

From Trade Unions to Digital Platforms: Reconfiguring Organizational Conflict Resolution in the Era of Digital Transformation, with Implications for Cameroon and Nigeria

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable feature of organisational life, and trade unions, reconciliation, mediation, and arbitration have long served as the primary means of resolving it in sub-Saharan African economies such as Cameroon and Nigeria. Objective: this seminar article investigates how digital transformation reshapes both the sources of organisational conflict and the mechanisms available for its resolution, extending the established analysis of collective mechanisms into the digital era and drawing out implications for business institutions in Cameroon and Nigeria. Methods: the study adopts a qualitative, systematic narrative literature-review design. An examination of 25 peer-reviewed articles, books, and policies published between 1968 and 2023 from the management, information systems and industrial relations fields reveals, through directed content analysis based on ten-codes covering five digitally caused sources of conflicts and five digital facilitators of resolution, that: digital conflict sources make up 40 percent of the coded corpus as opposed to 8 percent for digital resolution enablers; surveillance and algorithmic management emerge as the most common sub-theme (five out of twenty-five sources), whereas e-learning enabled training and issues of data ownership remain untouched. An institutional comparative assessment shows that Nigeria, with its codified Trade Disputes Act, provides a somewhat stronger ground for accommodating digital tools of dispute resolution than Cameroon, whose legal system is weak and fragile. Technology and conflict: dependent on leadership, digital competence and ethics.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution; Trade Unions; Digital Transformation; Online Dispute Resolution; Algorithmic Management; Sub-Saharan Africa.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Motivation

Conflict is an inherent characteristic of organizational functioning. Whenever people and groups attempt to achieve their objectives in a situation of interdependence, scarcity of resources and

differences in values, conflicts are bound to occur (Rahim, 2011; Robbins & Judge, 2019). For many years now, organizations have been using collective processes involving trade unions and reconciliation as well as mediation and arbitration processes to address conflicts. Collective-bargaining organizations such as trade unions fight for the rights of workers, just treatment and favorable conditions (Kaufman, 2020) whereas reconciliation involves mediated negotiations of issues related to pay, working hours and safety. Such mechanisms help to handle collective, economic and procedural types of conflicts and wherever they work effectively, they create psychological safety allowing employees to voice their issues without the fear of retaliation (Edmondson, 1999); however, their effectiveness depends on many factors including legal framework, organization capacity and type of the conflict itself (Bamber, Lansbury, & Wailes, 2020).

What has changed dramatically is not the existence of conflict, nor the value of these mechanisms, but the environment in which conflict unfolds. Digital transformation — the integration of digital technologies into every aspect of organisational activity — has reconfigured how people communicate, collaborate, and disagree (Vial, 2019). Remote and hybrid work, enterprise collaboration platforms, and the growing use of data analytics and AI in management have created workplaces in which much interaction is digitally mediated. Algorithmic management in particular — the use of software and data-driven systems to direct, evaluate, and discipline workers — has emerged as a distinctive, fast-growing source of friction (Kellogg, Valentine, & Christin, 2020), documented among ride-hailing and platform workers whose autonomy is constrained by opaque algorithms (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017; Wood, Graham, Lehdonvirta, & Hjorth, 2019).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Traditional mechanisms were developed largely for co-located, industrial workplaces in which union representatives, managers, and reconciliation committees could observe interpersonal dynamics directly, read non-verbal cues, and intervene in person. In Cameroon and Nigeria these mechanisms already operate under strain: Cameroon's fragile legal framework for dispute settlement often fails to handle labour disputes effectively (Bamber et al., 2020), while Nigeria experiences recurring industrial actions that reveal structural weaknesses in labour relations, particularly in the public sector (Sabo, Maishanu, & Muhammad, 2018).

In virtual and hybrid settings, conflict will emerge via text-based and asynchronous media through which meaning is easily misinterpreted, escalation takes place in silence, and management and union representatives are likely to only hear about conflicts after they have already become serious (Hinds & Bailey, 2003; Caputo, Kargina, & Pellegrini, 2023). Sources of new forms of conflict have developed that are not covered by the standard approaches and labour legislation: technostress due to constant connectedness (Tarafdar, Tu, Ragu-Nathan, & Ragu-Nathan, 2007), frustration at digital surveillance and algorithmic management (Tursunbayeva, Di Lauro, & Pagliari, 2021), data ownership disputes, and conflict between employees with varying levels of digital skillfulness (Lythreathis, El-Kassar, & Singh, 2022). There are two issues here. The first one is that organizations might use collective and interpersonal approaches for resolving conflicts developed for an analog organization in a digital setting where they are not completely adequate. The second issue is that digital solutions are often introduced without appropriate human, cultural, and legal prerequisites,

which is particularly true for uneven digital development such as in Cameroon and Nigeria (Dinyuy & Şener, 2021).

