



Conflict Management Strategies As A Prerequisite For Effective Organizational Performance: An Exploratory Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine conflict management strategies as a prerequisite for effective organizational performance. The study employed explanatory design which is based solely on insights drawn from the analysis of the existing literature of different studies, periodicals and books related to the topic. The findings revealed that a good conflict management techniques will greatly improve decision outcomes and high profile of productivity. Effective management strategies in conflict resolution will boost good communication, time management, cooperation and organizational productivity. It was also revealed that conflict resolution strategy helps to better good interpersonal relations among management and staff in an organization. It encourage and promote interpersonal relationships among co-workers and in turn improve on their morale, it lessen disruptions in production activities and enhances improved quality of services. It was therefore concluded that management of organization should initiate relevant conflict resolution procedures that is capable of driving the workforce positively and also create additional channels of communication with employees as means of obtaining prompt feedback on organizational policies, so that conflicting interest will not arise.

Keywords: Conflict management strategies; Management-employee interpersonal relationship; Effective conflict management; Negotiation, Mediation, Collaboration, Employees performance; Organizational performance

INTRODUCTION

Conflict in any organization is inevitable. If it is managed properly, the continuous existence of organization through the realization of set goals and objective requires effective functioning of its standardized input with the human element being indispensable. The human element factors required to facilitate goals attainments which are often involved in disagreements over issues such as opinion, interest, and view of style of management, among others. The reactionary effect is due to the perceived incompatibilities resulting typically from some form of interference or opposition which is termed conflict. It is a state of disagreement over issues of substance or emotional antagonism and may arise due to anger, mistrust or personality clashes. Irrespective of the factors resulting in conflict, it has been observed that an industrial conflict produces considerable effects on organizations and should be consciously managed as much as possible. Conflict management strategy is a catalyst for change and can have a positive impact on employee satisfaction and performance of the organization. Conversely, unmanaged conflict can negatively impact both employee satisfaction and job performance.

In order for people to progress at work and other aspect of life, there must be cooperation which is essential to ensure task attainment and stability in life. However, it would be wrong to reach the conclusion that cooperation is good while conflict is bad, this is because both concepts are pervasive

and co-exist in our social life. Rahim (2001) opined that management-labour conflict may be interpersonal or intergroup. Interpersonal conflict occurring between a supervisor and his subordinate or between two individuals at the same level of the organizational hierarchy. Intergroup conflicts often occur between two trade unions, between two departments or between management and workers while attempting to implement the policies and programme of the organization.

Awan and Anjum (2015) says that properly managed conflict promotes open communication, collaborative decision making, regular feedback, and timely resolution of conflict. Open communication and collaboration enhance the flow of new ideas and strengthen work relationship, which can have a positive effect on employee morale. Regular feedback and timely resolution of conflict has the potential of improving employee satisfaction and job performance.

Awan and Ibrahim (2015) contend that if the individuals do not have the communication or interpersonal skills to resolve their disputes, the conflict can grow and spread to others, eventually affecting their job performance, which, in turn, affects the job satisfaction of others, as well in addition to the staff not having the communication skills to address their disputes, their leaders often lack the necessary skills to be effective in conflict resolution. Once human resources personnel are involved, the process becomes punitive and results in disciplinary action, which contributes to an even greater reduction in employee morale and employee satisfaction.

Awan and Ahson (2015) say that conflict is a natural and inevitable part of people working together and should be kept at a manageable level where it will not disorganize the activities of the organization towards the attainment of its objectives.

It is the management major responsibility to device strategies in bringing down conflict as low as possible, which will enable the organization to still function to succeed (Robbins & Sanghi, 2006) against this background the study was being carried out on conflict management strategies as a prerequisite for effective organizational performance.

Statement of the Problem

Conflict arises in an organization when an individual perceives that his goals are threatened or hindered by another person's activities (Agwu, 2013). As most organizations have devoted a greater part of economic time and effort to settle conflict related issues, such situation has continued unabated, hence posing a negative challenge to industrial and economic growth of an organisation.

Although, management scholars believe that conflict cannot be completely ruled out in any organization but then, incessant occurrence of organizational conflict could have an adverse effect on the organization. Most conflicts in the Organization, arise from the inability of the management to fulfil its collective agreement as stipulated in its terms of employment with its employees resulting in employees embarking on industrial action. Employees' industrial action usually results in loss of man-hours, machine-hours, output, skilled personnel, employees' morale and organizational reputation etc (Okotoni, 2002; Agwu, 2013). One of the most fundamental problems currently destabilizing the survival of many organizations is the issue of industrial conflicts that arise between management and employees. Chukwu (2008) posited that most of the workers in an organization are very often restless and confrontational in their approach to issues which affect them as a group.

