

# MANAGING WORK-LIFE CONFLICTS IN PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS: EXPERIENCE FROM A PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATION IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

Employees in many public organizations are increasingly recognizing that work is infringing on their personal life and many are unable to cope. This study sought to investigate the immediate and remote causes of such conflicts between work and life with a view to finding ways of helping employees balance the two sides. Two thousand two hundred and twenty personnel in the twenty-one local councils that make up the Anambra Local Government System were pooled for the survey investigation. Using simple percentages and the inferential statistics of chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) to analyze the data gathered from the field-work and a test of hypothesis, it was found that employees would welcome policy interventions by government to reduce the number of duty hours on Thursdays and Fridays found to be days for social engagements. It was further found that employees would be willing to put in more hours of work on the less socially engaged days of Monday to Wednesday to make up for the lost hours used for personal and family matters. The study recommends policy reforms in public service which will increase working hours on less socially engaged days and reduce hours of work on the more socially engaged days to shore up motivation and productivity in public sector organizations.

## **Introduction**

Work-life balance is a broad concept that

describes prioritizing between career and ambition on one hand, compared with pleasure, leisure, family and spiritual development on the other hand. As the separation between work and home life diminishes extensively, this concept has become more relevant than ever before according to Berglund and Johansson (2007). The work-life conflict expression was first used in the late 1970s to describe the balance between an individual's work and personal life. Work-life balance is about creating and maintaining supportive healthy environment, which will enable employees to have balance between work and personal responsibilities and these tend to strengthen employee loyalty and productivity according to Brautigam (1997).

In the past, a typical employee in a public sector organization in the contemporary Nigerian environment would work conscientiously all the week days from Monday through Friday. This situation has since changed. According to Ejike (2008) employees in many public sector organizations are increasingly complaining that the line between work and non-work time has become blurred, creating personal conflicts and stress. However, at the same time, today's workplace presents opportunities for workers to create and structure their work role. A number of factors have contributed to blurring the lines between

employees' work life and personal life. One of such factors according to Armour, (2002) is globalization which has turned the world into a village and the implication is that work could go on beyond the stipulated hours thereby conflicting badly with the employee's personal time. The second is the fact that apart from the influence of communication technology which allows employees not only to be easily contacted through personal telephone lines but also enables them to do their jobs anywhere they are, at home, in their cars, on the beach and others, many organizations are asking employees to put in longer hours.

Therefore, employees are increasingly recognizing that work is infringing on their personal lives and complaints are mounting every day. Recent studies suggest that employees want jobs that give them flexibility in their work schedules so that they can better manage work-life conflicts (National Study on the Changing Workforce, 2002). There is sufficient evidence to show that balancing work and life conflicts now surpasses job security as an employee priority. This study seeks to investigate the immediate and remote causes of such conflicts between work and life with a view to finding ways of helping employees balance the two sides using the Anambra State Local Government System as a reference.

#### ***Administration of Local Government System in Anambra State of Nigeria***

Anambra State of Nigeria Local Government System was chosen as a study in view of the fact that the Local Government System is one of the biggest in Nigeria. The size of the Local Government System comprising of twenty-one local government councils will provide adequate data necessary for the investigation of the problem of work-life conflicts among staff in public services. The powers to handle issues relating to the staff of the local government system were conferred on the Anambra Local Government Service Commission. Such issues as appointment, discipline and promotion of staff in the

councils are in the domain of the Commission (Ugwu, 2000). Other issues such as policy design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation are also handled by the commission.

