Conflicts and Conflict Management in Modern Organisations-A Pre –Conflict Resolution Environment Approach

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Abstract- In the animal kingdom, the rule is, eat or be eaten: in the human kingdom, define or be defined. "These are words of Stephen Thomas an American psychologist, which a Cleary depicts a picture of the nature of Conflicts: that they are inevitable and occur everywhere: whether at individual level, family, group .societal organizational, regional and globally. There is a common believe that among several scholars on the definition of conflicts. They all view it as a disagreement, contradiction, incompatibility or differences that may arise in any situation/individuals/groups /organizations in which there are incompatible Goals, Ideas, Cognitions, or Emotions within or between individuals or groups that lead to opposition or antagonistic interaction. The definition recognizes three basic types of conflict: Goal conflict, Cognitive Conflict and Affective. The Hard and Soft model of Human Resource Management contend that conflicts are avoidable if organizations create a high committed workforce and focus on the needs of their employees contrary to the hard model. The soft model takes a unitaristic approach while the hard model takes a pluralistic approach.Unitarism view conflicts as dysfunctional whereas pluralism anticipates and views conflicts as normal in any organisation. The divergence of these approaches is a clear indication that conflicts are not necessarily undesirable. The resolution of conflict can often result to a constructive solution. This paper examines conflict from a variety of viewpoints. It considers the positive and negative aspects of conflict, discusses the levels of conflict that can occur within organizations which include: intrapersonal level, interpersonal, intragroup, intergroup, and intra-organisational level and finally, it identifies the approaches to conflict resolutions and strategies, of managing conflicts. The paper adopts Thomas and Killman strategies of conflict management modes which includes: Avoidance, Accommodation Collaboration, Competition and Compromise thus incorporating a more conducive pre-conflict resolution environment elements **ICLWC** which stands for: **Identify** the nature of conflict; **Communicate** effectively; **Listen** to one another, show the **willingnes**s to resolve the conflict and demonstrate **Congruence** of the mind. Therefore the article proposes setting a pre-conflict resolution environment (ICLWC) before identifying the appropriate conflict management strategies. It is also evident that organisations that take conflict audit and manage them amicably are likely to have a more satisfied work force and achieve their objectives.

Index Terms- Conflict, conflict management, Conflict resolution, Conflict modes, Conflict theories and models, conflict strategies, pre-conflict, Congruence, listening and communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Individuals, groups and organizations experience conflict at some time or another as they execute business or interact with one another. This may be due to magnitudes of ambiguity in the rules governing their relations or over dissimilarities of interests or because one or more parties consciously break the agreed procedures. Cole (1995) defines Conflict as a state that arises whenever the perceived benefits of an individual or a group clash with those of another individual or group in such a way that strong emotions are provoked and compromise is not considered to be an option. Managers are not only apprehensive with managing conflicts to limit the negative features of conflict while increasing the positive effects of conflicts, but also involved in resolving conflict to reduce, eliminate or terminate all forms and types of conflict. However, the way in which managers handle conflict determines whether it is beneficial or disparaging to an organization or to employees (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Conflict is inevitable and even desirable: "To work in an organization is to be in conflict. To take advantage of joint work requires conflict management" (Tjosvold 2008: 19). Organizational conflicts are unavoidable and studies indicate that about 20 percent of workers period is spent on managing conflicts (Rahim, 2000).

Divergent Views on Conflict

There differing views on whether conflicts are good /healthy or dangerous /counterproductive. While some scholars believe that conflicts are good, others believe that they are unnecessary and can be avoided. Conservatively, managers considered subduing conflict and maintaining peace at all costs as the best way to manage conflict. However, modern view, conflict as a cautionary signal for a more severe problematic issue that requires to be settled (Darling and Walker, 2001). Although not all hitches and differences can be resolved, managing conflicts can 'reduce its negative consequences arising and improve its positive functions thereby promoting efficacy in organisations' (Rahim, 2002: 208. Handy (1993) considers differences between people and groups as natural, inevitable and necessary ".paradoxically, differences are