1.3 Research Questions

This problem is expressed as three research questions that organise the remainder of the article:

- RQ1. How does digital transformation change the balance of sources and mechanisms of organisational conflict, relative to the traditional collective model?
- RQ2. Which specific digital tools function as credible resolution enablers, and how well is this capability represented in the existing scholarship?
- RQ3. What does a comparative reading of Cameroon and Nigeria reveal about the institutional conditions under which digitally mediated conflict resolution can or cannot take root?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Corresponding to these questions, the study pursues three objectives:

- To examine, through a structured content analysis of the literature, how digital transformation reshapes both the sources of organisational conflict and the mechanisms available for its resolution, relative to the traditional collective model of trade unions and reconciliation.
- To compare the institutional readiness of Cameroon and Nigeria for digitally mediated conflict resolution across the legal, infrastructural, and governance dimensions that condition adoption.
- To propose an integrative, layered framework and practical recommendations that unite collective mechanisms with digital tools under human-centred governance for organisations in both countries.

1.5 Contribution and Organisation of the Paper

From a methodological point of view, the research views the twenty-five-source corpus itself as the unit of analysis where each source is coded according to a ten code thematic scheme (consisting of five conflict source and five resolution enabler codes, Section 3). In this way, the collective-industrial relations paradigmatic approach is supplemented by socio-technical one, which yields a reusable coding scheme, six-dimensional comparative institutional readiness analysis of Cameroon and Nigeria, and a framework for an integrative analysis. The structure of the remaining sections is the following. In Section 2, the relevant literature will be reviewed, a comparative literature review table will be presented, research gap will be identified, and theoretical framework will be provided. Section 3 will contain information on methodology. In Section 4, the results will be stated. Section 5 will discuss the results in light of research questions and previous studies, and offer a layered framework and country-level conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Summary of Previous Research

This subsection summarises fourteen of the twenty-five reviewed sources, chosen for their direct bearing on the article's core arguments; the full corpus is analysed quantitatively in Section 4.

Kaufman (2020) reappraises the role of trade unions, arguing that despite membership decline unions retain a distinctive capacity to aggregate worker voice, correct labour–management power

asymmetries, and resolve collective disputes through structured bargaining. As a conceptual reappraisal it treats the workplace as an analogue, co-located setting and does not address how digital communication or algorithmic management change the terrain of representation — but it supplies the baseline against which this article measures residual, digitally inflected disputes.

Bamber, Lansbury, and Wailes (2020) give a comparative account of employment-relations systems across advanced and developing economies, including sub-Saharan cases, showing how legal frameworks, state capacity, and bargaining structures shape dispute resolution. Its comparative method helps contextualise Cameroon and Nigeria, but it treats technology mainly as a background factor rather than a direct object of analysis.

Hinds and Bailey (2003) show that distributed teams experience more task, affective, and process conflict than co-located teams, tracing this to the loss of informal, high-bandwidth cues. The account is theoretically rich but predates contemporary collaboration platforms and AI-mediated tools, so it needs updating for workplaces where most disputed interaction now occurs asynchronously in text.

Tarafdar et al. (2007) develop and validate a multidimensional model of technostress, showing that the strain of constant connectivity and information overload measurably reduces role performance. Its survey design grants empirical grounding, but the single-country sample predates always-on mobile collaboration, limiting direct generalisation to Cameroon and Nigeria.

Daft and Lengel (1986) formulate media richness theory: organisations should match channel richness to task equivocality. Foundational and durable, it must be extended — as here — to explain why lean channels are so often used, by default, for emotionally charged conflict in digital workplaces.

Katsh and Rabinovich-Einy (2017) trace online dispute resolution (ODR) from e-commerce to courts, agencies, and workplaces, arguing its promise lies in new data-informed forms of justice rather than mere digitisation. As a conceptual and historical account it offers limited empirical evidence on effectiveness within organisational, as opposed to consumer or judicial, contexts.

Kellogg, Valentine, and Christin (2020) synthesise a six-mechanism framework — restricting, recommending, recording, rating, replacing, rewarding — through which algorithms exert control, and document worker resistance (‘algoactivism’). Influential but drawn overwhelmingly from North American and European gig platforms, leaving open how these mechanisms manifest in Cameroon and Nigeria.