Most managers of organization perceive the workers as lazy, uncooperative individual, who always hold secret labour meetings and plan drastic actions against the organization, they constitute a threat to the labour interest, while workers in turn perceive the management as exploiting them (Ezema, 2007). It is this perception arising from the management and the workers that sometimes result in conflict.

The problem of incessant industrial conflicts, disputes, strikes, lockouts, and boycotts have generated much concern not only among employers of labour but also employees themselves and other stakeholders as well. The magnitude of the adverse effects can well be understood when one considers the huge losses in productivity, reduced profits, damages to organization's assets. The negative impact of such event is like "ill wind that does nobody good". All parties are usually affected, employees in the areas of poor inter-personal relationship between them and the management, and among themselves, loss of pay, termination and dismissal from employment; for the society, potency for social disorder, instability of jobs and mass unemployment which could affect the fulfillment of its obligation.

Given the reality as described above, it behooves on labour and management to seek ways of coping and minimizing undesirable tensions and conflicts, and its unpleasant consequences for this reason.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Structural-Functionalism Theory propounded by Persons (1960) in Alade (1998). The theory postulates that individuals normally adjust to a given structure in an organisation but any change in the structure of the organisation causes conflict and destabilizes the organisation. Conflict should be minimized by minimizing structural changes in order to maintain stability with both the individuals as well as the institutions. Another theory that lends credence to this study is conflict management model. This theory was propounded by Blake and Mouton in 1964. The theory explained styles for handling interpersonal conflicts into five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. In the 1970's and 1980's, researchers began using the intentions of the parties involved to classify the styles of conflict management that they would include in their models. The model based on the concerns of the parties involved in the conflict. The combination of the parties concerned for their own interests (that is, assertiveness) and their concern for the interests of those across the table (that is, cooperativeness) would yield a particular conflict management style. Pruitt called these styles yielding (low assertiveness / high cooperativeness), problem solving (high assertiveness / high cooperativeness), inaction (low assertiveness / low cooperativeness), and contending (high assertiveness / low cooperativeness). Pruitt argues that problem-solving is the preferred method when seeking mutually beneficial options. The relevance of the theory to the study is that it stresses on ways of handling conflicts in an organization.

An Overview of Organizational Conflict and Conflict Management

Conflict is a situation of disagreement between two parties. A conflict situation is therefore one that is characterized by the inability of those concerned to iron out their differences. Conflict is an inevitable feature of organizational life. The state of health of an organisation lies along a continuum that ranges from a conflict - free organisation to a conflict ridden organization. Conflict behaviour is an individual's reaction to the perception that one's own and another party's current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously (Vliert, Huismans & Euwema, 1995). Robbins & Judge (2007) define conflict as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected or is about to negatively affect something that the first cares about.

Schramm-Nielsen (2002) defines a conflict as a state of serious disagreement and argument about something perceived to be important by at least one of the parties involved while Azemosa (2004) says organizational conflict is in opposition between individual owners and managers on one hand and working people on the other. Adesina (2009) in his view of conflict posits that it is the striking together, mutual interference of opposing or incompatible forces, ideas, interest content, discard. Often times conflict either overtly or covertly manifest themselves thereby enabling people to sense their existence. Based on the above, one can deduce that conflict can occur with:

- An individual; this is known as intra-personal conflict
- between two groups; this is known as inter personal
- Between or among groups of people, units or department, this is known as inter group or unit conflict.
- Between or among different organizations or nations, this is known as international conflict.

Fujana (1997) states that modern organizational conflicts seem inevitable since the concerns of management is to maximize profit while labour is concerned with the best conditions for their services. In this process, conflicts emerge between the social partners in an effort of each partner to obtain maximum benefits of the other. He defines organizational conflict as a breakdown in the standard mechanism of decision making which leads an individual or group to experience difficulty in selecting a mutually acceptable alternative. He continues that organizational conflicts do arise within the rank and file of all the actors in the organization including the entire constituent of the whole set of individuals. Such conflicts are referred to as inter personal. It also involves an organized group of individuals acting concertedly. Umana and Okafor (2019) asserts that group decision-making requires careful deliberation and is most advantageous when participants generate answers from a list of choices without prejudice. However, groupthink may be the root cause of conflict and can wreak havoc when it occurs undetected, where minority opinions are stifled.

Views on Conflict

1) Traditional View (1930-1940): One school of thought says that conflict must be avoided as it reflects malefaction within the group. Conflict is viewed negatively and is associated with violence

and destruction. Conflict is as a result of poor communication and lack of trust between people. Conflict can be eliminated or resolved only at high level of management. According to this view, all conflicts should be avoided. Thus, there is need to pay attention to causes of conflict and correct them in order to improve group and organization performance (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Most conflicts have negative connotations, invoke negative feelings and often lead to destruction. Whether the effect of conflict is good or bad depends on the strategies used to deal with it (Rahim, 1986).