essential to change. If there were no urge to compete and no need for disagreement, the organisation would either be in a state of apathy or complacency. As Handy puts it, the absence of conflict is not harmony but apathy.Managers who perceive conflicts as essential for change inspire conflicts between groups and individuals. However the major challenge managers encounter is to retain constructive conflict over issues from sinking into dysfunctional interpersonal conflict and to encourage managers to disagree without retracting their ability to work as a team Conflict can be internal (within the individual) or external (between two or more individuals or between groups.) Sometimes conflicts may thrive unconsciously or unconsciously or triggered by situational factors such as individual goals, anxiety, power, sense of objectivity, inadequacy or differences in upbringing and orientations among staffs in organizations. (Bourgeois, Eisenhardt, & Kahwajy, 1997).

Labor Relations View on Conflicts

The collective features of organizational conflict have extensively been studied by industrial relations scholars. They reflected that management and workers have divergent interests and, therefore, conflict is unavoidable and ought to be resolved through mechanisms such as collective bargaining or labour courts (Teague and Roche, 2012). However, there few studies on personal conflict at work place from a management perspective (Hunter and Renwick, 2009).

Human resource management (HRM) has been labelled as a discipline with two distinctive facets (soft and hard) which are absolutely conflicting in theory. Although, from a theoretical background, the principal conflicts and pressures confined within the models have not been adequately explored, the terms have gained some prominence within organizational styles of managing conflicts. Storey (1989) made a distinction between the 'hard' and 'soft' versions of HRM. The hard version stresses that employees are important resources through which organizations accomplish competitive advantage. It focuses on the quantifiable, measurable and business-strategic features of managing employees in a 'rational' way, i.e. treating them as tools like any other factor of production to realize organizational needs. The pluralist view supports the hard version of HRM. Pluralistic view believes that the interests of employees will not automatically coincide with those of their employers. Conflicts of interest and disagreement between managers and workers over distribution of firm's profits are perceived as normal. They advocate for existence of conflict resolution mechanism and trade unions to deal with conflicts as they are experienced. The pluralist scholars perceive the unitary view is as unpractical and against the interest of employees. Many researchers support the pluralistic view on the argument that in any natural situation and with human interaction, conflicts are inevitable (Armstrong 2000).

While pluralism anticipates and views conflicts as normal in any organisation the unitary perspective views conflict as dysfunctional. Armstrong and Baron (2002) found employees to have a wealth of collective skills, abilities and experience, which they are able to organize productively and utilize in the interests of their employers, in order to contribute substantially to organizational goals and to achieve a competitive advantage (Armstrong 2000).

Storey (1992) in his Soft model of Human Resource Management contend that conflicts are avoidable if organizations create a high committed workforce and focus on the needs of their employees contrary to the hard model. (Guest (1987) and Storey (1992) noted the key difference between the hard and soft as being whether emphasis is made on the human (soft model) or the resource (hard model).In soft model, employees are perceived to be driven by McGregor's Theory Y perspective with individuals governed by the concept of a `high commitment work system' (Walton, 1985b), which is aimed at stimulating employee commitment; creating self-regulated behaviour and relations characterized by high levels of trust' (Wood, 1996,p. 41). Communication plays a vital role in management where employees' views are listened to and interest of management and employees indeed coincide. Soft model takes a unitaristic approach while the hard model takes a pluralistic approach. In the words of Gennard and Judge (1997), organizations and employees are assumed to be integrated, all sharing organizational goals and working as members of one team. In theory, one would argue that minimal or no conflict exists between employees and managers in organization that apply the soft model. Truss (1999) detected that with organizations needs dominating those of the employees, the notion of Soft HRM is more rhetoric than the reality (Armstrong 2002)

Theories of Genesis of Conflict

There several theories that explain conflict and conflict management in Organizations. This paper touches on the; Structural/sociological theory, Marxism theory, Biological Theory and Frustration-anger-aggression theory which advance the genesis of conflicts in modern organizations.