#### **Statement of Problem**

Man as a social being by nature must attend to some social activities which by and large interfere with work whether formal or informal. Sometimes, engaging in certain social activities outside formal and official work becomes a way of easing off what would have led to stress. Employees in both public and private organizations are increasingly recognizing that work is infringing on their personal lives, and complaints are mounting everyday. According to the National Study on the Changing Workforce 2002 employees want jobs that give them flexibility in their work schedules so that they can better manage work-life conflicts. Women, especially those within child-bearing age are in constant disagreement with their employers basically because of their double responsibilities one, to her official contract with the organization and two, to her domestic activities. But employers of labour cannot pretend not to know that women, especially those within child-bearing age must as a matter of necessity be treated differently in the organization's employment policy. As simple as the issue looks especially with women's clamor for gender equality or sensitivity, it remains very critical in the actualization of the goals of the most public and private organizations and particularly the local government system in Anambra State of Nigeria where the population of women is well over 60% of the entire workforce. Reducing stress because of its capacity to undermine output is what employees and employers seek to do. Our concern in this study is on how to balance the conflict that arises when an employee wants to do some personal things in addition to his or her job. This study therefore seeks to find ways to minimize the tendency for work-life conflicts for improved productivity in organizations especially in the public sector organizations.

### **Objective of the Study**

The study is focusing on how to strike a balance in the conflict between employees' formal work and life outside work in the public service organizations. To do this successfully, Anambra State of Nigeria Local Government System is used as a reference. The study will take a sample of the employees of the Anambra State of Nigeria Local Government System for investigation with the purpose of generalizing the findings for the public sector organizations in Nigeria.

### **Review of Related Literature**

According to Burton (1990), conflict means a perceived difference between two or more parties that result in mutual opposition. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines conflict as a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a disagreement. Conflict can also be defined as a "fight", "struggle" or "quarrel" between two or more people. Conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon in human or organizational relationships. It is a fact and part of life which cannot be avoided as long as human beings relate with one another. Although it is often considered to be a negative factor in human relationship, it potentially can have constructive as well as destructive consequences. Some of the destructive prospects are well known and they include being hostile by individuals or groups, withholding of information and resources, and deliberately performing under expected capacity (Obiora, 2007). Others include interference with each other's efforts and witch hunting. This can delay projects, drive up costs and cause valued employees to leave an organization (Obiora 2007).

On the other hand, conflict can yield a number of constructive consequences if well managed. For one thing, conflict highlights problem and the need for solution. For another, it could resolve problems. Conflict can also enhance morale and cohesion, as group members deal with areas of concern and frustration. Conflict can even stimulate interest, creativity and innovation by

encouraging ideas. The local government system as an organization is not immune to the above stated factors inherent in any organization with people with differences in behaviour and character that are bound to have conflicts. What matters is how they cope with such disagreements or differences and what they learn from it.

The body of literature is awash with research findings in conflict that arises from work-life experience. Obiora (2007) in an instructive work observed that employees are at the receiving end whenever contentious issues arise between them and the management.

This he attributed to the fact that management (employer) has to employ both the stick and the carrot as postulated by McGregor's theories X and Y. The employer can use either of the two or both depending on the policy and goal of the organization. Employers of labour generally appear to pay less attention to the needs of the employees especially as they relate to work-life conflict while designing the organization's human resources management policy (Okoki, 2000). This, according to him is what leads to absenteeism and low performance of the employees in the organization. He makes a distinction between enhanced remuneration and recognition that workers irrespective of adequate salary or wages still need time to attend to social engagements that are important aspects of living. He further remarked that employees are at their best if recognition is given to their social involvements time for friends and family members because that is the essence of life. He went on to note that high role overload precipitate high incidence of stress depression, mental ill-health and instability in family roles, all of which culminate in low productivity for the organization.

Supportive work environment and improved employee-family relationship no doubt will enhance the performance of the employees because under such circumstances, friction is reduced and so the staff sees the organization as particularly his or hers, an attitude which

makes for harmonious coexistence of the staff and management. According to Aboim (1985), living organisms whether biological or social organization are acutely dependent upon their supporting environment for survival and growth. They must interface with the environment in a purposeful and meaningful manner for the actualization of a predetermined goal. Berglund and Johansson (2007) have pointed out that most large scale organizations like the Anambra Local Government System are very dependent upon structures of related offices and the pattern of activities associated with them. This primarily is to create structural framework which is a necessary ingredient for goal attainment. They admitted that working at cross purposes maximizes tension in the organization which results to conflict between two interests if not tactically managed. In corroborating his view Ugwu (2000) notes that organization's policies that pertain to the welfare of the employees require serious attention because there are critical issues in achieving the goals of the establishment.

