

Effective Conflict Management: Panacea to Organisational Harmony, HR Togetherness, Team Work and Increase Productivity

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Abstract

This paper looks at the possibilities that effective management of conflict in organisations can bring about team work, togetherness, increase productivity and sustainable growth and development 21st century organisations. In any functional organisations, conflicts occur at different levels and their management and resolution are one of the important issues that need a lot of time and energy on the part of managers and stakeholders. On the other hand, in current management conditions, however, the occurrence of conflicts is an inevitable organisational fact and it is the managers who should undertake to manage the organisations toward sustainability and progress. Therefore, managers must have efficient information and knowledge about how to deal with conflicts. Conflict is everywhere. Every relationship has conflict. It exists inside us. It exists around us. It is natural and inevitable part of all human relationships. It occurs at all levels of the society. According to new approaches to organisation and management, however, conflict is inevitable and a certain level of conflict is inexorable for organisational effectiveness. Due to its nature, an organisation is a fertile ground for the growth and development of conflicts and disagreements. Negotiation therefore, is one of the techniques that a manager can use. In spite of many studies carried out by scholars and practitioners in the area of conflict management over the years, much still need to be done about conflict management and resolutions and factors affecting it. This paper is builds on previous theoretical and empirical studies to determine the extent to which contextual factors and effective conflict management impact on organisational harmony, HR team work, and productivity. The author concludes that sound management of conflict aids proactive and sustainable growth and development in 21st century organisations.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Organisational Harmony, HR Togetherness, Team Work, Increase Productivity, Sustained Growth and Development.

Introduction

"Successful careers are not planned. They develop when people are prepared for opportunities because they know their strengths, their method of work, and their values. Knowing where one belongs can transform an ordinary person-hardworking and competent but otherwise mediocre-into an outstanding performer" Peter Drucker.

To fully comprehend the rationale behind this paper, there is need for one to be acquainted with the concepts of conflict and conflict management. And, in this paradigm, therefore, there is also the need to understand that conflict is everywhere. That, every relationship has conflict. It exists inside us. It exists around us. It is natural and inevitable part of all human

relationships. It occurs at all levels of society-intrapsychic, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, intranational and international (Sandole & Staroste, 1987). In today's business environment, however, workplace conflict is a significant issue. Conflict is ubiquitous at all levels of human social relationships. Conflict is largely a perceived phenomenon. It is our perception of the situation that determines if a conflict exists. Conflict may be either healthy or unhealthy. Moreover, it should not be taken as the opposite of order. Though, there is orderliness in conflict yet it can be disorderly. Research in conflict management discipline, thus, states that conflict in the workplace is on the increase and will continue to go up. However, many organisational leaders and managers are not fully aware of the structures and processes available to manage it. Improper diagnosis of conflict and ineffective resolutions can cause devastating effects to the smooth running of an organisation.

Organisations in this century are constantly changing in order to improve their competitive position, but this does not, of course, mean that our organisations are learning to manage conflict more effectively. Scholars, managers and administrators attempt not so much to understand and deal with conflict functionally as to find ways of reducing, avoiding, or terminating it. It appears that this state of affairs has remained unchanged. As a result, valuable resources are wasted as employees engage in dysfunctional conflict and miss the opportunity of utilising functional conflict to improve their effectiveness.

Conflict Defined

Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or action of one or more members of the group are either by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict is everywhere. Every relationship has conflict. It exists inside us. It exists around us. It is natural and inevitable part of all human relationships. It occurs at all levels of society-intrapsychic, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, intranational and international (Sandole & Staroste, 1987). Conflict is ubiquitous at all levels of human social relationships. Some social scientists have given conflict a bad reputation by linking it with psychopathology, social disorder and war (Burton, 1990). Conflict is not deviant or sick behaviour. Social scientists need to analyse the level and the type of the conflict in order to understand the phenomenon.

