Conflicts and Its Management In An Organisation: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract- This paper examines conflict and its management in an organization. The approach adopted is theoretical as it assesses based on extant literature. Functional and dysfunctional conflicts were examined as well as five styles or techniques of conflict management. The generality of view and theory that supports conflict indicates that the style to be adopted depends largely on the situation. The paper concludes that conflict is inevitable in all aspect of life especially in an organization. It recommends employees awareness in accepting and appreciating the differences in perceptions and behaviour of individual within organization, in order to foster cordial relationship between individuals, groups and the organization for attainment of goals and objectives.

Index Terms- Conflict, conflict management, functional and dysfunctional conflict, organization

I. INTRODUCTION

In every organization, conflicts are bound to happen. Conflict is a common phenomenon that creates problem as a result of disputes, misunderstanding, grievances, discontent and disagreement of management and workers in a workplace. This has resulted in a lot of activities which sometimes is contrary to both organization's and employee's aim and objectives. Conflict is a healthy part of every relationship which can exist in the form of individual, inter-personal and intergroup conflicts (Obi, 2012). This is because two or more persons can't be expected to agree on the same thing at every given period in time. Organisational conflict is a specific type of conflict that occurs in the workplace. Cloke and Goldsmith (2011), posits that most executives, managers and employees face conflicts on a daily or weekly basis, spending from 20 percent to as much as 80 percent of their working hours trying to resolve or contain it. It is an inevitable part of our workday life that can be caused by many factors, such as different values, beliefs, opinions, and points of view

Diez and Albert (2006) connotes that conflicts denotes the incompatibility of subject positions. This definition emphasizes the opposition or incompatibility at the heart of the conflict, and initially leaves open the exact nature of these incompatibilities, i.e. whether they are interpersonal, intrapersonal, intergroup, intragroup or inter-organisational positions; whether they rest in different interests or beliefs; or whether they have a material existence or come into being only through discourse.

Given this initial definition, conflict is not always characterised by violence. Yet, conflict might escalate and lead to destructive results, in particular, in the form of physical violence that is increasingly seen as legitimate as conflict intensifies. However, conflict can also lead to a new idea, innovation, social or political organisation and therefore be productive if the parties involved are able to deal with their incompatibilities so that such a new idea, innovation or organisational form is achieved.

Nevertheless, there is no meaningful development that can take place outside conflict. For instance in Nigeria, according to sun news, February 27th, 2020, the academic staff union of universities –ASUU has had varying level of disagreement with the federal government over the non-payment of proposed and agreed salaries, non-provision of some infrastructures in the universities and the refusal of some universities lecturers to get registered on the salary integrated payroll and personnel information system (IPPIS). Disagreements between the union and the federal government over poor funding, the proliferation of state universities and non-implementation of previous agreement. When this disagreement is resolved, better understanding as well as better welfare package will be reached which in turns gives rise to a healthier society and patriotic citizenry. Also, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC) had also been in disagreements with the Federal Government over minimum wage. This disagreement has birthed an increment to thirty thousand naira minimum wage.

Conflicts need to be managed and resolved effectively. It is not only important to resolve the conflict, but also is equally important to ensure that the parties involved in conflict do not unnecessarily end up being in any kind of emotional stress during the resolution process of the conflict. Resolving conflict and maintaining the emotional wellbeing of people involved will be critical to successful conflict management. Hence, it is important to understand clearly, what the conflict is, why conflict occurs, challenges in conflicts management and various methods for resolving conflicts.

There are different views on conflicts. The traditional view says all conflicts are bad and must be totally avoided or discouraged (Robbins 2005), the human relations view sees conflict as a something that comes naturally and cannot be avoided in any group, this means that conflict is something that's always

in any organization, and it cannot be done without. The third view of conflict is that of the interactionist which explains that conflicts are necessary for group to perform effectively. This suggests that conflicts can be constructive and good and different ways of thinking should be encouraged to get multiple ideas and solutions to problems in hand (Townsend, 1985). Another school of thought is the integrationist, their view highlights that conflicts should not only be seen as good or bad but as something that is really necessary for a group to function effectively (De & Van, 2010). This view of conflict agrees with the interactionist view of conflict. Thus, conflict management should be approached with the idea that conflicts can be good for the team. So for effective conflict management, there is a need for creating a right atmosphere which empowers people to think originally and encourages them to put forth their suggestions and opinions without fear because when properly managed, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between people, organisations and the society at large.