Möhlmann and Zalmanson (2017) use interviews with Uber drivers to show how algorithmic management constrains autonomy while drivers develop tactics to resist it. The design captures lived experience with depth, but its single-platform, single-occupation focus limits transfer to conventional salaried employment.

Rule (2020) reviews ODR across consumer, judicial, and organisational contexts, arguing it cuts cost and time while raising questions of due process, algorithmic bias, and access for less digitally literate users — but offers little direct evidence on workplace-specific, sub-Saharan conditions.

Lythreatis, El-Kassar, and Singh (2022) systematically review the digital-divide literature, showing that a within-organisation divide is an under-theorised but consequential phenomenon. Few of its

primary studies are set in sub-Saharan Africa, so the organisational digital divide in Cameroon and Nigeria remains under-evidenced.

Edmondson (1999) establishes psychological safety — a shared belief that a team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking — as a measurable construct predicting learning behaviour, including willingness to surface disagreement. Rigorous but set in Western manufacturing teams; this article extends its logic, not its evidence base, to digitally mediated conflict disclosure.

Sabo, Maishanu, and Muhammad (2018) discuss the Nigerian public sector's industrial relations and connect the frequent occurrences of industrial disputes to deficiencies within grievance redressal and negotiation processes. Among the few Nigeria-centered references, this article sets the context for the institutional literature review, albeit with the limitation of being public sector only and dated before the emergence of remote and platform-based work.

Dinyuy and Şener (2021) analyze trade unions and employees' performances in Cameroon using cases of teachers' and drivers' unions and observe the variation in effectiveness of trade unions depending on the sector, which is hampered by poor legal compliance and employer opposition. The only directly related Cameroonian article, but does not cover Anglophone Crisis and digitally-mediated work.

Caputo, Kargina, and Pellegrini (2023) carry out bibliometric analysis and systematic review of virtual team conflicts and observe that the research on resolution of conflicts is much less developed than research on its descriptions, an observation independently confirming the discrepancy between sources of conflict and their enablers in this article (Section 4.1).

2.2 Review Table

Table 1 compares the fourteen studies on methodology, advantages, and limitations.

Study	Methodology	Advantages	Limitations
Kaufman (2020)	Conceptual reappraisal	Strong theoretical baseline on union function	No treatment of digital/algorithmic context
Bamber et al. (2020)	Comparative institutional analysis	Broad cross-country coverage incl. SSA	Technology treated as background
Hinds & Bailey (2003)	Narrative synthesis, distributed teams	Explains mechanism of virtual-team conflict	Predates modern collaboration platforms
Tarafdar et al. (2007)	Cross-sectional survey	Validated technostress construct	Single-country; pre-mobile-first work
Daft & Lengel (1986)	Theory-building	Durable, widely applied (MRT)	Predates digital collaboration technology
Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy (2017)	Historical / conceptual	Comprehensive account of ODR evolution	Little organisation-specific evidence
Kellogg et al. (2020)	Conceptual synthesis	Influential 6-mechanism control framework	Built on Western gig-platform evidence
Möhlmann &	Qualitative	Rich lived-	Single platform/occupation

Zalmanson (2017)	interviews (Uber)	experience evidence	
Rule (2020)	Literature review	Clear state-of-the-field synthesis	Limited SSA / workplace evidence
Lythreatis et al. (2022)	Systematic review	Broad synthesis of digital-divide drivers	Very few SSA-based studies
Edmondson (1999)	Multi-team field study	Rigorous, measurable safety construct	Single Western manufacturing context
Sabo et al. (2018)	Empirical, Nigerian public sector	Direct Nigerian evidence	Public-sector only; pre-digital
Dinyuy & Şener (2021)	Comparative case study, Cameroon	Direct Cameroonian evidence	Two-sector; no digital/crisis angle
Caputo et al. (2023)	Bibliometric & systematic review	Maps field; corroborates enabler gap	Descriptive of field, not primary data

Table 1. Comparative review of the fourteen core studies.

2.3 Research Gap

Together, the literature provides a rich yet fragmented body of work. Four gaps emerge in particular. First, geographic imbalance – two of twenty-five sources only, namely Sabo et al. (2018) and Dinyuy & Şener (2021), provide data from Cameroon or Nigeria, while others use either North American, European, or global platform economy context and thus claims regarding sub-Saharan Africa are based on very little direct evidence. Second, imbalance between source versus enabler – literature on how digital technology contributes to conflict is far richer than that on its capacity to resolve conflicts, with no sources focusing on digital literacy training-based interventions or data ownership disputes. Third, no integration – none of the studies discussed here combines a collective, industrial relations perspective with a digital, socio-technical perspective in one theoretical framework. Finally, none takes into consideration Anglophone Crisis in Cameroon as an important element influencing the capacity to resolve conflict. This article attempts to fill the first and third gap via a comparative analysis of Cameroon and Nigeria (Section 5.4) and highlights the second and fourth gaps as topics for further investigation (Section 6.3).

