



Policy Somersault and Organizational Tension: A Recurring Dilemma in Rivers State Waste Management Agency

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Received: 25.10.2025 | Accepted: 23.11.2025 | Published: 24.11.2025

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.1769593](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1769593)

Abstract

Original Research Article

The study examined the influence of policy somersault on organizational tension in Rivers State waste management agency (RIWAMA). The study adopted contradictory directives and frequent policy reversal as the dimensions of policy somersault while communication breakdown and leadership strain were adopted as the measures of organizational tension. The population of the study consist of 181 staff of RIWAMA. The study adopted the structure questionnaire as the tool for data collection .The collated data was analyzed using the spearman rank order coefficient via the use of the SPSS. Findings revealed policy somersault as a predictor of organizational tension hence, we made the following recommendations: Organizations should ensure that communication flows through defined, transparent channels by creating a central communication platform for directives. Organizations should Strengthen Policy Stability and Consistency by ensuring that policies are well-evaluated, evidence-based, and thoroughly tested before implementation. This reduces the likelihood of frequent changes that create tension among staff.

Keywords: Policy somersault, organizational tension, contradictory directives, policy reversal, communication breakdown, leadership strain, policy stability, policy consistency, organizational communication.

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Introduction

Organizational tension refers to the psychological, emotional, and relational strain experienced within an organization, often manifesting in conflict, stress, decreased productivity, and low morale (Putnam et al, 2016).. Tension can erode employee commitment, reduce operational effectiveness, and hinder service delivery key mandates for public institutions. In ministries that rely heavily on team-based coordination and

bureaucratic processes, such tensions can slow down decision-making, deepen interpersonal conflicts, and create a toxic organizational culture. Organizational tension also refers to heightened stress, interpersonal conflict, and strained relationships among employees and management, outcomes that frequently lead to decreased morale and reduced productivity (Wang et al., 2020).

Organizational tension is often embedded in institutional arrangements and systemic practices. Bureaucratic rigidity, excessive



hierarchy, limited resources, and competing institutional demands constitute common structural stressors, particularly in public sector organizations where regulatory compliance and accountability are paramount (Van de Ven, 2017). For instance, resource scarcity may compel departments to compete for funding or staff, generating conflict rather than collaboration. Similarly, rigid hierarchies may suppress employee voice and innovation, leading to frustration and feelings of powerlessness. The effects of organizational tension are significant and ambivalent, encompassing both constructive and destructive outcomes.

On the positive side, moderate levels of tension can be a driver of innovation and organizational learning. By forcing employees to confront contradictions, tension encourages critical reflection, creative problem-solving, and adaptive strategies (Smith & Lewis, 2011). For instance, competing perspectives within teams may lead to richer discussions and more innovative solutions, as individuals attempt to reconcile differences and address organizational challenges. In this sense, tension can function as a productive force that fosters resilience and continuous improvement. Conversely, when organizational tension escalates beyond manageable levels or remains unresolved, its effects become detrimental. Excessive tension contributes to hostile work environments characterized by diminished morale, reduced trust, weakened collaboration, and lowered productivity (Wang, Xie, & Cui, 2020).

On the other hand, Policy somersault

Statement of the Problem

Organizational tension is a critical issue affecting the efficiency, stability, and overall performance of many public institutions. In Rivers State waste management agency, organizational tension has increasingly become a source of concern, manifesting in strained interpersonal relationships, breakdowns in communication, interdepartmental conflict, reduced employee morale, and declining productivity hence the littering of waste in

almost all the streets of Port Harcourt. These tensions often emerge from factors such as unclear job roles, poor leadership practices, excessive bureaucracy, inadequate communication, and resistance to change.