The structural theory describes conflict from a creation of pressure that ascends when groups fight for limited resources. The theory recognizes social segregation, denial, class injustices, unfairness, marginalization, gender differences, racial apartheid, and economic corruption among others as sources of conflicts. Such factors characterize modern organizations and if managers are not keen in observing these triggers of conflicts, they may generate in destructive conflicts (Oakland, 2005)

Marxist Theory of conflict attributes the sources of conflict to division of Society into two unequal classes: the bourgeoisie, who controls the means of production as well as the government, and the proletariats (workers); who are deprived, socially deflated, and financially starved. There is a persistent struggle between the two classes over resources. (Lenin, 1917) believed that the state itself is a product of conflict of class struggle. However Marxism theory viewed conflict from economic view point ignoring other sources of conflict. One would be concerned on whether Marxism theory applies in defining organization conflict or not. Indeed collective bargaining agreement are based on struggle for financial resources between employers and employees. (Oakland, 2005)

Biological Theory of conflict explains that human nature is inherently shifted from cohort to cohort. The wicked nature of man can therefore be genetically transferred just the way a parent may transfer positive qualities to a child. It is argued that man may be that instinctively violent beings since their descendants were, and such aggressive or destructive impulses are in the genes. Some characteristics are inherent hence spontaneous and could be uncontainable. This argument underscores the statement that the

greatness of certain people, clan or family; conceit and hostility of a particular nation or group is genetically determined (Oakland, 2005)

Frustration-anger-aggression theory Advanced by Dollard and Doob, et al (1939), and further advanced by Miller (1948) and Berkowitz (1969 suggests that it is normal for man to respond to hostile conditions. Aggression is viewed as a product of obstructing, or frustrating, a person's energies to accomplish an objective. Frustration is considered as the sensation that develops when a person do not attain what they want (Tucker-lad, 2013). For example an employee may feel frustrated for not getting a promotion. When the anticipation fails to meet accomplishment, people tend to provoke others they think they are accountable for the frustration thus causing interpersonal conflicts (Oakland, 2005).

Types and Sources of Conflict in Organizations

Scholars of organizational behavior refer to any form of conflict within organizations as 'organizational conflict' (OC).such conflicts may shape themselves in diverse forms: intrapersonal, interpersonal intergroup and inter-organizational conflicts. The word 'inter' means "between," while 'intra' means "within" (Elmagri, & Eaton, 2011). Lamb (2008) considers Intra-personal conflicts as "man against self" conflict, "in which one endures to cope or fight with their cognizance and behaviors such as addiction, that one wants to end but may find it difficult to do so." The intrapersonal conflicts therefore occurs when an individual has to make a personal decision (do I take option A or option B?).It may be a conflict of values, of priorities or making a decision on a goal (Lamb 2008).

Interpersonal conflicts are found between individuals. Lamb (2008) Such conflict has been described as "man against man." According to Wood et al., (2003) interpersonal conflict is conflict that ensues between two or more persons working together in clusters or bands while Nistorescu (2006), views it as the process through which somebody or a section prevents another from winning the desired outcome. He noted if such conflicts are not prevented at early stages, they can get into ugly scenarios thus affecting employees' productivity. A number of studies point interpersonal conflict as the most common type of workplace conflict (Dana 2001).Such conflict is caused by individual dissimilarities including; behaviors, personality, culture, approaches, values, opinions, and the other differences (Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1996). Personality conflict occurs when much hidden differences in drives are observed in individuals or where there is malice or 'cold attitude' to each other, or inherent hostility thus leading to a disagreement. Power struggle may be found where two people in an association and have a great desire for supremacy and both want to control the affiliation. The Unresolved power conflict usually heightens to the point of relationship failure and sometimes dissolution (Fisher, 2000).