Conflict management refers to techniques to resolve conflicts in the organization to facilitate organisational goals and objectives. Thus, if the conflict does not hinder attainment of goals and objectives, it is not considered conflict. It is only when it mars the objectives of the organisation / workplace that it becomes a conflict. However, many studies have been carried out on conflict and conflict management but there is a dearth in literature regarding conflicts in organisations within Nigeria context.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
CONFLICT THEORY

Conflict theory as propounded by Karl Max focuses on the competition between groups within society over limited resources. It views social and economic institutions as tools of the struggle between groups or classes, used to maintain inequality and the dominance of the ruling class. A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within society will work to maximize their own benefits. The theory revolves around concepts of social inequality in the division of resources and focuses on the conflicts that exist between classes. Social structures are created through conflict between people with differing interests and resources. Individuals and resources, in turn, are influenced by these structures and by the unequal distribution of power and resources in the society (Knapp, 1994).

Conflict according to Hocker and Wilmot (2013) is a struggle between two or more persons who feel that there is incompatibilities in their goals, limited resources and intrusion from others in getting their desired goals.

Robbins (2005) sees conflict as a product of perception in the sense that another person perceives that what he/she cares about is being negatively affected or about to be negatively affected. This definition reiterates that conflict is all about perceptions and not necessarily real facts. It sees conflict as an emotional phenomenon. To Tschannen-Moran (2001), conflict refers to a kind of struggle, disagreement, or quarrels between persons or within the context of a group, when one person's belief or values are not accepted to another person, party or group.. Conflict pinpoint to the contrary ideas and actions of different parties which results in a state of friction. According to Doherty

and Guyler (2008) conflict is seen as a person's attempt over values and for attaining status, resources and power and in bringing down the goals of their opponents. It arises in the situations which are mapped by goals and emotions that are not reconcilable, and these things happens within or between individuals or groups and this leads to unfriendly or fierce interaction. A form of interactions between the persons, groups and parties who have differences in their likes, loves and values and their approach towards their desired goals is named conflict (Madiya and Shazia, 2015). Conflict is bound to happen in any organizations, it should not be a thing of surprise to witness conflicting thoughts, ideas, values and actions in organizations, , communities, associations, workgroups, family and in relationship (Janasz De, Dowd & Schneider, 2009). Conflict in nutshell is a struggle between people when they perceive that their interest is over ridden or when they perceive that their emotions are not being considered. It is when this struggle affects the attainment of set goals and or objectives that it becomes organisational conflict.

III.   TYPES OF CONFLICT

Madiha and Shazia (2015) assert that there are two types of conflict. A conflict can be either positive or negative. Positive conflict is functional and supports or benefits the organizations or person's main objective (Oucho, 2002).   A conflict is dysfunctional or negative when it obstructs the organization or the person's performance or ability to attain goals or objectives (Baker, 2011). The effects conflicts has on the organization and goals attainment will determine whether it is good or bad. Thus, the need to highlights their differences.

Functional or Constructive Conflict: Kinicki and Kreithner (2008) buttresses that the interactionist view does not suppose that all conflicts are bad. Rather, some conflicts may be necessary because they improve performance and also support the goals of organisations. This supports Robbin (2001) definition of functional conflict as one that enhances the goal congruence and ameliorates the performance of a group. Their point is that conflict that encourages healthy competition within groups results in better performance of work and higher productivity is beneficial to the organization.

One of the main advantages of this type of conflict is that it enables their members to identify the problems and see opportunities. Also, it can inspire to creating new ideas, learning, and growth among individuals (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2008). Thus, it is pertinent to understand that a functional conflict endorses the goals of the organization and improves performance. A functional conflict brings about innovation, it enables the group to look inward which could help new ideas to be birthed.

Dysfunctional/Destructive Conflict: Conflicts that are not effectively managed is capable of destroying the goals of an organization. When conflicts hinders the expected performance of a group, individuals or parties, it is termed destructive or dysfunctional (Kinicki and Kreithner, 2008). This type of conflict may interfere with ideas exchange and then ruin relationship. Hence, dysfunctional conflict does not allow organizational goals to be achieved, thereby leading to under utilization of resources and reduced productivity. This conflict type is reflected in situations such as (a) when individuals who are competing allows their interests to override the goals of the business, (b) when

managers withhold information from one another (c) employees sabotaging others' work, either intentionally or subtly (Kinicki and Kreitner, 2008).

IV. STYLES/TECHNIQUE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT.

A conflict arises when the values, needs, goals or interest of parties involved intermeddle with one another. As long as wworkplace is concerned, this cannot be avoide.the reason is because different stakeholders to the organization have different precedence. More likely than not, a conflict gives rise to opportunities for improvement. It is therefore pertinent to understand and employ various conflict management styles or techniques suitable for different scenario. This is because personality and situational factor influences the choice of styles to be adopted.

In the study of Madiya and Shazia (2015), Black and Mouton were one of the first to present a mode for analyzing how people react to interpersonal conflict situations. This mode describes managers responses to conflict management within an organization. Five modes or styles were described in their model They include; forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving (Black & Scimecca, 1998). Other authors identified two other ways mangers can respond to conflicts in addition to the five modes identified by Black and Mouton, they include: the passive-aggressive and the forcing styles (Robinson 2010; Pruitt and Robin, 1986).