2) The Human Relations or Contemporary View (1940-1970): Conflict is a natural occurrence in all groups. The human relations school accepts conflict. It believes that conflict may benefit a group's performance (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Dispute happens from time to time and it is not wise to put too much effort into avoiding or preventing the conflict. Concentrating only on large or critical conflicts allows people to resolve the conflict in a better and more effective way (Leung, 2010). According to this view, conflict is seen as a natural and inevitable outcome of people working together in groups and teams. Thus it needs not necessarily be viewed negatively, but rather positively as a potential force in contributing to the performance of individuals (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

3) The Interactionist View: According to this view, conflict is not only a positive force, but is also necessary for an individual to perform effectively. Resolving conflicts means challenging normal processes and procedures in an effort to improve individual productivity or introduce innovative systems (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Conflict is necessary to perform effectively, but not all conflicts are good. This school of thought has identified several types of conflict:

- > task conflict, relates to the content and goals of the work;
- > relationship conflict, which focuses on interpersonal relationships; and process conflict, which relates to how the work gets done (Robbins & Judge, 2007).

The interactionists interpret conflict in a totally different way from traditionalists and people with a contemporary view. According to interactionists, conflict can be identified as either dysfunctional or functional. Conflict is a part of people's lives and a natural phenomenon in all organizations. A low level of conflict will not be harmful for daily operations but will help to create smooth functioning by better understanding of existing issues. Conflict at the desired level can inspire creativity when handling issues and resolving conflict. Thus, conflict can be positive in work environments, but whenever a critical or major conflict occurs, it should be resolved as the undesired level of conflict can be harmful and dysfunctional for the organization (Leung, 2010).

Causes of organizational conflicts

In any organization, there are many causes of conflicts. Henry (2009) observes that conflicts within an individual usually arise when a person is uncertain about what task is expected to do, if not clearly defined by the supervisor or the person in charge. Furthermore, if the task of individuals working as a group is not clearly defined by the management, they will lead to more conflicts. Conflict between individuals may results from role-related pressures. Conflicts would arise between individuals and groups if the goals were not specified for individuals within the group. Additionally, according to the literature, there are innumerable origins of industrial dispute and each produces its own variety of effects. In general, Duke (1999) identifies six major sources of industrial conflict and they include;

- i The interpersonal disagreements that arise when one person is experiencing individual stress.
- ii The problems resulting from role conflict, a condition that occurs when there is a clash over one's role in the organization.
- iii The power struggle that puts groups against one another to achieve their own selfish objectives.
- iv The misunderstanding and disagreements from differentiation, i.e. the case that arise because people approach common problems from very different orientations.
- v The interdependence requirements for collaboration which if not extensive and balanced between the parties cause communication and interaction breakdowns which in turn, if critical, lead to more intensive conflicts.
- vi The external pressures from forces outside the enterprise that breed internal pressure as the system seeks to adapt but not to disrupt its internal orders.

Conflict resolution strategies

Conflict resolution according to Alper, Tjosvold & Law (2000) involve implementation of strategies to limit the negative aspects of conflicts and increase the positive aspects of conflict at a level equal to or higher where the conflict is taking place. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, that is, effectiveness of performance in organizational setting. It is not concerned with eliminating all conflicts or avoiding conflict. Rahim (2001) says that conflict resolution strategy is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. He added that committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs) and by engaging in collective negotiation. He also identified conflict resolution strategies and explained them as follows:

- i) **Accommodating:** The accommodating strategy essentially entails giving the opposing side what it wants. The use of accommodation often occurs when one of the parties wishes to keep the peace or perceives the issue as minor. For example, a business that requires formal dress may institute a "casual Friday" policy as a low-stakes means of keeping the peace with the rank and file. Employees who use accommodation as a primary conflict management strategy, however, may keep track and develop resentment.
- ii) **Avoiding:** The avoidance strategy seeks to put off conflict indefinitely. By delaying or ignoring the conflict, the avoider hopes the problem resolves itself without a confrontation. Those who actively avoid conflict frequently have low esteem or hold a position of low power. In some circumstances, avoidance strategy can serve as a profitable conflict management strategy, such as after the dismissal of a popular but unproductive employee. The hiring of a more productive replacement for the position soothes much of the conflict.
- iii) **Collaborating:** Collaboration works by integrating ideas set out by multiple people. The object is to find a creative solution acceptable to everyone. Collaboration, though useful, calls for a significant time commitment not appropriate to all conflicts. For example, a business owner should work collaboratively with the manager to establish policies, but collaborative decision making regarding office supplies wastes time better spent on other activities.
- iv) **Compromising:** The compromising strategy typically calls for both sides of a conflict to give up elements of their position in order to establish an acceptable, if not agreeable, solution. This strategy prevails most often in conflicts where the parties hold approximately equivalent power. Business owners frequently employ compromise during contract negotiations with other businesses when each party stands to lose something valuable, such as a customer or necessary service.
- v) **Competing:** Competition operates as a zero-sum game, in which one side wins and other loses. Highly assertive personalities often fall back on competition as a conflict management strategy. The competitive strategy works best in a limited number of conflicts, such as emergency situations. In general, business owners benefit from holding the competitive strategy in reserve for crisis situations and decisions that generate ill-will, such as pay cuts or layoffs.