Conflict is largely a perceived phenomenon. It is our perception of the situation that determines if a conflict exists. Conflict may be either healthy or unhealthy. Moreover, it should not be taken as the opposite of order. Though, there is orderliness in conflict yet it can be disorderly. No two persons in the world are absolutely the same or absolutely different. Therefore, no two persons can feel or think alike. The difference between thinking of different people causes conflict. The parties in conflict believe they have incompatible goals, and their aim is to neutralise, gain advantage over, injure or destroy one another.

According to Michael Armstrong (2010), conflict is inevitable in organisations because the goals, needs and values of groups and individuals do not always coincide. In the same vein,

however, conflict may be a sign of healthy organisation. Bland agreement on everything would be unnatural and enervating.

Conflict is the root of personal and social change. Hence, the organisations have conflict because of its ever-changing environment. Conflict prevents stagnation. It stimulates interest and curiosity. Conflict management is very popular in business schools today. The role of the administrator or a manager in an organisation is to handle day-to-day conflict in the allocation of limited resources.

Internal and external causes or sources may predispose parties in a work place to conflict orientations. Internally industrial conflicts originate basically from the opposed nature of the interests of the employer(s) and employee(s). On other hand, government, industrial and economic policies are in the nature of labour legislation, the behaviour of political and economic classes of industrial conflicts.

Industrial conflicts manifest in various forms. It may take the form of strike, palliating, boycotts, overtime ban, intimidation and lockout, depending on prevailing circumstances. Although, each of the above variety of industrial conflicts/disputes and actions have firm consequences on the productivity of an organisation. The strike action remains the most unpalatable and potent weapon in the arsenal of labour-this however, has become a potent weapon by the Nigeria Labour Congress for decades, particularly, ASUU, NMA, etc. This explains in part, why to the ordinary person, industrial conflict and strike are synonymous. A strike or lockout, when in force signifies a complete breakdown of collective bargaining through most labour-management conflict in workplace. Conflicts are considered tractable. Creative management effort is still required to avert the adverse effect that this may portends for the achievement of organisational goals.

Conflict management is the method that drives organisational conflicts toward organisational objectives and diminishes its non-functional aspects while enhancing the functional aspects (Jones, 2000). Overall, there are five ways to react to conflict, referred to as conflict management styles, and usually each person is dominant in one of these styles (Hurnang & Vertim, 2002). The aim of conflict management however, is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organisational setting. Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes while Conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. Five styles of conflict management as identified by Thomas and Kilmann are: Competing, Compromising, Collaborating, Avoiding and Accommodating (Technical brief for the Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode CPP research department 2007). Conflict can arise at any time. How you utilise conflict resolution strategies depends on both your conflict style and your conflict resolution skills. There are many different ways to respond to conflict situations; some conflict styles involve a considerate or cooperative approach while others involve either a competitive or passive approach.

Organisational Conflict

Organisational conflict is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of

needs, values and interest between people working together. Conflict takes many forms in organisation. Gretzhov (2006) suggested two (2) dimensions of conflict which are useful for managing conflict; one consisting of disagreement relating to task issues and the other consisting of emotional or interpersonal issues which leads to conflict. These two dimensions of conflict have been given a variety of labels, example, substantive and affective conflicts.

Every organisation encounters conflicts on a daily basis. The conflicts cannot be avoided, but it is possible to manage them via a way that we recognised them on time. It is necessary to continuously track the organisational signal which point to the existence. If it is not controlled, can lead to the situation that the conflict itself manages the organisation. One of the most important determinants of productivity is Efficiency and Performance. Job Containment is also the conflict as an independent variable of organisational behaviour.

Conflict is an everyday phenomenon in each organisation. Conflicts are impossible to avoid but it is possible to manage them in a way that will recognise the conflict symptoms on time. It is necessary to also to continuously track the organisational signals which point to their existence. Problems mostly occurs in those organisation where the business results directly depend on collaboration, team work and creativity, and were having only the result in mind, we tend to forget to take care of people and mutual relationship.

Disagreement which occurs within goals, interest or values of various individuals or group are incompatible, and those people block each other's efforts for accomplishing goals is called organisational conflict. Reduction of work performance efficiency reduces communication amongst employees, motivational failure and ultimate employees' dissatisfaction are only some of the numerous negative consequences of conflict. But conflict itself does not have to be negative.