The contention that managerial support helps in creating an atmosphere necessary for optimal productivity is a well supported proposition. The implication is that conflict is less likely to occur based on the already created environment of mutual understanding. Ebong (2006) found that allocation of fewer organizational rewards such as advancement opportunities and salary increases, subsidized lunch at break times, etc, received less commitment from employers to the detriment of the organization. Worst still, social activities which studies have shown to enhance positive mood and happiness are scarcely planned for, yet evidence abound that social interactions have long-term health benefits which include longevity (Berglund and Johansson 2007). So while discussing employees happiness, which only well articulated work-life balance policy can guarantee, the mood of the employee is important. People who are in good mood are more creative than people in bad moods according to Grawitch (2003).

### **Research Hypotheses**

The study formulated the following hypothesis for verification: Hypothesis One sought to determine whether employees of Anambra State of Nigeria Local Government System are concerned about work-life conflict in their organization or not.

Hypothesis two sought to find out whether the employees have the need for solving work-life conflict in their organization or not.

### **Research Methodology**

This study adopted analytical survey investigations as the principal method in the search for new knowledge. According to Ikeagwu (1998), studies of this nature will use the survey method to look for information on facts, attitudes, practices and opinions of the respondents.

**Determination of Population and Sample Size**  
The population of staff in the Anambra State Local Government System is a little above five thousand (5000) workers. Of this population, study questionnaires were sent to two thousand, two hundred (2200) representing about 40% of the population. According to Ikeagwu (1998) in a descriptive survey of this nature, 40% of the population would be enough for adequate generalization. Obikeze (1990) and Cochran (1977) clearly stated that a descriptive survey has to do with the use of selected sample of the population in a study and use of questionnaire as the instrument for data collection is common with survey study. Therefore, the use of a chosen sample of employees of Anambra State Local Government System cutting across all levels of staff in the establishment would produce the required result. Of the 2200 questionnaires that were distributed, 2010 were completed and returned as valid for analysis thus showing a non-response rate of only 8% which was considered negligible given the size of the sample.

The responses were analyzed using simple percentages and inferential statistics of Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) to determine relationships between variables. This approach facilitated in-depth

analysis which in turn revealed far-reaching findings on balancing work-life conflict in establishments like the Anambra Local Government System.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The data generated in this survey are presented and analyzed in this section through

manual operations. While we employed percentages to analyze the data generated, Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 significance level given the degrees of freedom (df). Therefore, the results obtained are presented as follows:

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Sex	Marital Status	Academic Qualification						Total	%
		FSLC	WAEC	NCE/OND /HND	First Degree	Masters Degree	Ph.D		
Male	Married	20	90	130	200	50	-	490	2.4
	Single	-	20	60	130	20	-	230	11.4
	Divorced	-	-	-	10	20	-	30	1.5
	Sub-Total	20	110	190	340	90	-	750	37.3
Female	Married	10	130	170	290	30	-	630	31.3
	Single	-	100	150	270	20	-	540	26.9
	Divorced	20	30	-	20	10	10	90	4.5
	Sub-Total	30	260	320	580	60	10	1260	62.7
	Grand-Total	50	370	510	920	150	10	2010	-
	%	2.5	18.4	25.4	45.8	7.5	0	-	100

Source: Analysis of empirical data by the researchers

The analysis of Table 1 above shows that about 62.7% of the sampled population in the local government is female and further analysis shows that about 31.3% of them are married. The implication of this is that a sizeable proportion of the staff of the local government is women who are also married. Certainly with the kind of conflict that is going on between work and life, the level of productivity in the organization must be

affected. Striking information from the table is that about 78.7% of the sample has tertiary education qualifications including Masters Degree, thus, showing that the local government has a fairly high level manpower. Similarly, about 6% of the sample is divorced regarding their marital status both male and female thus, showing that a greater proportion of the staff is emotionally stable.