Sources of Conflict

Fajana (2000) identifies two sources of conflict and they include:

- 1) **Internal Sources:** This is so called because they refer to factors which are inherent within the framework of an organization. Fajana (2000) states that the major prime factor of internal sources of conflict is the "Opposing interests" of industrial actors. These "divergent interests" will bring about conflict in attempts by the two parties in organizations to try to share what Ajibade (2004) calls "industrial cake". Apart from the above, it is another statement of fact that there is usually "power relationship" between the two actors in an industry which no doubt produce conflict and make such inevitable.
- 2) **The External Sources:** These are so called because they are outside the four walls of an organization. It may occur when the third party intervention to industrial dispute becomes one sided or biased. A good example is where government as the third and regulatory party tries to formulate policy or enact laws that favour one party at the detriment of the other. Such may generate conflict.

Process of Conflict

Conflict is a process in which one party suggests that its interest is being opposed by another party. As a role, people see only the observable part of conflict - angry words and actions of opposition. But this is only a small part of the conflict process (Mcshane and Glinow, 2008).

The conflict process consists of five stages (Robbins & Judge, 2007):

- > potential opposition or incompatibility;
- > cognition and personalization;
- > Intentions;
- > Behaviours; and
- > Outcome.

Functional and Dysfunctional Effects of Conflict

The benefits of conflict include the following (Omisore & Abiodun, 2014):

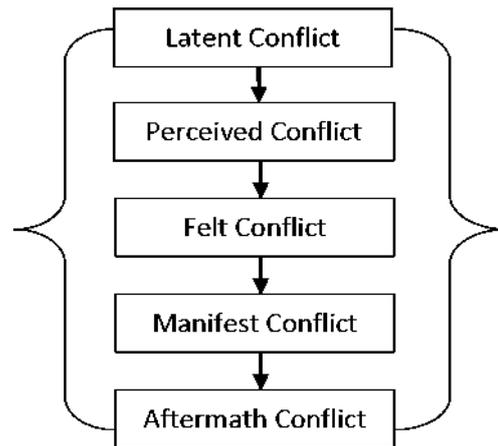
1. Inspire creativity: Fortunately, some organizations view conflict as an opportunity for finding creative solutions to problems. Conflict can inspire members to brainstorm, while examining problems from various perspectives.
2. Improve future communication: Conflict can bring group members together and help them learn more about each other. From learning each other's opinion on topics relevant to the organization's growth to understanding each member's preferred communication styles, conflict within an organization can give members the tools necessary to easily solve conflicts in the future.
3. Share and Respect Opinions: As organization members work together to solve conflict, they are more willing to share their opinions with other members of the group. Conflict can also cause members to actively listen to each other as they work to accomplish the organizational goals.
4. Facilitates an understanding of the problems, people have with one another and leads to better coordination among individuals and departments, in addition to strengthening intra-group relationship.
5. Satisfies certain psychological needs like dominance, aggression, esteem and ego, and thereby provides an opportunity for constructive use and release of aggressive urges.
6. Motivates individuals to do better and work harder. One's talents and abilities come to the forefront in a conflict situation.

The dysfunctional effects are:

1. Conflicts affect individual and organizational performance. Resolving conflicts takes a toll on managerial time and energy which could be more productively spent.
2. In a conflict situation, people may promote their self-interests or personal gains at the cost of others or the organization.
3. Intense conflicts over a prolonged period affect individuals emotionally and physically, and give rise to psychosomatic disorders.
4. Time spent on conflicts, if cost, could have been spent doing more productive things.
5. Conflict may lead to work sabotage, employee morale problems, decline in the market share of product/service and consequent loss of productivity

Pondy's Model of Organizational Conflict

One of the most widely accepted models of organizational conflict was developed by Louis Pondy cited in Jennifer and Jones (2007) which viewed conflict as a dynamic process that consists of five sequential stage.



Source: Jennifer and Gareth (2007). *Understanding and Managing Organizational Behaviour*, McGraw Hill/Irwin.

Latent Conflict - According to Jennifer and Jones (2007), at this stage there is actually no conflict. But the potential to cause conflict is present though hidden.