The majority of conflicts can, in fact, be an excellent ground for accomplishment of better business results and an impulse for changes and growth of the organisation itself. Duly recognition and adequate conflict management can lead to series of positive effect like stimulation of creativity and innovation within the company, stimulation of changes towards work quality improvement, reduction of incurred tensions, etc.

Theories and Models of Conflict Resolution

According to this model, group members balance their concern for satisfying personal needs and interests with their concern for satisfying the needs and interest of others in different ways. The intersection point between these two dimensions ultimately leads individuals towards exhibiting different styles of conflict resolutions. The dual mode identifies five conflict resolution styles/strategies that individual may use, depending on their dispositions towards pro-self or pro-social goals.

- **Avoidance conflict style:** characterised by inaction and passivity. Avoidance conflict style is typically used when an individual has reduced concern for their own outcomes as well as the outcomes of others. During conflict, these avoids adopt a "wait and see" attitude often allowing conflicts to phase out on its own without any personal

involvement unfortunately by neglecting to address high-conflict situations, avoiding risk and allowing problems to feaster out of control.

- **Yielding conflicts styles:** In contrast, yielding or “accommodating” conflict styles are characterised by a high concern for others while having a low concern for one’s own self. This passive pro-social approach emerges when individuals derives personal satisfaction from meeting the needs of others and have a general concern for maintaining stable, positive social relationships when faced with conflict, and individuals with yielding conflict style tend to give others demands out of respect for the social relationship (e.g. to maintain group unity) because they believe being agreeable may be more important than winning.
- **Competitive conflict style:** competitive or fighting conflict style maximises individual assertiveness and minimises empathy. Groups consisting of competitive members generally enjoy seeking dominating over others and typically see conflict as a win or lose predicament, power tactics (e.g. argue, insult: accuse (violence) that foster feelings of intimidation.
- **Cooperation conflict style:** characterised by an active concern for both pro-self behaviours, cooperation conflict style is typically used when an individual has elevated interest in their own outcomes as well as in the outcomes of others. During conflict, co-operators collaborate with others in an effort to find an amicable solution that satisfies all parties involved in the conflict. Individual with this type of conflict style tend to be highly assertive and highly empathetic at the same time. By seeing conflict as a creative opportunity, collaborators willingly invest time and resource into finding a “win-win” solution.
- **Conciliation conflict style:** Conciliation or “compromising” conflict style is typical of individual who possesses an intermediate level of concern for both personal and others’ outcomes. Compromisers value fairness and in doing so, anticipate mutual give – and – take interactions.

Causes of Industrial Crisis

It is difficult if not impossible to give a comprehensive account of the cause of conflict in an organisation. The following could be identified as some of the causes of organisation conflict.

- **Absence of real collection bargaining:** Organisational conflict management is bond to occur if no real collective bargaining takes place or if employees are denied the opportunity of making their grievances known. Even in a situation where collective bargaining takes place but the collective agreement is not strictly adhered to by both parties, conflict is still bound to occur.
- **Rise in expectation:** It is a common knowledge that even in situation where union’s attitude is geared towards maintaining organisation peace, conflict still occur due to expectations. Union leaders/members become apprehensive in the face of rising

inflation in the economy when their take home pay becomes insufficient to take care of their immediate problems. When there is high cost of living, it becomes difficult for workers to survive without a commensurate rise in their wages and fringes benefits. Naturally, workers will result to agitating for better remuneration and if not properly managed, conflict is bound to occur.