**Table 2: Opinion of Respondents on Work-life**

Rank	Length of Service in years					Total	%
	1-4	5-10	11-14	15-20	21 and above		
Security	-	-	10	20	-	30	1.5
Messenger	-	30	10	10	-	50	2.5
Clerical Assistant	100	70	40	80	-	290	14.4
Executive Officer	60	230	190	240	250	970	48.3
Officers cadre	50	100	290	150	80	670	33.3
Total	210	430	540	500	330	2010	100
%	10.4	21.4	26.9	24.9	16.4	100	

Source: Analysis of empirical data by the researchers

Table 2 is the presentation and analysis of employees' rank and length of service in years. It is easy to see from the table that staff distribution is very heavy at upper echelon with about 81.6% being those above the rank of clerical assistant. This situation can only be explained by the fact that employment has not taken place for a very long time in the local government system in the state. Also those who have been in the service of the system for 11 years and above constitute about 68.2% thus, lending credence to the fact that fresh employment in the system has not taken place for some time now.

**Testing of Hypotheses**

The two research hypotheses set up for the study were tested using appropriate statistical tool, chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) known for its adequacy in analyzing non-parametric variables of yes, no, and don't know responses (Oyeka 1996). The tests were done using a significance level () of 0.05. As usual, tests were to determine whether the observed values fall within the

acceptable region for the null hypothesis to be valid, otherwise the alternative hypothesis would be accepted.

**Hypothesis One**

Hypothesis One sought to determine whether employees of Anambra State Local Government System are concerned about work-life conflicts in their organization or not. Consequently, the null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis were presented as below:

H0: Employees of the Anambra State Local Government System appear not to be concerned about work-life conflict in their organizations.

H1: Employees of Anambra State Local Government System appear to be concerned about work-life conflicts in their organization. To test the hypothesis, we considered the opinion of the respondents on questions; Q10, Q11, and Q12.

Table 3: Opinion of Respondents on Work-life conflict

Variables	Responses					TOTAL
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Undecided	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed	
10. Some roles/schedules of duty do not give the employee room to attend to social and personal matters	400	610	30	310	660	2010
11. The need to balance work-life nowadays seems to surpass job security as an employee's priority.	670	410	90	610	230	2010
12. Married employees as dual career couple especially, are finding it difficult to fulfill commitments to home, spouse, children, parents and friends.	730	540	130	310	300	2010
<b>Total</b>	<b>1800</b>	<b>1560</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>1230</b>	<b>1190</b>	<b>6030</b>

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(40 - 60)^2}{60} + \frac{(61 - 52)^2}{52} + \dots + \frac{(30 - 39.7)^2}{39.7}$$

$$= 6.70 + 1.60 + \dots + 2.40$$

$$= 61.900$$

(See explanation in the appendix)

But  $\chi^2$  tabulated which is also called the critical region is 15.507, at 0.05 level of significance and 8 degrees of freedom (df). Since the value of  $\chi^2$  calculated of 61.900 is greater than the value of  $\chi^2$  tabulated of 15.507, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative which suggests that employees are concerned about work-life conflict in the organization. This test result has corroborated the assertion that employees' need to balance work-life conflict nowadays seems to surpass job security as the priority of the employees. It shows also that indeed, some roles or job schedules hardly allow the employee any space to engage in social life which of course is of great importance to him as a social being. As dual career couple, married employees especially women are finding it difficult to fulfill important commitments to home, spouse, children, parents and friends.

Table 4: Employee's Busiest Working Days in the Office

Working Days	Frequency	Percentage of total (%)
Monday	1310	65.2
Tuesday	110	5.5
Wednesday	530	26.4
Thursday	50	2.5
Friday	10	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 above is the presentation of employee's busiest working days in a week

The analysis on the table shows that about 65.2% said Monday is their busiest day in the office. This is followed by Wednesday with about 26.4% while other days like Tuesday, Thursday and Friday are insignificantly respected by 5.5%, 2.5% and 0.5 respectively.

Thus, indicating that Mondays and Wednesdays are days that employees cannot afford to joke with. Any contemplation for exemption or excuse must as a matter of necessity take cognizance of the two heavy activities days for the employees.