Perceived Conflict - This is the stage where one party becomes aware that conflict exist as a result of the awareness of the fact that its goals are been thwarted by the action of another party. At this point in time, each party begins to search for the origin and the cause of the conflict, analyze the event that led to the occurrence of the conflict and able to state clearly that conflict exist.

Felt Conflict - At this stage, each party to the conflict develop a negative and hostile feeling against the other party.

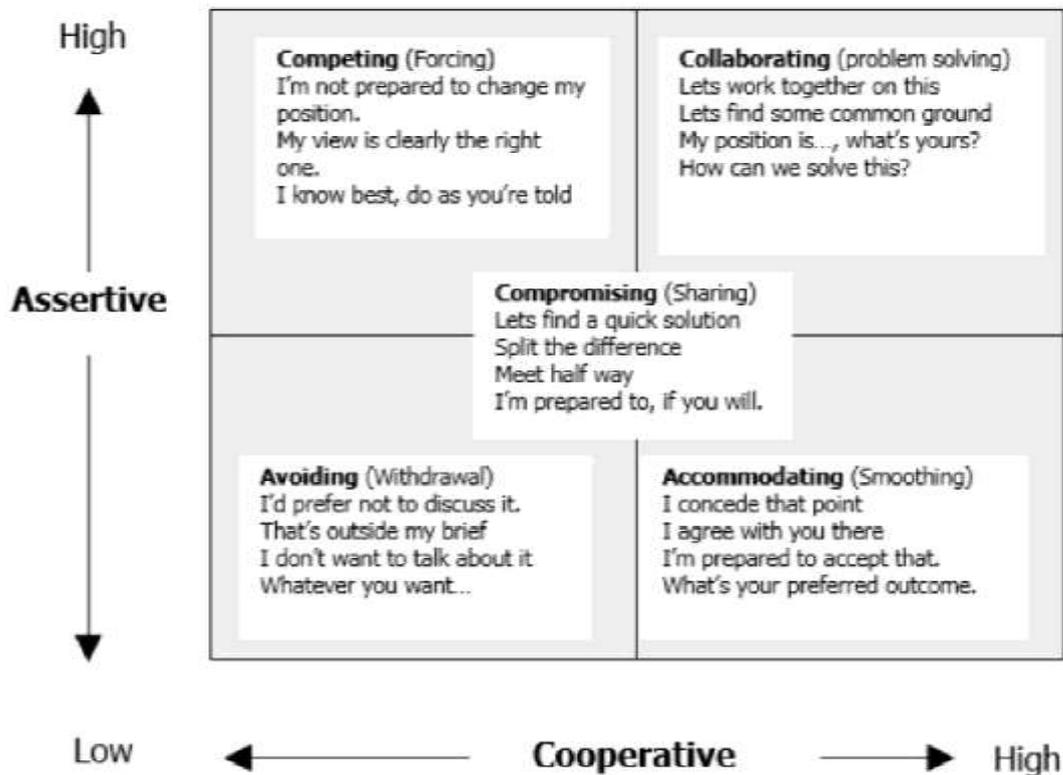
They develop this attitude of us- versus- them and begin to blame the other group as the cause of the conflict. Now as the party to the conflict argue out their view, it is usually blown out of proportion and conflict ensue.

Manifest Conflict - At the stage haven't felt the existence of conflict, one party decides to react and map out ways of dealing with the party whom they feel is the cause of the conflict. Also, both parties begin to hurt one another and thwart each other goals. Manifest conflict can take the form of open aggressiveness or even violence between people and group may occur.

Aftermath of Conflict - The conflict sooner or later in one way or the other someone get fired and serve as a scarp goat, the organisation reorganize and even fail as a result of the conflict. Every conflict episode leaves a conflict aftermath that affects the way both parties perceive and respond to a future conflict episode. If conflict can be resolve by compromise or collaboration before it reaches the manifest stage, the conflict aftermath will promote good future working relationship. If conflict process is not resolve early enough that will lead to a conflict aftermath that sour the relationship in the organisation and makes people believe that the working culture in the organisation is uncooperative.