Morell (2009) describes another type of conflict called "Man against society; or man against nature "conflict which arises when an individual stands against institution, practices, or social evils such as, human trafficking, mistreatments, oppression, fraud, corruption, bad governance, et cetera. Morell (2009) distinguishes the two forms of conflict and argues that "man against man" conflict generates into "man against society". "Man against nature" is a type of conflict that portrays a state of controversy between man and his environs. This includes conflict emerging from forces of environment: such as global warming, climate change, desertification, emerging resistant diseases such as malaria,, which produce a condition in which man scuffles with environment to overcome it.Modern organizations today struggle to reduce this type of conflict. (Lamb, 2008)

Another type of conflict include Inter-Group conflict brought about by difference or dispute between two or more groups, teams, ethnic groups, communities, or interest groups .Singh and Pandy (2004) define group conflict as the difference that rise from the choice made by team affiliates. The conflict may be inter- group or intra- group. This conflict may result from the group need to mutually agree; scarcity hence scramble for resources; variances in group goals, tasks interdependence differences in group opinions, Poor communication channels among group membership; struggle for recognition; overlapping responsibilities However, the way in which managers handle conflict determines whether it is beneficial or disparaging to an organization or individuals.(Deutsch & Coleman, 2000).

According to Katz (1965), there three main sources of conflict: Economic, value, and power Economic conflict includes opposing drives to achieve limited resources. Each individual focuses their behavior and emotions towards their gains. Such conflicts characterize Union and management negotiations. Value conflict encompasses a mismatch in cultural aspects; ideologies – the preferences, philosophies and practices that individuals believe in. Power conflict arises when each person/group/organization/nation wants to maximize the extent of control that they exercise in the affiliation and the societal situation. It is not possible for one party to be powerful without the other becoming feeble. As Thomas Stephen puts it, "In the animal kingdom, the rule is, eat or be eaten: in the human kingdom, define or be defined." Thus, any power tussle would generally result in a conquest and overthrow and submission or in a "stand-off" with untiring state of pressure. Most conflicts involve a combination of Economic, value, and power sources. For instance, union-management conflict not only involves struggle for economic resources, as well as power struggle but also encompasses different philosophies or political ideals. The more sources that are involved, the stronger and obstinate the conflict generally becomes. (Fischer 2000).

Fischer (2000) also attributes conflict to lack of clearness in communication. Poor communication is viewed as one of the major factors contributing to organizational conflict among other factors such as poor management style, change in governance, and thirst for power. Lack of clarity leads to confusion, hurt and anger thus aggravating the conflict process. Miscommunication and misinterpretation is often caused by Perceptual biases, Self-centeredness, selective perception, emotional bias, prejudices, etc., Fischer (2000)

Hotepo, et al., (2010) outlined six major sources of conflict which were categorized into both personal and organization factors: individual stress causing interpersonal differences; conflicting roles; struggle for control against one another/group to accomplish their own self-seeking behavior; misunderstandings and disagreements arising from different was employees are oriented; interdependence needs among employees to collaborate with one another , which, if not well handled may cause communication problems thus causing conflicts; and finally the external forces disrupting internal systems. For example change

in technology, political and social revolution are likely to cause conflict organizational conflict.Conflict is bound to ensue under environmental pressure with inadequate resources, unfavorable strategies such as downsizing, competitive stresses, or by high degrees of insecurity (Elmagri, & Eaton, 2011).

Sources of conflict can also be classified based on the understanding of its nature and consequences; 1. Affective Conflict, which results from provoked individual feelings and emotions on an issue as one try's to deal with the matter.2. Substantive Conflict arises from employees differences about job task or content. 3. Conflict of Interest may be caused by discrepancy between two parties in their prejudices for allocation of limited resource. 4. Conflict of values occur due to differences in values or philosophies   5. Goal Conflict occurs when individuals or groups pursue conflicting goals. 6. Realistic versus Nonrealistic Conflict- Realistic conflict   refers   to irreconcilabilities that have rational content (i.e., tasks, goals, values, and means and ends) while Nonrealistic conflict occurs as a product of a party's desire for let go pressure and voicing anger, ignorance,   or   fault.   7.   Institutionalized   versus   Non-institutionalized Conflict- The earlier is described by circumstances in which players apply explicit rules, and exhibit expected conduct, e.g. line staff conflict or labor management negotiations. 8. Retributive Conflict- This conflict is characterized by a condition where the conflicting parties feel the need for a protracted conflict to discipline the rival. 9. Misattributed Conflict- This relates to the inappropriate job of grounds (behaviors, parties, or issues) to battle. 10. Displaced Conflict- This type of conflict happens when the differing parties either direct their aggressions to social bodies who are not inscribed in conflict or claim over minor, issues (Rahim, 2011).