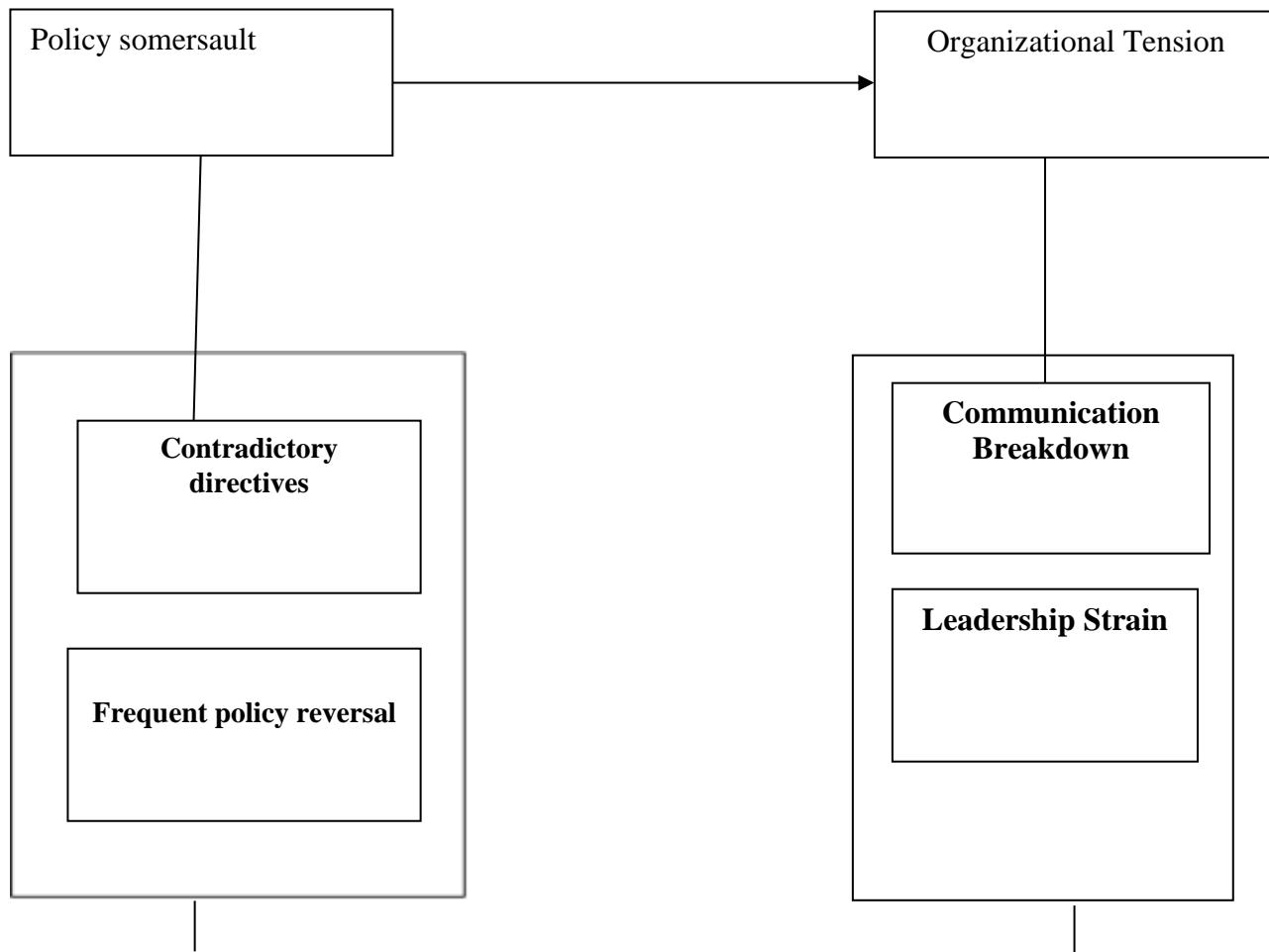
On the other hand, Policy somersault defines a situation of frequent policy reversal, inconsistency in policy and implementation as well as abandonment of existing policies. Policy somersault has become a recurring challenge in many Nigeria public organizations, including the Rivers State Waste Management Agency (RIWAMA). Over the years and worst of it all in more recent time, RIWAMA has experienced several shifts in operational guidelines, leadership directives, and waste management strategies resulting from political transitions, power tussle and administrative changes. These inconsistencies have often led to confusion among employees, disruption of workflow, and loss of organizational focus hence turning the one time reverend garden city to a garbage city at the moment.