- **Lack of understanding and accommodation:** Conflict could occur when either management or union takes stronger and perhaps philippic positions on any issue at stake. This does not mean that either parties should lose its convictions. What is essential here is the ability to understand and accommodate the position of either party. One can, however, adhere to its principles without necessarily being dogmatic. By critical and objective examination of the position of the other party, one may be adhered to finding out certain merits in the views shared by other party.
- **Management/union relationship:** Issues such as alleged victimisation of union members by management, non-recognition of unions, involvement of management in the internal affairs of the union's affairs, and lack of cooperation with union by refusing meetings causes rises of conflict in an organisation.
- **Differentiation:** Conflicts at unisex are caused mainly by differentiation. Differentiation occurs when people holds divergent beliefs and attitude due to their unique backgrounds, experience or training. For example, unisex partner have divergent technical background so they tend to see problems in a particular way and have difficult in understanding each other perspective. Organisation unwillingly fuel conflict by hiring people for their technical knowledge and encourage them to become even more specialised.
- **Goal incompatibility:** A common source of conflict is goal incompatibility. As the name implies, goal incompatibility occurs when people or work units have goals that interfere with each other financial rewards. In goal incompatibility, parties explain why conflict occurs between production staff and production managers in a given organisation. Analysts tries to provide objectives and independent advice to managers regarding whether certain raw materials should be purchase or sold.
- **Task interdependence:** This is the degree to which team members must share common inputs. Interact in the process of executing their work or receive outcome is being determined by their mutual performance. Conflict leads to increase in the level of task interdependence. The greater the risk of conflict will disrupt or interfere with the other side's goals.
- **Scarce resources:** Scarce resources generate conflict because scarcity motivates people to compete with others who also have deficiency in the resource need to achieve their stated goals/objectives. This occurs in companies that produce the same kind of product.
- **Ambiguity:** Ambiguity breeds conflicts because the uncertainty increases the risk that one party intends to interfere with the other party's goals. Ambiguity also

encourage political tactics and, in some cases, employees enter a free for all battle to win decision in their favour; when rule exist on other hand, everyone knows what to expect from each other and have agreed to abide by those rules.

- **Communication problem:** Conflict often occurs due to lack of opportunity, ability or motivation to communicate effectively. For example, when two parties lack opportunity to communicate, they tend to use stereotype to explain behaviours and anticipate future actions.

Dispute Resolution System Design

- Establish a process for making decisions about new or enhanced dispute resolution processes.
- Identify and diagnose the causes of recurring ORG conflicts and effectiveness of existing dispute handling procedures.
- Examine the range of options for additional procedures or revisions of existing procedures.
- Select or revise conflict resolution procedures, considering the corporate culture and the kinds of disputes that arise.
- Organise the selected procedures in a comprehensive conflict management system.
- Seek support from key organisational constituencies and secure approval for the proposed new system.
- Develop a plan for implementing the new system and promoting its use. Train personnel to administer the system and to provide specific services, such as mediation.
- Create a process for quality control, feedback and refinement of the system.

Approaches to Conflict Resolution

According to M. Armstrong (2010), Ware & Barnes (1991) identified the following methods of resolving conflict.

- **Withdrawal:** Either party may withdraw, leaving the other one to hold the field. This is the classic win/lose situation or zero-sum game. The winner may be triumphant but the loser will be to aggrieved and either demotivated or resolved to fight another day. There will have been a lull in the conflict, but not an end to it.
- **Smooth out differences:** Pretend the conflict does not exist, although no attempt has been made to tackle the root causes. Again, this is unsatisfactory. The issue is likely to re-emerge and the battle will recommence.
- **Bargaining:** An attempt may be made to reach a compromise through bargaining. This means that both sides are prepared to lose as well as win some points, and the aim is to reach a solution acceptable to both sides, however, bargaining involves all sorts of tactical and often counter-productive games, and the parties are often more anxious to seek acceptable compromises than to achieve sound solutions.

- **Preventing interaction:** Conflict is controlled by keeping people apart so that, although the differences still exist, those involved have the chance to cool down and consider more constructive approaches. But this may only be a temporary expedient, and the eventual confrontation could be even more explosive.
- **Structuring interaction:** Ground rules are developed to deal with the issues. But this may also be a temporary expedient if the strong underlying feelings are only suppressed rather than resolved.
- **Personal counselling:** This may give the parties a chance to release pent-up feelings and encourage them to think about new ways of resolving the conflict. But it might not deal with the essential nature of the conflict, which is the relationship between two people.
- **Constructive confrontation:** This is a method of bringing the conflicting individuals together. Ideally, with a third party whose function is to help build an exploratory and cooperative climate by getting them to understand and explore the other's perception and feelings. The issues will be confronted but by means of a joint analysis of factors relating to the situation and the behaviour of those involved. Feelings will be expressed but they will be analysed by reference to specific events rather than inferences or speculation about motives.