Managing Conflict

Recognizing the sources of conflict in any organization is the main step in the development of conflict resolution mechanism (Robbins and Judge, 2008; Rahim, 2002, Elmagri, M.I. and Eaton, D., 2011). The greatest method of managing conflict in organizations is pursuing a positive action rather than a negative force that would intimidate a person or a group. (Robinson et al (1974). Rahim (1986) says that organizational conflict should be managed rather than resolved to develop individual, group, and system success. There is need to identify all levels of organizational conflict and then mediate, may it be at intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup levels. To manage interpersonal conflict, employees must be exposed to strategies of managing interpersonal conflict to deal with different situations effectively and set up suitable instruments for unsettled concerns to be dispensed with correctly (Rahim, 2001). There is need for employees to change their attitudes, behavior to allow members to relate effectively. Managers should cultivate diverse but suitable approaches to resolve and manage conflicts; there is need to organize workshops on organizational conflict management from time to time for the employees. (Pawlak 1998)

Conflict Management Strategies

Recent studies indicate that line managers handle workplace conflicts in many organisations. There are discrepancies about the key factors influencing line manager's conflict management styles. There many ways in which conflict is resolved which entirely depends on several factors such as the interdependence and dominance of parties involved. (Blake, Shepard & Mouton, 1964) identified three common approaches for dealing with conflicts where parties involved are interdependent: 1.win-lose, 2. Lose-lose, and 3.win-win.

Individuals learn the manners of negative conflict early in their lifetime hence win-lose strategies such as competition, dominance, aggression and defence dominate in many social relations. It is assumed that one man's gain is the other person's loss. Therefore each party strives to compete or dominate. In a democratic system the winner is determined through an acceptable system such as popular vote, the ability of the leader, or the determination of justice. In an anarchy situation   it may be survival for the fittest; secret strategies, threat, insinuation – whatever works may be applied i.e., the ends justify the means. The main aim is to have a winner who is superior and a loser who is inferior (Thomas (1977) pointed with the win-lose competitive strategy, the parties battle the conflict out in an attempt to win though with the risk that one may lose.

The lose-lose strategy is epitomised by levelling over conflict or by attaining the simplest of compromises. Thomas (1977) advises seeking a middle ground where both parties bargain, giving up certain desired outcomes to achieve fulfilment of others. Conflict is seen as unavoidable. And using win-lose strategy allows each party to get some of what it wants.

The win-win approach is a cognisant and organised effort to maximize the outcomes of both parties through collaborative problem solving. The conflict is seen as a problem to be solved rather than a war to be won. Collaboration seeks to satisfy the desired outcomes of both parties often by changing the situation itself. This technique emphases on the needs and constraints of both parties rather than stressing approaches intended to defeat. Individuals involved work toward collective and superordinate goals (Thomas 1977).

Win-win approach emphasis on the superiority of the long term relationships between the parties, rather than short term accommodations. There is open and direct Communication. The outcomes of win-win approach is integrative and parties plan arrangements within the possible available resources prevailing in the relationship with a mutual understanding and trust, and acceptance rather than an acceleration of distrust and resentment. Win-win approach needs extraordinary amount of tolerance and expertise in human relations and problem solving (Blake, Shepard & Mouton, 1964).