Frequent policy changes tend to undermine staff morale, create uncertainty in job expectations, and foster distrust toward management decisions. Consequently, employees may experience heightened levels of organizational tension manifested through conflict, poor communication, reduced cooperation, and declining productivity. Moreover, the lack of continuity in policy implementation hampers long-term planning, resource allocation, and the attainment of RIWAMA's strategic objectives for effective waste management in Rivers State.

Despite the evident disruptions caused by policy reversals, there appears to be limited empirical investigation into how these inconsistencies specifically influence organizational tension within RIWAMA. Understanding this relationship is critical for promoting stability, enhancing staff commitment, and ensuring the sustainability of waste management programs in the state. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the effect of policy somersault on organizational tension in the Rivers State Waste Management Agency (RIWAMA).



Conceptual Framework of policy somersault and organizational tension



Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of policy somersault on organizational tension in Rivers State waste management agency (RIWAMA). The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the relationship between contradictory directives and communication breakdown in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA).
2. Examine the relationship between contradictory directives and leadership strain in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)
3. Examine the relationship between frequent policy reversal and declining collaboration in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA).

4. Examine the relationship between frequent policy reversal and communication breakdown in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between contradictory directives and communication breakdown in Rivers State waste management agency (RIWAMA)?
2. What is the relationship between contradictory directives and leadership strain in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)?

3. What is the relationship between frequent policy reversal and declining collaboration in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)?
4. What is the relationship between frequent policy reversal and communication breakdown in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)?

Research Hypotheses

This work will be guided with the following research hypotheses:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between contradictory directives and communication breakdown in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA).

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between contradictory directives and leadership strain in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)?

Ho3 There is no significant relationship between frequent policy reversal and declining collaboration in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)

Ho4 There is no significant relationship between frequent policy reversal and communication breakdown in Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA)?

Concept of Policy Somersault

Policy somersault defines sudden, frequent or sweeping reversals and inconsistencies in policy that undermine continuity, implementation and long-term planning. The phenomenon is especially identifiable in Nigeria government and as well as organizations operating in Nigeria and other African states, where it's linked to weak institutions, politicized appointments, lack of evidence-based policy making, and regime change. Empirical studies and policy briefs associate policy somersaults with weakened investment climate, disrupted service delivery (education, agriculture), and poor development outcomes. According to Nseowo and Anieti (2023) Policy somersault does not present itself to any ambiguity but rather connotes the inability of an organization or body (government) to achieve its predetermined

policy goals or objectives, arising from certain policy defaults. Okpata (2016) defined policy somersault as the abrupt reversal, abandonment or flip-flopping of a stated policy direction such that previously announced policy goals or instruments are overturned in a short period. It is sometimes framed as a type of policy failure or policy inconsistency.

The abrupt reversal, withdrawal, or frequent alteration of established policies creates significant organizational instability. When policies change unpredictably, organizations experience both operational and behavioral disruptions that undermine performance as well as instigate other problems such as: Organizational uncertainties and confusion, decline in employee morale and commitment, loss of organizational integrity and trust, increase operational inefficiency, heighten internal conflict and tension. Strategic drift and loss of competitive advantage. No doubt, If not managed properly, can significantly impair organizational performance and long-term sustainability

Dimensions of Policy Somersault Contradictory Directives

Contradictory directives constitute a central dimension of policy somersault, a phenomenon where organizations reverse, suspend, or radically alter established policies within short time intervals. Contradictory directives occur when leaders issue instructions that conflict with previous policies or coexisting operational guidelines, thereby producing organizational confusion.

