

## **Effective Management of Organisational Conflict: A Panacea for Organizational Growth**

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### **Abstract**

This paper entitled “Effective Management of Organisational Conflict: a Panacea for organizational growth.” Conflict is unavoidable in organization and even in everyday life. Often, people don’t go looking for conflict but it springs up in the course of interaction between people who come from various background with different perceptions on issues and human relations. This paper tries to x-ray the various processes of conflict, types of conflict, elements of conflicts, causes of conflict, as well as positive and negative sides of conflict. The researchers further outlined measures of conflict management, while their concern drove them to look at effective management of conflict in organization. This article closes with recommendations and measures to be taken to enhance conflict management in order to actualize organizational goals.

**Keywords:** conflict, management, organization, organizational goals

### **Introduction**

Rubbins in Olujide (2011) stated that conflict is a frequent occurrence in organizational life, members of the organization being human beings with needs and interest that can often clash. This clash does not mean the end or failure of organization but in most cases serves as measures for certain action to be taken. Awan and Anjum (2015) stated that a negative work environment that does not promote conflict resolution can result in poor employee behavior and job performance. The ability to manage personnel in an organization plays a pivotal role in the growth and progress of any organization. Luthans, Rubach and Marsnik in Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) emphasized that properly managed conflict increases learning through increasing the degree to which groups ask questions and challenge the status quo. While Uzochina (2016) pointed out that if managed effectively conflict can be constructive but if not conflict can be a destructive force in people and organization.

### **Meaning of Conflict**

According to Omoike (2014), conflict is when two or more people or groups have or think they have incompatible goals. Shantz and Hobart in

Uzoechina (2016) see conflict as a dispute or struggle between two parties that are characterized by overt expression of hostility or intentional interference in the goal attainment of the opposing party. Ezegbe (1997) defined conflict as mutual hostility in interpersonal, inter group, organizational or intra-organizational relationships involving the Chief Executive. Conflict is unavoidable in organization and even in every aspect of life. Actually, people don't go looking for conflict but it arises because of miscommunication between people with regard to their needs, ideas, belief, goals or values. While Glueck in Olujide (2011) opined that conflict is a disagreement between two or more organization members or groups arising from the fact that they share scarce resources or work activities and from the fact that they have different status, goals, values or perceptions.

In fact, Coser in Olujide(2011) stressed that no group can entirely be harmonious for it would be devoid of process and structure as both 'positive' and 'negative' factors build group relations. Conflict as well as cooperation has social functions. Far from being necessarily dysfunctional, a certain degree of conflict is an essential element in group formation and the persistence of group life. Nwokedi and Obumse (2014) perceived conflict as being innate in the nature of men and women, this characterizes the way they behave while interacting with others. Many administrators know this and so apply different measures or strategies to control and prevent conflict from being destructive. Uzoechina(2016) maintained that conflict involves situation in which differences are expressed by interdependent people in the process of achieving their needs and goals. It arises when a difference exists between two or more people.

### **Processes of Conflict**

Uzoechina (2016) argued that conflict is not tangible but lies in the minds of the people who are parties to it. It normally starts from little to a fully blown thing. Behfor, Peterson, Mannis and Trochim in Omoike (2014) stated that conflict involves stages, from inception to end and is sequential in nature.

- (a) **Latent conflict:** It is when even though the conflict situation exists but it is not yet recognized or obvious.
- (b) **Felt conflict:** This is a situation whereby the conflict is tensed but has not yet occurred.
- (c) **Manifest conflict:** This is a situation whereby the conflict is obvious to everyone, then the situation becomes apparent.

- (d) **Conflict Resolution:** It is the stage whereby the conflict is being managed or resolved. The conflict brings in other people in the attempt to find a way out of the existing conflict.
- (e) **Conflict Aftermath:** This is the after effect of a conflict situation. The two parties in the conflict situation have seen the consequence of the conflict situation.

## **Types of Conflict**

Conflict often arise when one sees somebody or something as a threat to his/her goal or desire. Conflict arises in various forms or dimension such as:

- 1) Intra-Personal conflict
- 2) Inter-Personal conflict
- 3) Inter-Department conflict
- 4) Intra Unit/Department conflict
- 5) Community related conflict

### **Intra-Personal Conflict**

This type of conflict deals with individuals. It may come in form of disagreement on how people take in, process and produce information. Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) stated that it is manifested in aggression, excessive thinking, short temper, avoidance and shouting.