Three other group of researchers such as Blake and Mouton (1974), Kilmann and Thomas (1978), and Rahim and Bonoma (1979) describes five important styles that can influence the management of conflicts. These styles are viewed as the pattrens people behave and respond to situations. These styles are considered foremost in the context of conflict management regardless of the change in job environments, these unique styles give a hint of how people manage conflicts in their daily lives (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001). There are five modes offered as a solution to managing conflict that are assessed on a scale of assertiveness and cooperativeness. Assertiveness is the extent an individual attempts to satisfy his own concern while cooperativeness is the extent of trying to satisfy the other parties. These modes/styles are as opined by Mouton Blake are collaboration, competing, accommodating, avoiding and compromising.

V. COMPETITING

Competing is a style of managing conflict that comes to play when a person considers his or her own right to be more important than that of others. When conflicting issue becomes important in order to give priority to one's opinion or idea, this approach is preferred. This style can degenerate to the extent that the loser may want to retaliate having being dominated by the other party (Strong, Devault & Cohen, 2008). A Competing individual is assertive and uncooperative, he is power crazy. He does not consider the interest of others but f self at other person's expense. He does anything he considers right to win his position. Competing can take the form of defending one's right and or

position the person feels is right or correct. This individual always wants to win at all cause (Kilmann and Thomas, 2010).

VI. ACCOMODATING

This style is depicted by a high degree of unassertiveness and cooperativeness. This style is adopted by those that use the mediations of other parties to manage conflict. (Yuan, 2007). Accommodating style is displayed in a situation when someone shows more concern for another party's interest more than his/hers. This style is aadopted when the cause of the conflict is of more importance to the other party or parties involved than oneself. The aim of using this style is to allow the other party to win while you lose. Individuals with passive behaviour are found to use this style of conflict management and resolution (Verderber & Sellnow, 2012). According to Kraybill (2005), this style harmonizes the responses of conflict. This style focuses more on the relationship rather than the agenda. Those who use this style do so in order to fit in with other group or parties and it becomes overused, the individual may become depressed as a result of giving up things that are of importance to him.

VII. COMPROMISING

This style of conflict management falls in the middle between assertiveness and cooperativeness. This has to do with winning a little and losing a little in order to reach an agreement after negotiation (Yuan, 2007). It gives rise to I-win a little and I-lose a little section to come to a compromise. Individual who use this style change their own opinion in order to avoid continuous confrontation or because they foung enough and cogent reason to do so (Lussier, 2010; Reich, Wagner-Westbrook, Kressel, 2007; Tidd, Friedman, Currall and Tsai, 2000). Compromising involve parties sacrificing something and keeping something. Its objective is to find an expedient and joint result that satisfies both parties halfway. Another name given to this style is sharing and dividing the difference (Barki & Hartwick, 2001). This style is preferred when goals of parties involved are averagely important and the use of competing or collaborating style has not been successful. According to Schyns & Hansbrough (2010), compromising is achieved when those involved sacrifices part of their interest, views, ideas and idiosyncrasies to deal with conflict situations. This compromising style shows an average concern for one's own interest and an average concern for the interests of others involved. This style is preferable when a temporary solution is needed to quickly resolve conflict situations to avoid the struggle for power. Morris-Rothschild and Brassard (2006) did a study on Teachers' conflict management styles, their findings revealed that most of the teachers adopted the compromising conflict management style.

VIII. AVOIDING

Avoiding can be seen to be a passive conflict management style. This style is depicted by a high degree of unassertiveness and uncooperativeness. It is the opposite of collaborating conflict management style. Here, a person tends to run away or disregards the conflict. This style is depicted by a person having low or little concern for the right of others as well as his (Nelson & Campbell,

2008). An avoiding individual does not show concern for the right of others neither does he show concern for his own right. He practically runs away from the conflict and does not take responsibility for conflict situations. Another name for this style according to Barki and Hartwick's (2001) are escaping, withdrawing, apathy and evading. Rahim, Antonioni and Psenicka, (2001) also posits that people who supports this style tend to ignore or disregard conflict. Avoidance style is prevalent in Asian culture. The Chinese culture adopts this style to preserve and nurture relationship and a harmonious situation (Huang, 1999).

Friedmann, Tidd, Curraland and Tsai (2000) studied the impact of personal conflict style on work and how it might be related to stress. They found that individuals who adopt this style of managing conflict had a higher levels of task and relationship conflict and resulting in high level of stress.

Chan, Monroe, Ng and Tan (2006) did a research on conflict management styles among junior accountants, their findings reveals that females are disposes to avoiding conflict more than their male counterparts. Also, males were more likely to adopt a dominating conflict style than the female junior accountant.