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Six complementary theories anchor the analysis. The Thomas–Kilman model (TKI) identifies five conflict-handling modes — competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, accommodating — along assertiveness and cooperativeness (Thomas, 1992); digital media make avoidance easier in asynchronous settings and collaboration harder to sustain. Media richness theory (MRT) holds that richer media suit ambiguous, emotive tasks while leaner media suit routine exchange (Daft & Lengel, 1986); because conflict is equivocal, resolving it through lean channels invites escalation. Interest-based negotiation (IBN) urges a focus on underlying interests rather than fixed positions (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 2011), central to both reconciliation and ODR. Socio-technical systems theory (STS) argues effectiveness depends on jointly optimising social and technical subsystems (Trist, 1981), providing the lens for the article's core claim that technology's effect on conflict is contingent on its social, legal, and cultural embedding. Psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) explains when employees raise concerns early rather than let digital channels amplify avoidance.

Finally, sociomateriality (Orlikowski, 2007) holds that technology and social practice are constitutively entangled, cautioning against treating ODR and analytics tools as neutral instruments assessable independently of how, and by whom, they are used.

3. Methodology

The paper follows a qualitative, systematic-narrative Literature Review (SLR) methodology: appropriate for the cross-management, information-systems and industrial-relations literatures and the somewhat conceptual problem, since literature within each rarely talks directly to its peers. Unlike the other literature reviews and conceptual studies, instead of engaging in primary organizational data collection. It selects the relevant body of work published literature as data and subjects it to 'directed qualitative content analysis' on a predetermined set of themes. The method is particularly suitable to evaluate a literature's evenness/evenness of attention across such themes. Unlike that of narrative or bibliometric reviews in which there is neither comparable auditability (Section 4) nor sufficient interpretive richness (Sections 2 & 5).

3.1 Research Design

Every source was fully read and assigned to one of four macro-categories: Traditional Conflict Resolution and Industrial Relations Theory and Practice; Digital Transformation and Socio-Technical Theory; Sources of Conflict in a Digital World; or Digital Enablers of Conflict Resolution. The latter two categories of sources were also coded using an additive coding scheme of ten codes developed deductively and inductively during coding: five codes for sources of conflict (CS1 – Communication Ambiguity; CS2 – Technostress and Connectivity Overload; CS3 – Surveillance and Algorithmic Management; CS4 – Digital Divide Within Organizations; CS5 – Uncertainty Around Change and Data Ownership) and five codes for conflict resolution enablers (RE1 – Online Dispute Resolution; RE2 – Early Detection through Data Analytics; RE3 – Transparency and Documentation of Process; RE4 – E-learning and Digital Training; RE5 – Facilitation/Mediation in Virtual Contexts).

3.2 Materials: Literature Corpus and Search Strategy

The database has been developed based on a structured manual search through Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, and JSTOR, supplemented by a backtracking of citations from relevant theories (Trist, 1981; Thomas, 1992). The search string included the combination of three sets – conflict-related terms ('conflict resolution', 'industrial relations', 'trade union*', 'reconciliation', 'mediation', 'arbitration'); digital terms ('digital transformation', 'algorithmic management', 'online dispute resolution', 'technostress', 'digital divide', 'people analytics'); context terms ('Cameroon', 'Nigeria', 'sub-Saharan Africa') using Boolean AND/OR operators. Criteria for inclusion were: scholarly peer-reviewed articles or academic books or systematic/bibliometric reviews, written in English language, dealing with organizational conflict, conflict resolution, digital transformation or industrial relations and available in full-text version. The exclusion criteria were: opinion pieces without a method, commentary that is not peer-reviewed, and non-workplace settings. As a result, twenty-five sources were identified for the period 1968-2023.

3.3 Procedure: Content-Analysis Coding Protocol

3.4 Analytical Tools

The coding was captured in a structured spreadsheet showing a cross-tabulation of all sources and the four macro-categories/ten subthemes, as is routine in the content analysis of small corpora. Frequency counts were graphed using Python (matplotlib) bar charts (Figures 1 and 2). The institutional-readiness comparative assessment (Section 4.3) was generated by qualitative document analysis of the labour-law and industrial-relations sources (predominantly Bamber et al., 2020; Sabo et al., 2018; Dinyuy & ener, 2021) and scored ordinal Low/Medium/High against six dimensions, providing the anchors so that judgement is stated transparently and can be argued against rather than accepted as a metric on face-value; Table 5 records the scales.