Conflict Managing Modes

Follett (1926/1940) was one of the early scholars who took a lot of interest on conflict and conflict managing modes. She acknowledged three main modes of managing interpersonal conflicts: Domination, Compromise and Integration. She also suggested that organizations could deal with conflicts through: Avoidance and Suppression styles. Other earlier studies in conflict managing modes are from the work of Follett's mode. Blake and Mouton (1964) found that   interpersonal conflicts could be resolved using five modes: Forcing, Withdrawing, Smoothing, Compromising, and Problem solving. They categorised the modes based on the level of concern for individuals and production. Unlike Follet's modes, Blake and Mouton introduces Forcing problem solving and smoothing as conflict mode and all believe

on compromise mode in conflict management. Rahim (1983) suggested that interpersonal conflict could be managed using his five modes; integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising all based on the level of concern for a person and others the person relates with. Rahim modes were an extension of Follet though the former included obliging, a style Follet had not considered. Unlike Follet and Rahim, Blake and Mouton added forcing and smoothing styles of handling conflict,

Thomas (1976) advanced a two-dimensional framework of conflict-handling modes based on on the level of cooperativeness and assertiveness of the parties involved in the conflict. He recognized five conflict-handling modes: collaborating, accommodating, competing, avoiding and compromising. People who are assertive attempt to gratify their own concerns, while individuals who are cooperative try to fulfil the concerns of others. Comparing Thomas and Rahim's modes there is a large amount of similarity between the two approaches. Blake and Mutton's (1964) empirical study is viewed as the genesis of all other studies on conflict handling styles. Thomas (1976) and Rahim (1983) conflict management modes have been widely applied most widely by managers and individuals even in the current times. (Holt and DeVore, 2005; Daly et al., 2010). Although Blake and Mutton (1964) designate that the collaborating mode (high concern for both people and production) is most effective for dealing with conflict, recent authors believed that different modes of handling relational conflicts are appropriate for various situations (Rahim, 2002) Each situation or problem is unique hence may require a unique strategy or different mode to solve the problem.

Context under Each Managing Mode is Applicable

It is argued the type of conflict mode managers apply depends on several factors; situational features of the conflict such as the intricacy and significance of the matter, how relevant each situation is to each party, the time and resources involved in resolving the conflict. Thomas (1977) five modes as shown in fig. 1. of conflicts are widely applied by managers today to solve organisational including interpersonal conflicts, Many scholars agree on circumstances and situations under which each mode is best applicable.(Rahim 2002)
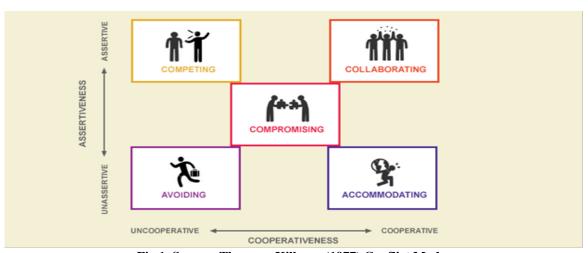

Fig.1. Source: Thomas –Killman (1977) Conflict Modes

According to the above model, collaborating mode is best when parties wish to cooperate to achieve a win -win outcome and ensure each party is contented. It seeks to obtain a lasting solution taking into account the interest of both parties involved in the conflict like the integrative and problem-solving modes. (Holt and DeVore, 2005). Collaboration is considered beneficial when the issue is intricate, when commitment is desirable from the other party for fruitful operation and time is available for problem-solving. On the other hand, the mode may be unsuitable in a simple mater, when urgent solution is needed, and where individuals involved lack problem-solving skills. Chung-Yan and Moeller (2010) suggest that collaboration is the best mode of handling strategic conflict or a long term problem. (Rahim, 2002).
Accommodation mode disregards one's own needs and down plays the dissimilarities (Rahim 2000). It is suitable if a party considers their view point not right and need to be reasonable, where the matter is insignificant or is more important to the other person, where there is need to gain credit, when there is desire to minimize loss in a defeat, and for purposes of maintaining harmony and stability in the relationship (Rahim, 2002). According to Chung-Yan and Moeller,(2010), accommodating is inappropriate for handling task conflict but best when dealing with interpersonal relations conflict due to due to its long-term orientation.

Competing mode has been associated with a win-lose outcome and the need to defend your position. Rahim, (2002: 219.) found competition to be appropriate mode where there's no qualified person to make a decision and where there is need to overcome assertive juniors. However he felt the mode was inappropriate where the matter is complex, if both parties are equally controlling or the parties are highly competent on the problem. The mode is also appropriate when one is right on an important issue, when quick decisive action is desirable, when unpopular decisions have to be taken on unimportant matter. Canary (2003) established that competition was usually not effective in handling divergences.