Table 5: Employees' Likely Social Engagement Days during the working Days of the week

Working Days	Frequency	Percentage of total (%)
Monday	-	-
Tuesday	50	2.5
Wednesday	210	10.4
Thursday	590	29.4
Friday	1160	57.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>100</b>

It could be seen from the above table that Fridays and to some extent Thursdays are the most likely working days that the employees engage in one form of social activity or the other as they are represented by 57.7% and 29.4% respectively. The table further shows that Monday is free as nobody mentioned it as a social engagement day. Tuesday has very insignificant proportion of the employees who said it is their social activity day with

about 2.5%. From the foregoing analysis of employees busiest days in a week and the likely days for social activities, it could be seen that employers have room for adjustment to accommodate the employees' social activities to reduce the conflict that arises between work and the employee's life.

**Hypothesis Two**

Hypothesis two sought to find out whether the employees have the need for solving work-life conflicts in their organizations or not.

Accordingly, the null hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis were presented as below:

- Ho: Employees of the **Anambra State Local Government System** do not seem to have the need for policy intervention for solving the work-life conflict in their organization.
- Hi: Employees of the **Anambra State Local Government System** seem to have the need for policy intervention for solving the work-life conflict in their organization.

To test the hypothesis, we considered the opinion of respondents on the following questions: 15, 16, 17 and 18.

Table 6: Employees' Opinion on Policy Intervention for Balancing Work-life conflict

Variable	Responses			Total
	Yes	No	Don't know	
Q15. Would you subscribe to the idea of working less hours on the days of your social activities and more hours on other days to make up for the lost hours on social activities.	1270	690	50	2010
Q16. Would you accept to take work home to make up for time spent on social activities or family life during office hours?	910	970	130	2010
Q17. Would you subscribe to the idea that your organization should provide babysitter for working nursing mothers to enable them work longer hours than currently obtains?	1080	870	60	2010
Q18. Everything considered, do you think the propositions as raised in Q, 15, 16 and 17 above if granted would reduce work-life conflict as well as keep productivity high?	1390	510	110	2010
<b>Total</b>	<b>4650</b>	<b>3040</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>8040</b>

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(127 - 116.3)^2}{116.3} + \frac{(69 - 76)^2}{76} + \dots + \frac{(11 - 8.8)^2}{8.8}$$
$$= 0.98 + 0.64 + \dots + 0.55$$
$$= 32.610$$

**(See explanation in the appendix)**

But which is also called the critical value of the critical region is 12.502, at 0.05 level of significance and 6 degrees of freedom (df). Therefore, since the value of of 32.610 is greater than the value of of 12.502, we reject H<sub>0</sub> (the null hypothesis) and accept H<sub>1</sub> (the alternative hypothesis) which suggests that employees appears to have the need for policy intervention for solving the work-life conflict in their organization.

The implication of this result is that there is the need for policy intervention in the local government system as regards their employee's work-life conflict. The employees will appreciate any policy intervention that will afford them the opportunity to work less hours on the identified days of social engagements as well as be willing to either take work home or work extra hours on other days to make up for lost hours spent on social activities. Similarly, the result also shows that employees would welcome the idea of providing baby-sitter for nursing mother to enable them work more hours than usual to enhance productivity in the organization.

**Discussion of Research Findings**

Having presented and analyzed the data generated in this study in the preceding section, the findings are hereby discussed. The sample consists of more female than male with female population, being about 62.7% a true reflection of the current gender situation in the local government system in particular and civil service in general in Anambra State. It is also worthy of note to mention that the sample is a fairly literate one as those with tertiary education represents about 78.7%. In another development, only about 6% of the sample has their marital status as divorced thus, showing that a greater percentage of

those interviewed have stable homes.

The distribution of rank of employees by length of service shows that the system is heavy at the upper echelon with about 81.6% being those above the rank of clerical officers. Also those who have been in the service of the system for 11 years and above constitute about 68.2%. All these lend credence to the assertion that employment of fresh hands has not taken place for a reasonably long period. The crises or conflict that results from inability of the employees to attend to personal needs portends a very dangerous work environment for obvious reason. It could lead to deviant work place behaviour. The work place incivility or antisocial behaviour which could be voluntary behaviour that violates significant organizational norms, and in doing so, threatens the well-being of the organization or its members, such norms could be company's policies that prohibit certain behaviors like fighting in the office, playing loud music in one's workplace. It could also be a violation of unwritten rules of the organization which are widely shared by all. It could also lead to job dissatisfaction which is a negative feeling about one's job that results from an evaluation of its characteristics, all of which contribute significantly to low performance of the employee in the organization.