Contradictory directives embody ambiguity, inconsistency, and directional conflict, all of which distort organizational routines and weaken strategic coherence. Organizational actors rely on stable rules to interpret their roles and responsibilities; thus, inconsistent directives disrupt interpretive frames and escalate workplace tension (March & Olsen, 2013). When policies are reversed or contradicted suddenly, employees experience cognitive overload due to the need to reconcile conflicting expectations, resulting in reduced efficiency and compliance (Weick, 1995).

Moreover, contradictory directives accentuate the implementation gap associated with policy



somersault. While organizations may justify policy reversals as responses to emergent contingencies, contradictory directives often reflect poor communication, inadequate consultation, or political interference (Adebayo, 2022). These inconsistencies generate operational uncertainty, making it difficult for employees to align actions with organizational goals. As posited by Lipsky, (2010) unclear and conflicting policies push frontline workers to improvise, which increases variability in outcomes.

Frequent Policy Reversal

Frequent policy reversal represents a critical dimension of policy somersault, a phenomenon in which organizational policies undergo abrupt, repeated, or inconsistent changes that undermine coherence in strategic direction (Author, 2018). Frequent policy reversal also refers to the continual overturning, modification, or replacement of existing policies within short intervals, often without adequate evaluation or learning from previous cycles (Lee & Morgan, 2020). Such reversals reflect institutional instability and a lack of policy commitment, signaling to stakeholders that organizational decision-making is reactive rather than strategic (Okafor, 2019). When policies change rapidly, employees and managers find it challenging to align behaviors and resources around a stable set of expectations.

This dimension of policy somersault is frequently associated with leadership inconsistency, poorly coordinated directives, and weak strategic foresight (Harrison & Smith, 2021). Organizations that lack data informed decision processes or rely excessively on top-down, personality-driven leadership tend to engage in more frequent reversals. These oscillations erode institutional memory and weaken the capacity for long-term planning (Browne, 2017).

Frequent policy reversal also contributes to organizational tension, reduced morale, and diminished trust among employees. When personnel perceive that policies will soon change again, they become reluctant to invest effort in implementing new directives, which

can lead to performance stagnation and resistance to change (Kareem & Adeyemi, 2022). In this context, policy reversal functions as both a symptom and a driver of systemic instability.

Concept of Organizational Tension

Organizational tension refers to the state of strain, stress, or conflict that arises within organizations due to competing demands, misaligned interests, or dysfunctional workplace interactions. It embodies both the psychological strain experienced by employees and the structural frictions that disrupt organizational processes (Putnam et al, 2016). Unlike temporary conflict, tension is often ongoing and systemic, reflecting deeper contradictions between individuals, teams, or organizational goals.

Scholars broadly conceptualize organizational tension as arising from two interrelated dimensions interpersonal dynamics and structural conditions each shaping the experiences of employees and influencing organizational outcomes in distinct but overlapping ways. At the interpersonal level, tension is primarily associated with strained social relations and negative workplace interactions. Behaviors such as incivility, bullying, harassment, and unresolved interpersonal conflicts disrupt cooperation and create environments of mistrust (Obiora & Iwuoha, 2020).

Organizational tension is often embedded in institutional arrangements and systemic practices. Bureaucratic rigidity, excessive hierarchy, limited resources, and competing institutional demands constitute common structural stressors, particularly in public sector organizations where regulatory compliance and accountability are paramount (Van de Ven, 2017). For instance, resource scarcity may compel departments to compete for funding or staff, generating conflict rather than collaboration.

When tension in the organization escalates beyond manageable levels or remains unresolved, its effects become detrimental. Excessive tension contributes to hostile work



environments characterized by diminished morale, reduced trust, weakened collaboration, and lowered productivity (Wang, Xie, & Cui, 2020). Over time, prolonged exposure to unresolved tension manifests in negative individual outcomes such as stress, burnout, absenteeism, and turnover, while at the organizational level, these individual responses accumulate into systemic inefficiencies. Ineffective management of tension can further erode organizational legitimacy, as stakeholders perceive the institution as dysfunctional, poorly coordinated, or incapable of delivering on its mandates.