What is Negotiation?

Negotiation is a way to resolve conflicts or disagreements or divide resources among two or more parties, carried out willingly by free choice. The two sides make contact for suggestions and counter suggestions and in this manner, however, communication takes place between the parties. Each side employs its own tactics in an effort to reach maximum results. Negotiations can be conducted on all topics, except ethics and religion. Negotiations take place daily, whether on a conscious or subconscious level. The stages in negotiation are: preparation, presentation and justification, bargaining, offers and counter-offers, using various tactics, and in conclusion – choosing an option or agreement. The risk in conducting negotiations is that there is no guarantee of successful results and often the hopes of the parties influence their tactics and the outcome of the negotiations.

Types and Models of Negotiation

- **One-time negotiation:** a single, unprecedented occurrence, which offers maximum success in minimum time and yields predictable result in which one or the other party wins and the other loses. There are no expectations for further implications on relations in the future and total attention is focused on successful resolution of the issue at hand.
- **Continuous negotiations** are conducted in the framework of ongoing relationship, such as partners, supplier-client, etc. This type of negotiation is characterised by bearing the influence of experience and the nature of former relationship between

the parties. Additionally, it carries each side's expectations for the future, replete with emotional involvement accumulated over the years, which could lead to more conciliatory behaviour on the part of both sides. Even in a case where no agreement is reached, there is an opening for a possible chance in the future when both parties have enough motivation, which might enable them to reach a resolution, and satisfactory to all. It is desirable to conclude in a win/win situation; otherwise, the disappointed party will often find ways to violate the agreement, or worse, take measures to inflict hurt on the other party.

- **Direct negotiation** whereby continuous personal and direct contact between the involved parties exists. The advantage in this case is also the disadvantage. In other words, the two parties meet with one another directly and see the others' behaviour.
- **Indirect negotiation** takes place in the presence of representatives or mediators. The problem here lies in the vested interests of the mediators, which might be different from those of the party they are representing. There are different acceptable attitudes towards the accepted negotiation style. Cultural differences are reflected in negotiating styles, for instance, direct, egalitarian, authoritarian or blunt (Lebaron, 2003). Approach to the time dimension may differ regarding such aspects as punctuality, adhering to schedules, and the way in which the negotiation is conducted. In principle, there are no fixed rules for conducting negotiations, or for reaching successful outcomes, since there is no negotiation that is identical to another. Intuition or experience is not sufficient, although experience can be helpful in leading the negotiations to a successful outcome.

Conclusion

Conflict is inevitable in today's personal and organisational life and appears in different forms including: interpersonal, interpersonal, intra-group, inter-group and inter-organisational. Despite the common negative perception of conflict, it is not necessarily a negative phenomenon and an average level of conflict could raise the performance level of an organisation. What is important in the context is on how to cope and deal with it.

In addition, for effective conflict resolution system, managers should first analyse it and then use various techniques that are used for conflict resolution such as negotiation, mediation and arbitration, and the like. Among these techniques, therefore, negotiation can help to solve conflicts more effectively than the others and allows the manager and management to handle conflicts more efficiently. Since the manager participates in a joint decision-making process of negotiation to handle the conflict, he will not be accused of favouring certain individuals or parties. In addition, there is an interactive dialogue between the two sides in negotiations and both sides can speak for the sake of their interests in the process and finally reach a joint, mutual and timely decision. This, in a way, implies that if negotiations are implemented effectively and efficiently, and if ethical issues are observed in them, they can be more effective and more successful than the other methods of conflict resolution. In the final analysis, therefore, managing conflict is a matter of resolving the

issues that create disappointment, whether it arises between groups (inter-group conflict) or between individuals.

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