### **Inter-Personal Conflict**

This deals with disagreement or misunderstanding between two people who have incompatible goals, needs and approaches in their relationship. The two individuals may be working towards a common goal but because of the disparity of opinion or interest, conflict arises.

### **Inter-Departmental Conflict**

This is conflict between two departments in an organization. In some organizations, it could be as a result of opposing orientations to issues or activities.

### **Intra Unit/Departmental Conflict**

This kind of conflict has to do with members within a unit or department in an organization.

### **Community-related Conflict**

This revolves around a host community and an organization which normally arises as a result of misunderstanding on certain issues.

## **Elements of Conflict**

Lang in Omoike (2014) maintained that organizational conflict usually involves three elements, which have to be appropriately matched through necessary organizational arrangements in order to resolve the conflict. They are as follows:

**Power:** This involves the authority and means at the disposal of people to get things done. Omoike (2014) further stated that power if used efficiently creates an atmosphere of cooperation, but can generate conflicts when misused, withheld or amassed.

**Organisational demands:** It involves workers' expectations regarding job performance if and when these expectations are not met, workers feel angry, disheartened, injured or even cheated. These, eventually led to conflict.

**Worth:** This is known as person's self esteem. It is when people feel that this self-esteem has been trampled upon that conflict arises. Omoike (2014) stated that conflict generally arise from mismatches between power, organizational demands and feelings of personal worth.

## **Causes of Conflict**

Johdi and Raman in Uzoechina (2016) affirmed that conflict cannot be evaded in organizations. Salleh and Adulpakdee in Uzoechina (2016) further stated that causes of conflict can be classified into two main categories, namely:

- (a) Structural based factors
- (b) Personal/Non-Structural based factors

## **Structural Based Conflict**

This is based on the way in which an organization is designed to work, in terms of size, characteristics and nature of environment. Some structural aspects of an organization which are likely to cause conflict are as follows: task interdependence, difference in status, inadequate facilities and equipment, inadequate evaluation mechanism, difference in performance criteria and reward system, role dissatisfaction and disagreement over needs.

- (1) **Task/Work Interdependence:** According to Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011), this exists when two or more sub-units depend on each other to complete their respective tasks. Conflict may arise in such situation over task performance. Employees depend on each other in the following ways:

- (a) **Pooled Interdependence:** This refers each unit to perform their task independently but eventually refers to the center. Conflict may arise whenever any unit fails to meet up with deadline.

- (b) **Sequential Interdependence:** Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) stated that this is the type of conflict that arises because the performance of one task depends on the completion of another. Example, in the Bursary Department, cash book unit must finish balancing their record before reconciliation unit must work. If there is any conflict work is delayed.
  - (c) **Reciprocal Interdependence:** This type of conflict arises because a lot of interaction is needed among staff in a unit to be able to carry out their official task. Individuals being what they are and made up of different components, some are slow workers, some fast and some are workaholics. As a result of this difference, conflict is bound to arise.
- (2) **Difference in status of workers:** In many organizations, heads of unit are always placed on special privileges which others are denied. It often tends to lead to conflict especially among low cadre staff that often see themselves as being used.
  - (3) **Inadequate Physical Facilities and Equipment:** Facilities are often not enough in many organizations; this tends to create conflict in many organizations. In some cases, it leads to competition which often turns out to be unhealthy.
  - (4) **Inadequate Evaluation Mechanism:** This is a situation whereby evaluation mechanisms in most organizations are such that tend to favor one set of people more than others. In such cases, often leads to competition which often turns out to be unhealthy.
  - (5) **Difference in Performance Criteria and Reward System:** More often, employees put in their best depending on the level of reward they receive from the organization they work. Whenever they discover that some employees are favored more than others, it often results in conflict.
  - (6) **Role Dissatisfaction and Disagreement over News:** Organizations are often muddled up in conflict whenever there is role dissatisfaction. When employees are not recognized or their contribution not acknowledged, they tend to put up very poor attitude towards their job, some even form faction that would always want to limit the progress of the organization and it limits their performance in the organization.

### **Personal/Non Structural Based Factor**

This is the personal traits of individuals as they relate with others. Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) listed it to include such factors as differences in background, differences in values, differences in perception, differences in personal traits, poor communication skills, management style,

incompetence, poor attitude to work, issues of generation gap, anti-authority and prejudice tend to lead people to conflict with one another.