Organizational tension in public sector is particularly pronounced due to rigid bureaucratic structures, political interference, and resource constraints. While some level of tension may be inevitable in complex organizations, its persistence especially when fueled by workplace incivility poses a serious challenge to both employee welfare and institutional performance. Thus, while tension is inevitable in organizational life, its outcomes largely depend on whether it is managed constructively or allowed to intensify unchecked.

Measures of Organizational Tension

Communication Breakdown

Communication breakdown refers to a failure in the transmission, interpretation, or reception of information between individuals or groups within an organization or social setting. It occurs when the intended message is distorted, misunderstood, ignored, or lost altogether, thereby impeding effective interaction and collaboration (Keyton, 2017). Since communication is the lifeblood of organizational functioning, any disruption in this process can significantly hinder coordination, decision-making, and relationship-building.

At the interpersonal level, communication breakdown is primarily rooted in human interaction challenges and the psychological dynamics that shape how individuals send, receive, and interpret messages. Barriers such as poor listening skills, language differences, assumptions, emotional interference, and lack of feedback often distort the intended meaning

of a message (Robbins & Judge, 2019). For instance, when individuals fail to actively listen, they may selectively hear only parts of a message or interpret information through their own biases, leading to misunderstandings, errors, or even interpersonal conflict. Active listening requires concentration, empathy, and responsiveness, and its absence greatly increases the likelihood of miscommunication.

Language differences further complicate interpersonal exchanges, especially in multicultural workplaces where employees may interpret terms or expressions differently. Similarly, ambiguous language or technical jargon can obscure clarity, causing employees to act on incomplete or inaccurate interpretations of instructions. Emotional interference is another critical factor; feelings of anger, anxiety, stress, or defensiveness can cloud judgment and distort both the transmission and reception of messages. For example, a stressed employee might misinterpret neutral feedback as criticism, escalating tension unnecessarily.

At the organizational level, communication breakdown is often linked to broader structural and systemic factors that go beyond individual interactions. Hierarchical barriers are among the most common obstacles, particularly in organizations with rigid bureaucratic structures. In such contexts, messages must pass through multiple levels of authority before reaching their destination, which can result in message distortion, delays, or even intentional filtering, depending on the interests of intermediaries (Lunenburg, 2010). This not only undermines the accuracy of communication but also discourages openness, as lower-level employees may feel their voices are unlikely to reach decision-makers. Information overload represents another significant barrier, as employees often receive excessive volumes of data through meetings, emails, and reports, making it difficult to discern relevant information and leading to oversight or misinterpretation.

Technological failures and overreliance on digital tools also contribute to organizational miscommunication. While modern technology facilitates faster information sharing, excessive dependence on emails, messaging platforms, or



automated systems can reduce opportunities for nuanced, face-to-face communication. This often leads to misunderstandings, as digital communication lacks the non-verbal cues such as tone, facial expression, and body language that enrich meaning in interpersonal exchanges. The consequences of communication breakdown are far-reaching. On the one hand, it undermines efficiency by causing duplication of tasks, errors, and delays in decision-making. On the other hand, it damages interpersonal relationships, reduces trust, and fosters organizational conflict. In the long run, persistent communication breakdown can erode morale, increase employee dissatisfaction, and negatively impact organizational performance (Shockley-Zalabak, 2014). Beyond the workplace, communication breakdown in social and political contexts may exacerbate misunderstandings, deepen divisions, and hinder conflict resolution. Communication breakdown represents a critical barrier to effective human interaction. Addressing it requires intentional strategies such as active listening, use of clear and concise language, feedback mechanisms, open communication channels, and effective use of technology. By minimizing barriers to communication, organizations and individuals can enhance mutual understanding, strengthen collaboration, and achieve collective goals.