Avoiding mode is used as a preventive measure, by assuming the problem or delaying the situation (Rahim, 2002).

Rahim advocates the use of avoidance only when the matter is inconsequential and the possible dysfunctional consequence of provoking the other party overshadows the paybacks of resolution.). Canary (2003) found that avoidance is generally ineffective at resolving disagreements. Thomas (1977) believed avoidance would be best when the matter is unimportant and there other more significant issues to deal with, when time is required to calm angers or to gather information, where others can deal with the issue more effectively, and where other issues are involved.

Compromising mode advocates for a give-and-take situation which aims to fulfil each party's concern (Thomas et al., 2008). It is suitable when parties are of equal supremacies and are committed to mutually exclusive actions, when the matter important and collaboration and competition are not the best modes of dealing with the conflict. (Thomas 1977).However Rahim (2002) contend that compromise is inappropriate where the state of affairs is complex and requires a long-term solution based on a problem-solving style hence not best for managing social conflicts. Therefore more cooperative modes (accommodating, compromising and collaboration) are considered to be more practical in providing lasting solutions to conflicts, while less cooperative modes(avoidance and competition) are most appropriate in dealing with short term tactical issues.(Rahim, 2002). However Thomas dual model based on the degree of cooperation and assertiveness involved, is faulted for its assumption that conflict is handled only by the parties involved while in the actual sense a mediator or a conciliator may be involved in helping the parties in resolving conflict. This is common in dispute resolution in organisations where the trade union representatives represents the interests of their members.
Some managers may not lack the sovereignty and the means to apply the conflict-handling mode for a specific conflict condition. De Church and Marks (2001) model collapses into two dimensions all other modes mentioned by other scholars; 1.Activeness."The extent to which conflict behaviours make a responsive and direct rather than passive and indirect impression" High activeness is characterized by openly discussing differences of opinion while parties fully pursuing their own interests.2. Agreeableness -"the extent to which conflict behaviours make a pleasant and relaxed rather than unpleasant impression". High agreeableness is characterized by attempting to satisfy all parties involved.

Factors Influencing Conflict Management Style

Rahim (2002) emphasised both organisational and personal characteristics as determinants of conflict-handling mode while Thomas, (1976). Viewed it from a psychological viewpoint, either contextual (i.e. a behaviour reaction to a condition) (Thomas, 1992; Rahim, 2002) or personality-based (Daly et al., 2010). The Personal aspects of the parties involved in a conflict have a significant impact on the stability of the style of managing conflict. (Daly et al., 2010). Tyler (1986) hypothesised that task-oriented managers are more likely to be concerned with productivity, whereas relationship-oriented managers are more likely to be concerned Personal interpersonal relations. The organisational aspects, include policies and regulations for conflict management, and training accorded to line managers on conflict management. (Daly et al., 2010).

The sex of line executives may also influence their conflict management mode. Holt and DeVore (2005) in their study found

that men are more expected to apply competing mode than women, and that females are more expected to recommend the use of compromising mode than men. Though some empirical studies disclose that females tend to be more assertive in handling conflict then male. (Nguyen and Jang, 2012). Thomas et al.'s (2008) study also observed similar findings based on the argument that men are equally assertive hence were more likely to use competitive mode. Their findings revealed that there were no substantial differences regarding the use of collaborating mode. Munduate et al.'s (1999) study however found no correlation between conflict mode and gender. This complicates the conclusion on whether gender differences had any impact on the choice of conflict management style. The national culture of bosses may also affect their conflict-handling mode.

The results of Holt and DeVore's (2005) study reveals that managers' individual values and beliefs lead them to competing mode, while collectivistic cultures favour the modes of avoidance, compromising and collaborating. Doucet et al. (2009) study agrees with Holt and DeVore's findings which found outstanding variances between American managers and Chinese managers. While Western executives view avoidance of conflict as counter-productive, some studies found out that conflict avoidance is effective in socialist societies, where harmony and redeeming image are extremely treasured (Morris et al., 1998; Doucet et al., 2009). However no studies show whether the national culture of executives surpasses the organisational culture when managers are selecting the conflict mode.