IX. COLLABORATION

The collaboration style of conflict management is depicted by high degree of assertiveness and cooperation. It is the bringing together of ideas to achieve the best solutions in a conflict situation. The best solution is reached through a creative process that is generated from the inputs of other parties involved. This method may be considered to be the best since resolution is achieved through cooperation of parties involved (Haridas as cited by Oachesu 2015).

This style deals on having a high concern for the interest of all other parties involved. It focuses on problem solving and a desire to reach a favourable outcome for both parties (Phillips & Gully, 2011). When collaborating, a resolution is made that fully satisfies the interest of all parties involved.

According to Flanagan and Runde (2008), collaborating conflict management styles describes individuals in conflict who finds the best solution that satisfies all the parties concerned. It is generally seen as a problem-solving style. Here, issues are openly attended to; parties involved are neutral in their communication with other party.

X. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN AN ORGANISATION

Conflicts are incapable of being avoided or evaded, learning to properly deal with them is very important. When conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship. Managing conflict in an organization is key to achieving organization's objectives. Tschannen-Moran (2001) portrays conflict management as a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict as it arises in all aspects of their lives. Doomenici and Littlejohn (2001) believe that conflict management creates an environment that may effectively diagnose, work through, and

perhaps prevent future conflicts. The essence of managing conflict is to reduce its ill effect while at the same time increasing the positive aspect of it. Darling and Walker (2001) opine that communication is the bedrock to managing conflict in any organization since it is a natural phenomenon. Campbell (2003) builds on this by asserting that conflict management is a form of disciplined communication that is built on a process that enhances speaking and listening skills, an expanded understanding of an issue and a problem solving approach to achieving a determined end.

The positive effects of conflict management in schools were portrayed in a study by Vestal (2001) the study revealed that after teachers had undergone conflict management training, they reported an increased level of comfort with handling conflict, greater understanding of conflict, improved use of conflict management strategies, and changes in the way they involved themselves in students' conflicts. The work of D'Oosterlinck and Broekaert (2003) portrayed that some school system reported positive effects in conflict management with students. In addition, parents and teachers reported positive effects on their self-esteem and conflict resolution skills, both in and out of school. Going by the above cited studies, managing conflict has positive effects on both the school, teachers and student.

XI. CONCLUSION

Organization's goals and objectives may not be achieved whenever conflict arises. Mutual understanding as well as commitment of employees to complete their tasks may be hindered if conflict is not properly managed. Employees may become resentful and short tempered which could result in negative outcomes on individual, group and the organization, hence causing truancy, skipping of work and increase in people leaving the job or organization. Conflict must be properly managed to attain goals and objectives of the organization as well as the individual. An important aspect of overcoming dysfunctional conflict is by seeking support and cooperation amongst team members. Ayoko (2007) posits that parties that are involved in mutual relationship are able to resolve conflicts that occur in an organization while maintaining their emotional balance. Thus, conflicts properly managed births innovation, creativity and an opportunity to explore. In nutshell, not all conflicts are bad. This is because it enables individual and group members to form a cordial relationship and instills confidence amongst them.

XII. RECOMMENDATION

The conflict management style to use will depend on the situation at hand.

Sadri (2012) identifies four situational factors in dealing with conflict management. They include (a) how important is the conflict situation, (b) importance of the relationship with the other party, (c) what power or authority does one have in dealing with the conflict and (d) how much time does the person managing the conflict have to resolve the issues. A higher importance will be given to the situation if the parties have an ongoing relationship. If there is an alternative to the party or persons involved or the

relationship is for a short period or a one-time one, the importance to the relationship may be low. The issue of power will be considered depending on who is involved in the conflict. This can range from low to high power. For instance, conflict between employees of the same level will be of equal power, that between a supervisor and and another employee will be of high power. When faced with issues of little value or importance, the assumption that one's concerns may not be satisfied, and knowing that the conflict can be resolve more effectively by others, the individual may gain from employing the avoiding style.

The compromising style could be adopted when goals are moderately important but not worth the effort of potential disruption involved in using more assertive mode.

The competing conflict management style could be adopted when fast, decisive action is needed especially in times of emergency.

The collaborating conflict management style should be adopted when the person wants to combine insights of different perspective from people to resolve a conflicts or when one is trying to find an all inclusive solution when concerns for both parties are very important.

The accommodating conflict management style could be adopted when one wants to build up social credits for future issues of importance to one or to assist in the managerial development of one's employees by allowing them to experiment and learn from their own mistakes.

According to Wilmot and Hocker (2001), people use these styles acceding to their choice and their choice is influenced by the interaction of various factors like working experience, designation, gender and age. Conflict also could be better managed by improving employee's awareness in accepting and appreciating the diversity of individuals within their organization.

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