Declining Collaboration

Declining collaboration is an important indicator of organizational tension, as it reflects the erosion of cooperative behaviors, trust, and shared commitment among employees. Collaboration is fundamental to organizational effectiveness because it facilitates knowledge sharing, problem-solving, and innovation. When tension within an organization escalates—whether from interpersonal conflicts, structural inefficiencies, or resource constraints—collaboration is often one of the first casualties. Thus, declining collaboration can serve as a tangible measure of underlying tension levels in the workplace.

At the interpersonal level, organizational tension often manifests as strained relationships, mistrust, and communication breakdowns, all of

which undermine collaboration. Employees experiencing tension may become less willing to share information, provide support, or engage in joint problem-solving. For instance, unresolved conflicts or perceptions of incivility create psychological barriers to teamwork, leading to withdrawal and reduced cooperative engagement (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001). This withdrawal behavior signals not just interpersonal discord but also the broader impact of organizational strain on group cohesion.

At the structural level, tension emerges from hierarchical rigidity, competing demands, and resource limitations, which further weaken collaborative efforts. In environments characterized by bureaucratic procedures or siloed departments, employees often prioritize their individual or departmental interests over collective organizational goals (Cross et al., 2016). The more intense the organizational tension driven by unclear goals, competing priorities, or leadership strain—the more visible the decline in cross-functional collaboration. Declining collaboration in such contexts is therefore not merely a by-product but a clear measure of how systemic pressures disrupt cooperation and collective performance.

The significance of declining collaboration as a measure of organizational tension lies in its cascading effects. Reduced teamwork hampers innovation, slows problem-solving, and diminishes adaptability, thereby amplifying organizational inefficiencies (Edmondson, 2012). It also feeds into a cycle of tension, as weakened collaboration fosters frustration, distrust, and disengagement, which in turn deepen organizational strain. Leaders and managers can thus observe patterns of declining collaboration such as reduced team participation, knowledge hoarding, or increased interpersonal conflicts as indicators of mounting tension within the organizational environment. Declining collaboration provides both a **symptom** and a **measure** of organizational tension. As employees disengage from cooperative processes due to interpersonal frictions and structural barriers, organizations can assess the severity of underlying tension by monitoring collaboration trends. Addressing



declining collaboration through strategies such as trust-building, participative leadership, and cross-departmental initiatives not only restores teamwork but also alleviates organizational tension, strengthening resilience and overall effectiveness.

Theoretical framework of the Study

This study is hinged on the underlining principles of stakeholders theory by Freeman (1984). The theory is a framework for understanding how organizations manage relationships with parties who can affect or are affected by organizational decisions. Stakeholder relationships are **dynamic**. Which implies that Interests, power, and influence of stakeholders can change over time, requiring

continuous monitoring and engagement.

Methodology

This study takes a pilot form (this is because a much more elaborate study will be carried out later on same subject matter but with a larger population size) in investigating the influence of policy somersault on organizational tension of Rivers state waste management agency (RIWAMA). The took a census of 181 staff of Rivers state waste management agency, owing to its relatively smallness. Data were collated via the structured questionnaire while we adopted the spearman rank correlation coefficient as the tool for data analysis,

Association between contradictory directives and Organizational tension

Correlation Matrix for contradictory directives and Organizational tension

		Contradictor y directives	Communicati on breakdown	Declinin g collabor ation
Spear man's rho	Contradictory directives	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.514**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	181	181
	Communication breakdown	Correlation Coefficient	.514**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	181	181
Declining collaboration	Declining collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	.601**	.366**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.004
		N	181	181

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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

The results in the above table indicate that there is a significant association between contradictory directives and organizational tension. contradictory directives does impact breakdown of communication ($r = 0.514$, $p =$

$0.000 < 0.05$). contradictory directives does impact declining collaboration ($r = .601$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The association between contradictory directives and the measures of organizational tension is found to be very



significant at the level of 0.05 significance. Going by this result, hypotheses one and two were rejected at .05 alpha level. This indicate

that there is significant relationship between contradictory directives and organizational tension.