Conflict Management Strategies

Conflict management implies integration of all factors which can contribute to conflict resolution or its prevention. Those factors are improvement of communication and practicing discipline in the organization, as well as having in mind the life phases of parties included. Thomas (1992) identified two primary conflict handing intentions namely; Cooperativeness and Assertiveness. Cooperativeness means the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns; while Assertiveness means the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his/her own concerns. These two basic dimensions of behaviour can be used to define five specific methods of dealing with conflicts, as shown on the grid below:



- 1) **Competing** - Is assertive and uncooperative - an individual pursues their own concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power-oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position - one's ability to argue, one's rank, economic sanctions. Competing might mean "standing up for your rights," defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win.
- 2) **Accommodating** - Is unassertive and cooperative - the opposite of competing. When accommodating, an individual neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person; there is an element of self-sacrifice in this mode. Accommodating might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order when one would prefer not to, or yielding to another's point of view.
- 3) **Avoiding** - Is unassertive and uncooperative - the individual does not immediately pursue their own concerns or those of the other person. They do not address the conflict. Avoiding might take the form of diplomatically side-stepping an issue, postponing an issue until a better time, or simply withdrawing from a threatening situation.
- 4) **Collaborating** - Is both assertive and cooperative - the opposite of avoiding. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find some solution which fully satisfies the concerns of both persons. It means digging into an issue to identify the underlying concerns of the two individuals and to find an alternative which meets both sets of concerns. Collaborating between two persons might take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, concluding to resolve some condition which would otherwise have them competing for resources, or confronting and trying to find a creative solution to an interpersonal problem.
- 5) **Compromising** - Is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. The objective is to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. It falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating. Compromising gives up more than competing but less than accommodating. Likewise, it addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but does not explore it in as much depth as collaborating. Compromising might mean splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking a quick middle-ground position.

Mediation

Section 3 (2) of the Trade Disputes Act of 1976 provides that if the attempt to settle the dispute through the voluntary machinery of negotiation fails, or if no collective agreement for the settlement of a trade dispute exists the parties shall within seven days of the failure (or if no collective agreement exists, within seven days from the date on which the dispute arises or is first apprehended) meet together by themselves under the presidency of a mediator mutually agreed upon and appointed by or on behalf of the parties with a view to settling the dispute amicably. Fashoyin (1992) observes that mediation is not commonly used in Nigeria and that only few employers in the private sector use it, especially in resolving interpersonal and procedural disputes. Fashoyin adduced four reasons for the non-use of the mediation in Nigeria: The First reason is that the Ministry of Labour and Productivity does not enforce the use of the machinery as provided by law. In similar vein, pool of mediators or resource persons in this field cannot be easily identified by the parties. The second reason has to do with cost considerations since the mediators have to be settled, which in contrast to conciliatory service by the Ministry which is rendered free and readily available. The third reason centres on the fact that the parties must agree on the choice of the mediator which may not be easy for them to agree upon. The fourth reason is that mediation will normally be used for issues that may result in considerable cost or damage if a solution is not quickly found. If the dispute is not settled within fourteen days of the date on which a mediator is appointed, the dispute shall be reported to the Minister of Labour and Productivity. The report shall record the points on which the parties disagreed and describe the steps already taken by the parties to reach a settlement. On receipt of the report, the Minister may if he is not satisfied about the steps taken so far to settle the dispute through mediation, he may within seven days appoint a conciliator.

Conciliation

Experience had shown that the Minister usually appoints a staff from the Ministry of Labour and Productivity to act as conciliator. The duty of the conciliator is to enquire into the causes and circumstances of the dispute and negotiate with both parties with a view to bringing about settlement. Conciliation as a process of peace making in industrial relations aims to bring about the speedy settlement of disputes without resort to strikes or lockouts and hasten the termination of work stoppages when these have occurred. Fashoyin (1992) notes that the conciliator works under guidelines, such as demonstrable impartiality, refrain from blaming one party in the presence of the other, all in a bid to reduce tension and narrow differences.

Ubeku (1983) frowns at the frequent breach of the guideline by the conciliator either out of inexperience or lack of patient to achieve results. Conciliation is viewed as arising from the failure of collective bargaining. Consequently, conciliation is seen as an extension of collective bargaining. If the conciliator succeeds in reaching a settlement of the dispute within fourteen days of his appointment, he is required to report the fact to the Minister and forward to him a memorandum of the terms of the settlement signed by the representatives of the parties, and from the date on which the memorandum is signed (or such earlier or later date as may be specified therein), the terms recorded therein shall be binding on the employers and workers to whom those terms relate. However, if a settlement of the dispute is not reached within fourteen days of the conciliators appointment, or if after attempting negotiation with the parties he is satisfied that he will not be able to bring about a settlement, the Conciliator shall immediately report the fact to the Minister.

Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP)

Apart from the use of conciliator, the Minister may refer a dispute to a Board of Inquiry which is primarily fact finding machinery. However, it is seldom used. Negotiation between the parties to a trade dispute end with conciliation. If conciliation fails, the Minister is required within fourteen days to refer the dispute to the Industrial Arbitration Panel (IAP) for settlement. Arbitration has been defined as a procedure for the settlement of disputes under which the parties agree to be bound by the decision of an arbitrator whose decision is in general final and legally binding on both parties. Unlike the ordinary civil courts where litigants can go directly to the court, all trade disputes go to the Panel under referral by the Minister of Labour and Productivity. As soon as a trade dispute is referred to the panel, the chairman of the panel in exercise of his statutory powers shall constitute a Tribunal consisting of either:

- a) The Chairman/Vice chairman and two or more Arbitrators, or
- b) An arbitrator assisted by two or more Assessors, or

c) A Sole Arbitrator,

The panel fixes the time and place for the hearing and must notify the parties. The proceedings of the panel are intended to be relatively informal both in terms of the pre-panel procedure and the hearing. At the hearing, a party may be represented by the person of his choice. Parties can be represented by either Legal Practitioner or their officials. Ubeku (1983) observes that legalistic approach to the settlement of labour disputes manifests itself in several ways at the panel: the rules of evidence not strictly followed are entertained and regularly used. Counsel appearance at the court makes proceedings appear like court proceedings. Though the panel is not a court but the Chairman is addressed as "my lord" and the parties are referred to as "applicants" and "respondents". The decision of the panel is known as an 'award'. An award cannot be communicated to the parties directly by the panel. The award must first be forwarded to the Minister who will release it to the parties. In special circumstances, the law empowers the Minister to remit an award back to the panel for reconsideration on ground of public policy or interest. If no notice of objection to the award is given to the Minister within seven days of the release to the parties, the Minister shall publish in the official Gazette, a notice confirming the award and the award shall be binding on the employers and the workers to whom it relates as from the date of the award or such other date as may be specialized in the award. Ubeku (1983) expresses displeasure at tie delay in the arbitration process which he sees as causing frustration for both the employers and the employees in Nigeria. He maintains that in dispute settlement procedure times is of essence and by the National Policy on Labour; one of its cardinal objectives is the expeditious settlement of disputes. This notwithstanding delay continues to be a frustrating feature of IAP.

Aturu (2001) questions the overbearing power of the Minister by stating that under section 18 of the Trade Disputes Act, the powers given to the Minister are too many and so much power that it is unsafe to entrust to one person. According to the writers, queries have been raised as to why the Minister must confirm an IAP award before it would become binding. Why should parties go through the tedious process of resolution up to arbitration only for the Minister to refuse to coat in the award? This is capable of generating a fresh dispute if not against the former adversary but against the government which may be accused by one of the parties of partialities. Fashoyin (1992) observes that trade unions tend to prefer arbitration to conciliation, especially where interest disputes or economic issues are involved. The exceptions are the unions in the public sector which appear skeptical about the neutrality of public employer in the arbitration process. The suitability of arbitration over litigation in specific cases may depend on the relationship between the disputants. However, it does not diminish the fact that arbitration has advantages over litigation. Nigerian trade unions have by tradition and by their positions been fully engaged in the resolution of disputes despite their misleading portrayal by the electronic and mass media as "trouble markers" and "radicals", union officials roles as "managers of discontent" and peace-makers hardly receive a mention except in the cloistered surroundings of boardrooms where a gratified management is showering encomiums on some union leaders whose intervention have either averted industrial action or brought one to a speedy end (Otobo & Fallah, 2007).

Ubeku (1983) laments that IAP out of enthusiasm sometimes hands down decision not in accordance with the practice in the industry. The back-dating of ward on arrears appears inconsistent with the provisions of the Government income policies. The duty of the tribunal is simply to settle industrial disputes within a defined framework and not to make law or policy. He cited that in 1978, the Federal Government in a policy abolished the granting of car loan directly by an employer from its own resources but the employer may guarantee the employee to go to bank for such a loan. The Civil Service Union took the matter to the IAP in 1980 and the panel changed Government policy by ruling that the old system of direct car loans be maintained, thus changing a fundamental labour policy of the country. The same award was later confirmed by the National Industrial Court.

Agomo (1995) supports the view of Aturu (2001) when she noted that apart from delay in making awards, there is also delay in confirmation of awards sent to the Minister. Furthermore, the procedural provision whereby power is centered on the Minister constitutes an inherent weakness on the system and makes the IAP look like a government organ. However, apart from some shortcomings, IAP is seen as making contributions to industrial peace in the country by acting as a bridge across the wide gap between labour and management. If notice of objection to the award of the panel is given to the Minister within seven days from the release to the parties, the Minister is obliged

to refer the dispute to the National Industrial Court (NIC) for adjudication.

Ways of managing organizational conflict

Overall conflict management should aim to minimize affective conflicts at all levels, attain and maintain a moderate amount of substantive conflict, and use the appropriate conflict management strategy, to effectively bring about the first two goals, and also to match the status and concerns of the two parties in conflict (Rahim, 2001).

In order for conflict management strategies to be effective, they should satisfy certain criteria. The criteria below are particularly useful for not only conflict management, but also decision making in management.

