Emergency Management Authority. The findings revealed that there is a positive and significant association between compromise conflict management style and the health of an organization. It concluded that because the employees of these Federal agencies exhibited the attributes of compromise conflict management style, the health of the organization was strengthened. Also, Bob-Fubara et al. (2022) undertook an empirical study that looks at compromising conflict strategy and workplace harmony in oil servicing companies in Rivers State. The study found that compromise as a dispute management strategy significantly impacts on



workplace harmony in oil servicing companies in Rivers State. Considering the study's findings, they concluded that dispute management through the use of compromise strategy significantly influence workplace harmony in relation to teamwork, and communication and this is due to poor management activities among oil servicing firms. Thus, this study aligns with the above scholarly positions, giving the outcome of the result.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Drawing from the aim and objectives of the study and the discussions on the findings thus far, it is plausible to submit that compromising strategy has significant impact on workplace harmony of public universities in Rivers State. Consequently, the following recommendations are provided:

- i. Management of public universities should be responsive in objectively arresting any conflict situation with appropriate strategy such as compromise. This can be achieved by establishing effective and responsive internal grievance handling mechanisms.
- ii. The management of tertiary institutions should institutionalize dialogue. They need to explore dialogue strategy as a foremost step among others in managing conflict. Through dialogue, workers develop skills to accept differences, thereby preventing crises and improving performance.

### Limitations

- i. **Industry Limitation:** Whereas there are private universities and other tertiary institutions in Rivers State, this study was limited to only public universities in Rivers State. Therefore, care should be taken in making generalizations from the study to other tertiary educational systems.
- ii. **Geographical Scope limitation:** One of the limitations of this study is the fact that it only focused on Rivers State, whereas other States of the country exist. Thus, the recommendations from this study may not be applicable in other parts of the country and beyond, giving our differences.
- iii. **Choice of research Design:** This study employed the cross-sectional research design, which does not provide for an explanation of causal relationships between the variables.

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