3.5 Limitations of the Method

Three limitations qualify the method. First, coding was performed by a single reviewer, so an inter-rater reliability statistic cannot be reported and some subjectivity in threshold judgements is unavoidable. Second, the review synthesises secondary literature rather than primary data from organisations in Cameroon or Nigeria, so its country conclusions are inferential rather than firm-level evidence. Third, the institutional-readiness ratings are an ordinal, interpretive synthesis rather than a validated index, and should be read as a structured starting point for debate. These are revisited in Section 6.3.

4. Results

This section reports the content analysis and the comparative institutional assessment objectively; interpretation is reserved for Section 5.

4.1 Thematic Coding Results

Of the twenty-five sources, nine (36%) were classified under Traditional Conflict-Resolution and Industrial-Relations Theory and Practice, four (16%) under Digital-Transformation and Socio-Technical Foundations, ten (40%) under Digital Sources of Conflict, and two (8%) under Digital Enablers of Resolution (Table 2; Figure 1).

Macro-category	Sources	% of corpus (N = 25)
Traditional conflict-resolution & IR theory and practice	9	36%
Digital-transformation theoretical foundations	4	16%
Digital sources of conflict	10	40%
Digital enablers of resolution	2	8%

Table 2. Primary thematic classification of the reviewed literature (N = 25).

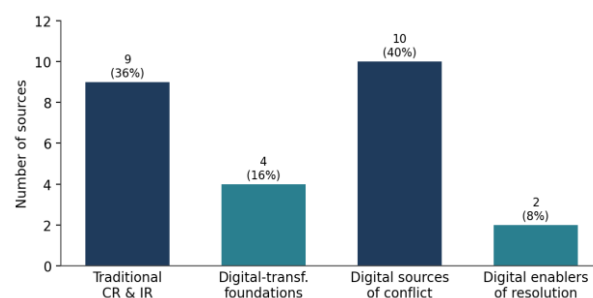


Figure 1. Primary thematic classification of the reviewed literature.

At the subtheme level (Table 3; Figure 2), CS3 (surveillance and algorithmic management) was the most frequently coded theme, addressed substantively by five sources, followed by CS1 (communication ambiguity) and RE1 (online dispute resolution), each addressed by three. CS2 and RE5 were each addressed by two; CS4, RE2, and RE3 by one each. No source substantively addressed CS5 (change-related uncertainty and data-ownership disputes) or RE4 (e-learning and digital training).

Code	Subtheme	Sources
CS1	Communication ambiguity in lean/asynchronous channels	3
CS2	Technostress and connectivity overload	2
CS3	Surveillance and algorithmic management	5
CS4	Internal digital divide	1
CS5	Change-related uncertainty and data-ownership disputes	0
RE1	Online dispute resolution (ODR)	3
RE2	Data-driven early detection	1
RE3	Process transparency and documentation	1
RE4	E-learning and digital training	0
RE5	Virtual facilitation and mediation	2

Table 3. Frequency of conflict-source (CS) and resolution-enabler (RE) subthemes.

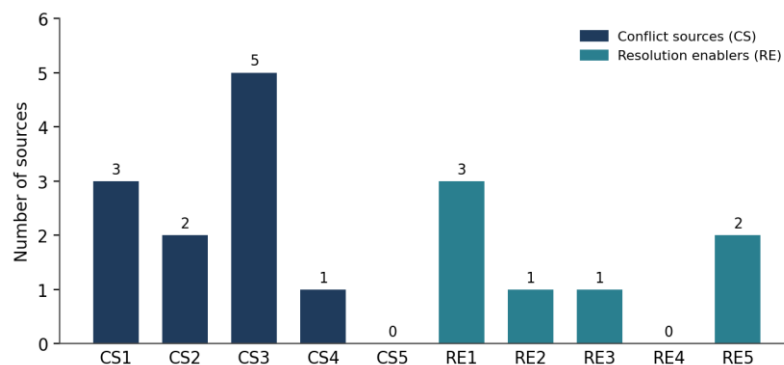


Figure 2. Frequency of digital conflict-source and resolution-enabler subthemes.

4.2 Traditional versus Digital Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms

Table 4 summarises descriptively how traditional and digital mechanisms compare across seven dimensions relevant to Cameroon and Nigeria.