- **Organization learning and effectiveness:** In order to attain this objective, conflict management strategies should be designed to enhance critical and innovative thinking to learn the process of diagnosis and intervention in the right problems.
- **Needs of stakeholders:** Sometimes multiple parties are involved in a conflict in an organization and the challenge of conflict management would be to involve these parties in a problem solving process that will lead to collective learning and organizational effectiveness, organizations should institutionalize the positions of employee advocate, customer and supplier advocate, as well as environmental and stockholder advocates.
- **Ethics:** A wise leader must behave ethically, and to do so the leader should be open to new information and be willing to change his or her mind. By the same token, subordinates and other stakeholders have an ethical duty to speak out against the decisions of supervisors when consequences of these decisions are likely to be serious. Without an understanding of ethics, conflict cannot be handled.

Steps to managing conflict

Maccoby & Studder (2011) posit that the first step is reactionary by assessing and reacting to the conflict. The second step is proactive by determining how the employee reacted to the decision. The manager tries to take (create) a new approach, and once again tries to discern how the employee reacts. Once the manager feels that the best decision for the organization has been chosen, and the employee feels justified, then the manager decides if this is a single case conflict, or one that should be written as policy. The entire process starts as a reactive situation but then moves towards a proactive decision. It is based on obtaining an outcome that best fits the organization, but emphasizes the perception of justice for the employee. Maccoby & Studder (2011) identify five steps to managing conflict

1. **Anticipate:** Take time to obtain information that can lead to conflict.
2. **Prevent:** Develop strategies before the conflict occurs.
3. **Identify:** If it is interpersonal or procedural, move to quickly manage it.
4. **Manage:** Remember that conflict is emotional
5. **Resolve:** React, without blame, and you will learn through dialogue.

They also have degrees of conflict management style.

1. **Integrating** involves opening up, creating dialogue, and exploring differences to choose an effective solution for both groups. This style is positively associated with individual and organizational outcomes (Rahim, 2001).
2. **Obliging** tries to find the same interests of the parties, while trying to minimize the true feeling of the conflict, to satisfy the other party.
3. **Dominating** is a coercive manager who forces their own way.
4. **Avoiding** is ignoring the problem in hopes that it will go away.
5. **Compromising** is a manager that is willing to make concessions and the employee makes concessions for a mutual agreement.

Observations

Based on the literature explored, the study observed the following findings;

- i **Effective conflict management strategies** are crucial for the attainment and achievement of organizational goals and objectives. In other words, if the management is not knowledgeable in conflict resolution strategies, it will affect the performance of organizations negatively but if conflict is constructively managed, it will enhance organizational performance.

- ii Effective conflicts resolution strategies ensures good communication, time management, cooperation and increase organizational performance.
- iii Conflict resolution strategy lessen disruptions in production activities and enhances improved quality of services.
- iv Conflict resolution strategy helps to better good interpersonal relationship between management and staff and reduces late coming, absenteeism and poor attitude of an employee towards work.
- v Management should encourage and promote interpersonal relationships among co-workers to improve on their morale
- vi That Poor Communication is a major cause of Conflict.
- vii That possible ways of handling Conflict situation in an Organization is by Constant dialogue.
- viii That Management must adopt Conflict Management strategies that will improve on the Performance of the Organization.
- ix Good leadership on the part of management and employee representatives can be a strategy for preventing conflicts.
- x Finally, efforts should be made by the management to organize seminars/workshops on organizational conflict management from time to time for the employees. This will enable employees learn about conflict and how it can be effectively managed for individual and organization effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

Good conflict management techniques will greatly improves decision outcomes and high profile of productivity. Effective management strategies in conflict resolution will boost good communication, time management, cooperation and organizational productivity. Conflict in an organization is inevitable in as much as both management and workers want to maximize their goals. Conflict resolution strategy assists in reducing negativity and increases positivity in the work place. Since a good conflict improve decision outcomes and ensure group productivity when properly managed, it also create additional channels of communication with employees as means of obtaining prompt feedback on organizational policies, so that conflicting interest will not arise. The researchers rightly conclude that if the organisation can effectively and efficiently manage conflict within its operation, this will lead to high level of organisational performance which will result into achievement of the organisational goals and objectives. Successfully managing conflict has a domino effect, allowing managers to create a workplace where employees can thrive. Further studies, therefore, becomes imperative to identify good conflicts and how managers can use them to improve organizational performance. Also, a methodological work is required to analyze how interpersonal conflicts affect organization performance. Future researches should also examine conflict resolution in service-oriented and nonservice oriented organization; employees-employees and management-employees conflict and its effect on productivity of organization. Lastly, there is the need for research that would ascertain the moderating effects of gender, leadership style and personality traits on the relationships between conflict management strategies and productivity.

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