The result shows further employees' busiest days in the office are Mondays and Wednesdays and that their social activities days are mainly Thursdays and Fridays as could be seen from Tables 4 and 5 respectively. Given this background information, employees of the local government prefer to work less hours on someday to be designated as social activities days and work extra hours on busy days and perhaps take work home to make up for lost hours spent on social engagement days. All these measures are to ensure that workers have time to attend to their personal needs and at the same time perform optimally for the organization without so much stress. Furthermore, it was shown that the provision

of baby-sitter in the office will be of great relief to the employees especially the nursing mothers. This was believed to have the advantage of extending the working hours of such nursing mothers than what obtains currently as well as give them some comfort about the well-being of their babies. An intervention like this will surely contribute significantly to balancing the conflict that result from work-life and at the same time have the tendency to increase productivity which entails combining effectiveness and efficiency in an organization. As the study revealed the percentage of woman in the organization is more than 60%, appropriate policy intervention that aims at tackling women peculiar problems in relation to work-life, will go a long way in reshaping the organization for good and at the same time facilitate the accomplishment in their dual career activities without stress.

#### **Conclusion**

A large segment of today's workforce is increasingly complaining that the line between work and non-work time has become blurred, thus, creating personal conflicts and stress. Some of the factors that have contributed to blurring the lines between employees' work-life and personal life are the use of communication technology which allows the employees to do their work even at home, in their cars, etc. others are the desire to increase output, dual career couple, assignment of busy schedules or roles, etc. to the employees. It was discovered that for many, balancing work and life demands now surpasses job security as employee priority. Employees want an environment that will give them sufficient flexibility in their work schedules so they can better manage work-life conflicts.

Employees of Anambra State of Nigeria Local Government System would want their employers to introduce some policy interventions that will enable them attend to their personal life demands while maintaining enhanced level of productivity in the office. The employees are ready to make sacrifices to make such polices effective but the

management should first show willingness to intervene. This, it was believed would minimize tendency for stress that accompanies work-life conflict.

#### **Recommendations**

Based on our findings and conclusions as stated above, we make these recommendations:

Work-life conflict has posed some serious challenges to the employees of Anambra State of Nigeria Local Government System. Since the Local Government System is centrally managed in the country by respective Local Government Service Commissions across the country, it is important that the commission comes up with some policy interventions that will help workers balance work-life conflict which has become obvious in their workplaces. Since employee's busy days and likely social engagement days have been identified, the onus is now on government to reflect the wishes and aspirations of the employees in the policy intervention to be designed. One way this can be done is to shift some workload from the likely social engagement days to other days that are freer from such social activities to give workers enough time out, by marginally extending the working hours of such days. Permission could also be given to workers to take work home to enable them make up for the lost time on personal and social activities. This would however require some amendments in the labour laws of Nigeria to reflect the urgent need to help workers balance work-life conflicts in public organizations to enhance productivity.

#### **Suggestion for further research**

It is suggested that further research should be carried out to determine if there are cultural differences that affect work-life conflicts in organizations.

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Appendix  
Test Statistic of Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ )

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(O - E)^2}{E} \quad \chi^2_{(r-1)(c-1)}$$

Where:

O = Observed frequency, and  
E = expected frequency

$$\text{And } E = \frac{N_i \times N_j}{N}$$

N

Where:

$N_i$  = row total  
 $N_j$  = Column total  
N = Overall total

Also, r denotes row, and  
C denotes column

$(r-1)(c-1) = \text{d.f.} = \text{degree of freedom}$

and  $\alpha = \text{Significance level which could be } 0.05 \text{ or } 0.01$

Whenever  $\chi^2_c \geq X^2$

Where  $\chi^2_c = \text{Chi-Square } (\chi^2) \text{ calculated, and}$

$\chi^2_{(r-1)(c-1)} = \text{Chi-Square tabulated,}$

We reject  $H_0$  and accept  $H_1$