Dimension	Traditional (unions, reconciliation, mediation, arbitration)	Digital (ODR, analytics, e-learning, virtual facilitation)
Primary locus of resolution	In-person committees, delegates, hearings	Platform-mediated, often asynchronous
Typical timeframe	Weeks to months, bound by meeting schedules	Hours to weeks; can proceed continuously
Cost of reaching dispersed staff	Rises with distance and headcount	Largely flat regardless of location
Evidentiary documentation	Minutes and case files, often paper-based	Native digital records and audit trails

Reliance on non-verbal cues	High; central to reconciliation	Low–moderate; depends on channel richness
Risk of surveillance/misuse	Low; direct human oversight	Present where analytics are non-transparent
Legal recognition (CM/NG)	Long-established (Bamber et al., 2020)	Emerging; not yet fully codified

Table 4. Traditional versus digital mechanisms, as characterised in the reviewed literature.

4.3 Comparative Institutional Readiness: Cameroon and Nigeria

Table 5 reports the ordinal readiness ratings with their evidentiary basis; Figure 3 presents them graphically.

Dimension	Cameroon	Nigeria	Evidentiary basis
Legal framework maturity for digital-era disputes	Low	Medium	Bamber et al. (2020); Dinyuy & Şener (2021)
Trade union institutional strength	Medium	Medium	Dinyuy & Şener (2021); Sabo et al. (2018)
Digital infrastructure / connectivity	Low	Medium	Lythreatis et al. (2022); Bamber et al. (2020)
Internal digital-literacy parity	Low	Low	Lythreatis et al. (2022)
ODR / analytics adoption	Low	Medium	Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy (2017); Rule (2020)
Regulatory clarity on data & algorithmic governance	Low	Low	Tursunbayeva et al. (2021)

Table 5. Comparative institutional readiness, Cameroon vs Nigeria (author's ordinal synthesis; see Sections 3.4–3.5).

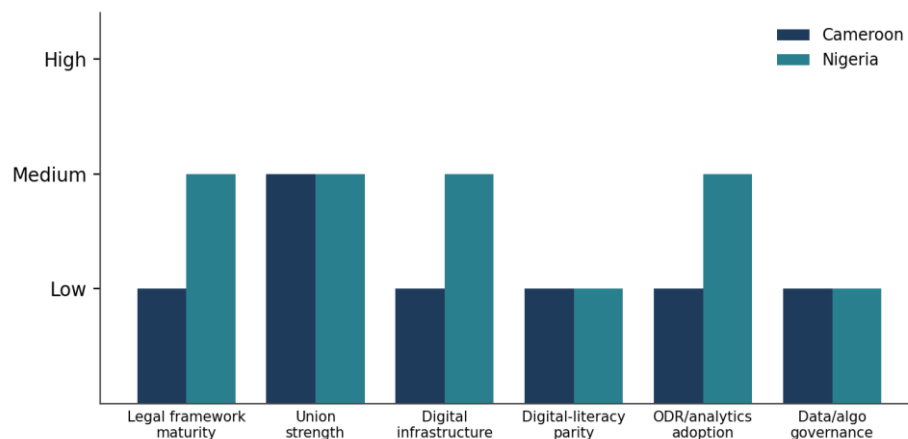


Figure 3. Comparative institutional readiness for digitally mediated conflict resolution.

4.4 Composition of the Reviewed Corpus

Seven of the twenty-five sources (28%) employed an empirical design; the remaining eighteen (72%) were conceptual, theoretical, or review-based. Two sources (8%) reported evidence specific to Cameroon or Nigeria; the remaining twenty-three (92%) were set in North American, European, or global/platform-economy contexts (Table 6).

Attribute	Category	Sources	%
Methodological orientation	Empirical (survey, interview, case, field study)	7	28%
Methodological orientation	Conceptual, theoretical, or review-based	18	72%
Geographic focus	Cameroon- or Nigeria-specific	2	8%
Geographic focus	North America, Europe, or global/platform	23	92%

Table 6. Methodological orientation and geographic focus of the reviewed corpus (N = 25).

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of the Thematic Findings

The clearest pattern is the asymmetry between attention to digital conflict sources (40% of the corpus) and to digital resolution enablers (8%). Scholarship has been considerably quicker to document how digital transformation creates friction than to establish how organisations should respond. This is not merely an artefact of search strategy: the same asymmetry is independently reported by Caputo, Kargina, and Pellegrini's (2023) bibliometric review, giving convergent support from a second, differently constructed corpus. Practically, managers, HR professionals, and union representatives in Cameroon and Nigeria will find a literature better at diagnosing the problem than prescribing the remedy. That CS3 is the single most-studied subtheme while RE4 and CS5 are entirely unaddressed suggests attention has concentrated on the most visible and ethically charged manifestations of algorithmic control (Kellogg et al., 2020; Tursunbayeva et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2019) at the expense of the more tractable capability-building interventions — digital-skills training chief among them — that Section 5.7 argues are most immediately actionable.