Association between frequent policy reversal and Organizational tension

Correlation Matrix for frequent policy reversal and Organizational tension

		Frequent policy reversal	Communication breakdown	Declining collaboration
Frequent policy reversal	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.269*	.176*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.038	.179
	N	181	181	181
Spearman's rho	Correlation Coefficient	.269*	1.000	.802**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038	.	.000
	N	181	181	181
Declining collaboration	Correlation Coefficient	.176*	.802**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.179	.000	.
	N	181	181	181

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

The result above indicate that there is a significant relationship between frequent policy reversal and communication breakdown ($r = 0.269$, $p = 0.038 < 0.05$). Rudeness is not significantly associated to leadership strain ($r = .176$, $p = 0.179 > 0.05$); Rudeness is significantly associated to declining collaboration ($r = .428$, $p = 0.001 < 0.05$). The association between Rudeness and two measures of organizational tension are found as significant at 0.05 level of significance. Going by this result, hypotheses four and six were rejected at .05 alpha level, while hypothesis five was not rejected. It is accepted.

Discussion of findings

Contradictory directives and organizational tension

We observed that contradictory directives (from the Rivers state government and the internal leadership of RIWAMA) does fuel

organizational tension. Contradictory directives create structural and relational tension by undermining trust in leadership. Frequent reversals and inconsistent instructions erode employees' perceptions of managerial competence and procedural fairness (Meyer & Rowan, 2019). This can lead to resistance, reduced morale, and fragmented collaboration across units. Over time, such tension contributes to organizational inertia, as employees prefer to delay action rather than risk following a directive that may later be reversed.

In dynamic environments, contradictory directives may arise from attempts to adapt quickly; however, without coherent communication and strategic alignment, such abrupt shifts manifest as policy somersault rather than agility (Teece et al., 2016). Effective management therefore requires clarity, stability, and alignment in policy communication to prevent contradictions from degenerating into organizational dysfunction.



Frequent policy reversal and organizational tension

Frequent policy reversals undermines stakeholder confidence, especially in environments where external partners depend on predictable organizational behavior. Policy unpredictability signals risk, thereby reducing cooperation and complicating coordination with regulators, suppliers, and clients (Nguyen, 2021). Internally, teams may develop informal workarounds to cope with instability, unintentionally reinforcing a culture of non-compliance (Chen, 2017).

Frequent policy reversal, reveals deep organizational vulnerabilities rooted in inconsistency, strategic misalignment, and leadership volatility. Its consequences ranging from eroded organizational trust, heightened organizational tension and impaired performance, which underscore the importance of policy stability, coherence, and institutional learning in sustaining effective organizational governance.

Conclusion

Policy somersault is characterized by inconsistent, rapidly changing, or contradictory policy decisions and frequent policy reversal has significant and often negative influence on organizational tension. When policies shift unpredictably, employees experience confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety regarding expectations, goals, and procedures. This uncertainty disrupts workflow, undermines trust in leadership, and weakens organizational cohesion. Policy somersault also creates friction between departments, since roles and responsibilities keep shifting, causing conflict over resources, priorities, and accountability. In the long run, such instability affects morale, reduces productivity, and weakens the organization's ability to plan and execute long-term goals. Ultimately, policy somersault acts as a major driver of structural, interpersonal, and psychological tension across the organization as such a very strong predictor of organizational tension.

Recommendation

1. Organizations should ensure that communication flows through defined, transparent channels by Creating a central communication platform for directives and not engaging in issuance of contradictory directives where the leadership of RIWAMA issues one directive in the morning and the state governments comes out at noon with an alternative directive.
2. Organizations should Strengthen Policy Stability and Consistency by ensuring that policies are well-evaluated, evidence-based, and thoroughly tested before implementation. This reduces the likelihood of frequent changes that create tension among staff.

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