- (1) **Differences in Background:** This difference in background include: educational level attained, social status, cultural orientation, ethnic group and religious affiliation or belief. Any variation in these factors tends to lead people to conflict.
- (2) **Differences in values:** The value that individual attach to things affects their action and line of thought. It affects the actions they take concerning any issue, in cases of such differences, conflict is bound to arise.
- (3) **Differences in Perception:** The perception of an individual on a particular issue affects so much his/her ways of doing things. It influences cooperation and understanding among people working in an organization.
- (4) **Differences in Personal Traits:** Peoples' personality and disposition can make conflict to arise in organizations. Individuals that are domineering tend to conflict with the dictatorial ones. Those with high temperament often conflict with others.
- (5) **Poor Communication Skill:**Uzoechina (2016) stated that poor communication can lead to misunderstanding and barriers while too little or too much communication can lead to conflict. He further stated that when there is too little communication, associates do not know enough about each other's interactions, goals, or plans. In such cases, coordination becomes difficult, and misunderstanding is more likely to occur, which can result in conflict.
- (6) **Management Style:** The type of management adopted by an organization's Chief Executive tend to either spur up or minimize conflict in the organization. If a Chief Executive is authoritative and has no listening ear to employee, conflict is bound to erupt. But in cases whereby the Chief Executive has a listening ear, the level of conflict often times is minimized.
- (7) **Incompetence:** Conflicts often arise in situation whereby one is not qualified to be a Chief Executive but through lobbying or other means finds himself/herself there. The ability with the pre-requisite qualification of being a Chief Executive is necessary to avoid conflicts in any organization.
- (8) **Poor Attitude to Work:** Many employees have very poor attitude to work and often times such people always don't like taking corrections. In such situations, conflict is bound to occur.

- (9) **Issues of Generation Gap:** The very younger people see the older ones as old fashioned. With this opinion in the mind of such employees, conflict is bound to arise because the two opinions rarely meet to agree.
- (10) **Anti-Authority and Prejudice:** Some employees the moment there is a misunderstanding between them and the Chief Executive they build anti-authority relationship and strong prejudice, that often generate conflict in the organization.

### **Positive Effects of Conflict**

Although conflict is often associated with negativity but there is still positive effects of conflict in an organization. Baldwin, Bommer and Rubin in Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) outlined the positive effects of conflict as follows:

- (a) In some cases, without an issue degenerating into conflict, many Chief Executives will not agree to reconsider their stand on issues or policy implementation. It creates an avenue for both parties to brainstorm or even for a third party to come in and mediate between them thereby forcing, pleading or compelling the Chief Executive to have a rethink.
- (b) It can motivate people to try to understand other's position and ideas. Through conflict negotiation, employees' position and ideas are often better understood.
- (c) Conflict encourages people to voice new ideas, facilitating innovation and change. Through conflict, people can voice new ideas because the opportunity of dialogue enables people to speak out thereby facilitating innovation and change.
- (d) It brings problem into the open that might otherwise be ignored. Through negotiation and renegotiation, problems which ordinarily would have been neglected are brought to limelight and treated.

### **Negative Effects of Conflict**

Conflict is known to have many negative effects which include the following:

- 1) It has resulted in many strained relationship and human relation. A lot of people once there is conflict turn out to be sworn enemies and those who before then were friends hardly walk together during conflict situation.
- 2) Conflict often makes people to be determined to bring out their stubbornness and determination to pull down the whole organization.
- 3) It splits organization into fraction and division, during conflict situation, people build or form different gangs that would do the organization no good.

## **Conflict Management and Organisational goals**

Omoike (2014) opined that conflict management is primarily concerned with controlling conflict in human relations. Uzoechina (2016) stated that conflict management is the principle that conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflict can decrease the odds of non-productive escalation. Human beings are hard to control and in conflict management, it entails exploring measures or means by which problems that occur in any organization can be easily resolved so as to realize organizational goals. Leadership and conflict normally go hand-in-hand, because the moment one assumes a leadership position he/she is likely to manage conflict situations. Effective conflict management enables a chief executive to minimize the negative outcome of conflict and promote the positive outcome with the aim of actualizing organizational goals. For Rahim in Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011), it involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunction of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization. Tschannen – Moran in Uzoechina (2016) further stated that conflict management is a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflicts as it arises in all aspects of their lives so as to achieve desired or set organizational goals. Upholding it, Adonni and Anie (2005) stressed that managers should develop appropriate strategies to resolve conflicts as they arise in their organizations. Also, Conflict management theory stressed that conflict management system should be put in place in every organization so as to achieve set objectives. Some of these management measures include:

- (1) **Negotiation:** Morley in Olujide (2011) saw negotiation as a game of strategy, analogous to games such as Poker or Chess. For Uzoechina(2016) it is a problem-solving process in which either the two parties in the dispute or their representatives meet face to face to work together unassisted to resolve the dispute between the parties. Basically, negotiation is often aimed at producing a solution that would be acceptable to all and sundry. It strives to ensure that none of the people involved feel hurt and to possibly find workable solution to the conflict.
- (2) **Mediation:** Omoike (2014) stated that when negotiation fails, parties can invite an independent mediator to facilitate settlement of the conflict. It involves a process whereby parties involved in a conflict meet one on one to resolve the issue through a third party. This situation often creates the opportunity for those in conflict to express



their bitterness and grievances and allow those in conflict to forge ahead.

- (3) **Confrontation:**Ezegbe (1997) stated that in confrontation, issue and problem can be subjected to a debate between those in conflict or neutral groups in order to expose the problem and convince the combatants of its emptiness. However, Uzoehina (2016) maintained that confrontation strategy to conflict management entails both parties placing their desires above those of all others involved in the conflict, but at this level it is difficult for resolution to occur.
- (4) **Arbitration:**Omoike (2014) opined that this means the appointment of an independent person or group of persons (a panel) to act as adjudicator (judge) in a dispute to decide on term of settlement. Both parties must agree that the decision of the arbitrator is binding on them. This independent person is supposed to be impartial and without bias.
- (5) **Silence and Avoidance:** This is a strategy that a Chief Executive uses to solve conflict situation by delaying or keeping quiet on an issue that has brought conflict to the organization. Ezegbe (1997) stated that silence or avoidance can disarm the combatants emotionally as they wait for days or months on end, without any practical action on the part of the Chief Executive. However, putting one's head in the sand does trouble itself, and certainly escalates if not proactively and properly solved. Ezegbe (1997) pointed out that silence or avoidance should be used with caution because neglected or silenced problems may gather momentum one day to erupt like a volcano. Uzoehina (2016) maintained that when the avoidance strategy is appropriate is when one has issues of low importance, to reduce tension and to buy sometime.
- (6) **The Grit Theory:** According to Ezegbe (1997), this theory was formulated by Osgood (1962) referred to as "Graduated Reciprocation in Tension-Reduction". In the attempt to resolve conflicts in organization, the Grit theory can be applied, if a particular group produces one thing, the other group should produce another, or in distribution of offices or positions to reduce conflict and to carry everybody along. By so doing, people working in the organization will know that certain position they have enjoyed should be felt by others too and conflict is reduced. It works well in conflict situation of monopolization or domination of office position in organizations.
- (7) **An Address by an Influential Person:** In the attempt to resolve conflict in an organization, an influential and highly respected person in the society can be invited to appeal to those involved in the conflict.

(8) **Separation:** In organizations whereby the conflict exists between staff of the same department, the Chief Executive can resort to separation of the persons involved in conflict so as to resolve it.

(9) **National Industrial Court:** This is the highest body that determines cases that pertain to labour matters, in other words the Supreme Court on labour matters. People resort to it when both legal and other panels of arbitration have not satisfactorily resolved their case. The National Industrial Court's decision is binding and conclusive on all labour matters.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the need for effective management of organizational conflict so as to actualize the much needed growth of the organization, some recommendations were made as follows:

- Chief Executive should address conflicting issues privately.
- Recognize, understand and respect the 'meaning' and 'dignity' of human person.
- Feel pesky emotions.
- Deal with himself/herself first, before others.
- Attack the problem instead of the personality.
- Investigate the situation.
- Let everyone have a say.
- Don't look for persons to blame rather look at the root cause.
- Conversations on the issue should be goal-oriented.
- Consider preventive strategies for such situations not to arise in future.

### **Conclusion**

It is obvious that conflict can never be avoided in organization but it is the ability of the Chief Executive to manage it well that makes the actualization of organizational goals and smooth running possible. Nwokedi and Obumse (2014) posited that the human Need Theory argued that deprivation of individuals and community access to the means of satisfying their basic needs is behind all violent conflicts. Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) emphasized that properly managed conflict promotes productivity through increasing the degree to which groups ask questions and challenge the status quo. Administrators should always bear in mind that every organization is full of people who are gifted with manipulative ability that is used to influence others. Chief Executive should imbibe the principle of controlling, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and avoidance in

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order to effectively manage conflicts in the organizations. Therefore, Administrators should always ensure that all conflict management strategy must have a human touch.

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