5.2 Relating the Findings to the Research Questions

RQ1. The weight tilts towards individualized, technology-induced friction – communication ambiguity, technostress, algorithmic surveillance – which is beyond the purview of the collective, economic conflict that trade unions and reconciliation can tackle best (Table 4), which happens to be the arena highlighted as their weakness. RQ2. Online Dispute Resolution (RE1) stands out as the most well-supported enabler, thanks to having three dedicated resources (Katsh & Rabinovich-Einy, 2017; Rule, 2020) and the interest-based negotiation principle underlying it (Fisher et al., 2011); data-enabled early detection, process visibility, virtual mediation and most importantly e-learning based training remain comparatively poorly evidenced (Table 3). RQ3. Nigeria seems to have a slight institutional edge, thanks to its statutory Trade Disputes Act and National Industrial Relations Policy along with better infrastructure while both suffer from the same level of parity deficit in digital literacy and ambiguous data/algorithmic governance; thus, the common constraint for both cases is digital governance more than anything else.

5.3 Comparison with Previous Studies

The finding that digital transformation reworks rather than replaces existing organisational logics echoes Vial's (2019) characterisation of digital transformation as a strategic, not merely technological, phenomenon; this article applies that logic specifically to conflict resolution. The prominence of algorithmic-management themes is consistent with Kellogg et al.'s (2020) argument

that algorithmic control generates distinctive resistance dynamics, here extended to the salaried, unionised workplaces more typical of Cameroon and Nigeria. And where Caputo et al. (2023) identify a resolution-research shortfall for virtual teams, this broader corpus shows the shortfall holds across the digital-conflict literature generally — the gap is structural to the field, not specific to one sublitterature.

5.4 An Integrative, Layered Model

Digital transformation is neither inherently harmful nor beneficial for conflict resolution. The same analytics that enable early detection can, deployed covertly, become a grievance; the same asynchronous channels that allow reflective mediation can, used carelessly, breed misunderstanding. This contingency is exactly what socio-technical systems theory and sociomateriality (Orlikowski, 2007) predict, and it aligns with the conclusion that no single mechanism is a universal solution. The way forward is a layered, integrative model (Figure 4): trade unions and collective bargaining continue to resolve economic and collective disputes; reconciliation, mediation, and arbitration — increasingly delivered through ODR — address stalemates and interpersonal friction; digital analytics support early, human-led intervention; and richer media are reserved for equivocal, emotive disputes while leaner channels handle routine coordination. Crucially, data and monitoring must be governed transparently, proportionately, and in line with privacy and fairness principles.

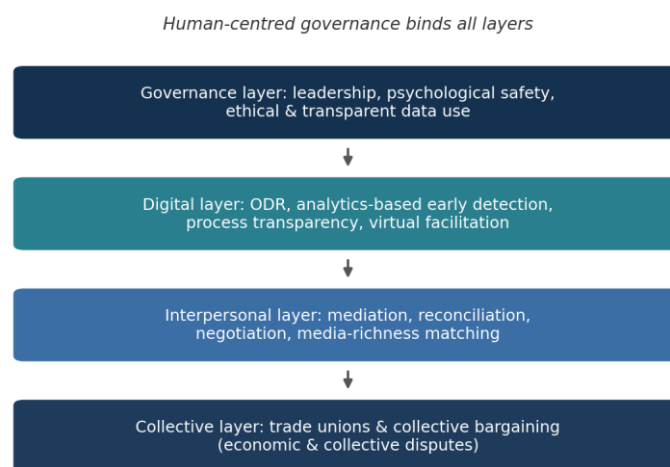


Figure 4. The layered, integrative model of digitally mediated conflict resolution.

Central to this integration is leadership and culture. Technology cannot substitute for the psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) that lets employees raise concerns without fear, nor for the trust underpinning integrative negotiation and good-faith union engagement. Leaders must model constructive digital communication, set explicit norms for online interaction, invest in the digital literacy that narrows the internal divide, and design change participatively. Where these social and legal conditions are met, digital tools amplify an organisation's capacity to manage conflict; where absent, the same tools magnify dysfunction.

5.5 Implications for Business Institutions in Cameroon

Cameroon's fragile legal framework is insufficient on its own, and digital transformation raises the stakes. Businesses should establish internal grievance procedures and train managers and union representatives before conflicts escalate, extending these procedures to digitally mediated disputes arising from remote work and monitoring. Transparent, non-retaliatory policies toward union activity remain essential and should be paired with clear, disclosed rules on digital surveillance and data use. In regions affected by the Anglophone Crisis, decentralised, locally grounded approaches — now partly deliverable through digital facilitation — can maintain participation where face-to-face engagement is disrupted

5.6 Implications for Business Institutions in Nigeria

The use of the Nigerian National Industrial Relations Policy and the procedural steps set out under the Trade Disputes Act offer an elaborate structure that would easily facilitate the use of technology. Companies need to ensure that their internal policies incorporate the need for social dialogue, promote collective bargaining, and utilize mediation, increasingly online dispute resolution (ODR), as the primary means of dispute resolution rather than depending only on arbitration and legal procedures. It is important to increase alternative dispute resolution skills and digital literacy amongst the HR department to minimize industrial actions especially in the health, education, and oil and gas industries, which have been identified by Sabo et al. (2018).

5.7 Practical Recommendations

- Integrate digital tools with collective mechanisms. Treat ODR, analytics, and collaboration platforms as complements to — not replacements for — unions, reconciliation, mediation, and arbitration, embedding them in existing grievance and bargaining structures.
- Establish clear digital communication norms. Set explicit expectations for channels, response times, and etiquette, and move heated or equivocal matters from text to richer video or voice, consistent with media richness theory.
- Invest in digital literacy and conflict-management training. Narrow the internal digital divide and build negotiation, active-listening, and ODR skills through continuous, accessible e-learning — directly addressing the RE4 gap in Section 4.1.
- Use analytics transparently and ethically. Disclose the purpose, scope, and safeguards of communication analytics to employees and unions, and treat outputs as prompts for supportive human intervention rather than surveillance or automated sanction (Tursunbayeva et al., 2021).
- Lead with psychological safety and human-centred change. Cultivate an environment where employees feel safe to voice disagreement, involve staff and union representatives in technology decisions, and pace change so the social system evolves in step with the technical one.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings.

Collective bargaining agreements and reconciliation settlements continue to work well for the significant number of organizational conflicts, especially those that are collective and economic in

nature; however, this is constrained by the legal, institutional, and interpersonal nature of many conflicts. In terms of the analysis of the content of twenty-five documents, the digital transformation is changing this picture in two ways: it creates additional tension in those areas where collective mechanisms prove themselves inefficient (40% of the analyzed corpus) and offers an opportunity to use ODR, early detection of conflicts through data analytics, and transparency, which is not very common in the existing literature (8%). In terms of the institutional assessment, the difference between Nigeria and Cameroon is marginal with respect to the development of relevant laws and infrastructure; however, their digital literacy parity and regulatory clarity of the data and algorithmic governance is equal.

6.2 Contributions to the Field

The article makes three contributions. Theoretically, it integrates six literatures — industrial relations, media richness theory, interest-based negotiation, socio-technical systems, psychological safety, and sociomateriality — into a single layered framework (Figure 4), extending the established trade-union/reconciliation analysis into the digital era. Methodologically, it develops and applies a reusable ten-code content-analysis scheme. Practically, it offers business institutions in Cameroon and Nigeria a comparative institutional-readiness assessment and concrete recommendations for combining collective and digital mechanisms under human-centred governance.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Building on the gaps in Section 2.3 and the limitations in Section 3.5, five directions merit priority:

- Primary empirical fieldwork — surveys, interviews, or case studies — with organisations, unions, and employees in Cameroon and Nigeria, including Anglophone-Crisis-affected regions, to close the geographic gap (Table 6).
- Intervention studies evaluating e-learning-based digital-literacy and conflict-management training (the RE4 gap), the enabler with the clearest organisational relevance and least evidence.
- Dedicated research on employee data-ownership and algorithmic-governance disputes (the CS5 gap), of growing importance as HR analytics adoption spreads.
- Comparative, multi-country studies extending the Cameroon–Nigeria comparison to other sub-Saharan economies, to test whether the patterns in Table 5 generalise.
- Longitudinal research tracking how the layered model performs as organisations jointly mature in digital and collective capability.

The single thread is that the promise of digital transformation for conflict resolution is conditional. It offers organisations a chance to resolve conflict more effectively than their predecessors could, but the chance is realised only where capabilities exist and the surrounding legal, cultural, and infrastructural environment supplies what resolution needs. Managers and union representatives should treat digital tools as a complement to, not a substitute for, collective strength; policymakers should build the digital-literacy, regulatory, and infrastructural conditions on which the model rests; and researchers should close the evidentiary gaps this review has made explicit. Organisations that master this synthesis will be better positioned to convert the inevitable conflicts of working life into sources of learning, trust, and cohesion.

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