Psychologists argue that executive's personality has an impact on the choice of their conflict-handling mode. (Jensen-Campbell and Graziano, 2005). Antonioni (1998) study showed a positive relations between bosses' personality trait and conflict-handling mode. He found that agreeable bosses more inclined to collaborative mode. Other empirical studies revealed similar results. Conscientiousness is negatively correlated with avoiding mode. Given that personality influenced only a small fraction (25 percent) of disparity in the use of certain conflict-handling modes. It implies that other factors other than personality were significant in influencing the choice of conflict managing mode executives. (Antonioni 1998).
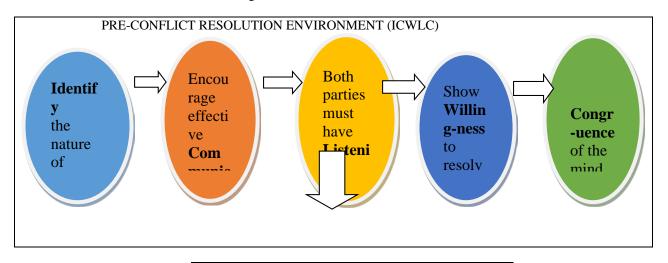
Conflict management skills are considered very essential in the success of conflict resolution. There is need to evaluate managers often on how they deal with organisational conflict. Studies show that line managers generally do not receive feedback about their conflict management capabilities in Irish organisations. Other authors also advocated for the need to reward executives for managing their employees effectively. (Merchant and Wilson, 1994), this would be a lesson to others that organisations care and value consistency in conflict management.

Creating a Pre-Conflict Resolution Environment

Management scholars generally agree that there is no one best style on how to manage conflict Conflict can be managed successfully only if pre-conflict environment is conducive for conflict management. The authors of this paper agree with other scholars that Thomas-Killman's modes of conflict management model is very critical in conflict management but they propose the need to incorporate pre-conflict environment resolution elements (ICWLC) as shown in fig 2 at the plenary stage of conflict management. They advocate that there is need to lay a good

ground for conflict management before one identifies an appropriate strategy of handling conflict. (Rahim (2002)

Fig. 2.Pre-conflict Resolution Environment Model

PRE-CONFLICT RESOLUTION ENVIRONMENT (ICWLC)

Identify the nature of

Encourage effective **Communi**

Both parties must have **Listeni**

Show **Willing-ness** to resolv

Congr-uence of the mind

Conflict Resolution Strategy

Source:Murerwa-Guantai (2019)

Every manager must Identify **(I)** the nature of the conflict; its significance, time required to resolve it, and either or not it's mandatory to win the competition at the end, among other factors mentioned in this paper. Managers also need to identify a conducive pre-conflict resolution environment. This may require manager's prior training in conflict management to enable them handle conflict whenever it occurs. There is also need to identity the way managers are oriented towards perceiving conflict. Khun and Poole (2000) identified two types of approaches of conflict that influence managers perception; Distributive approach which uses a competitive tactic where each party aims at wining at the expense of the other party (win-lose outcome) expected and Integrative orientation where both parties build concessions and view conflict as an occasion to ensure a win-win outcome for both parties.Identification of all the elements discussed is likely to ensure a smooth process of conflict resolution. Jonothan (2016)

Effective Communication **(C)** plays a key role in managing interpersonal conflict. Brickman and Kirschner (2004) identify twenty four ways of bringing the best in everyone. In their book, they argue that one must accept differences as obstacles and aim at reducing differences. "Conflict occurs when the emphasis is on differences. Such differences can be reduced through effective communication. Reducing differences can turn conflicts into cooperation" Brickman and Kirschner (2004).

Resolving conflicts requires effective Listening **(L).** Managers must listen to understand their employees. "When two or more people want to be heard and no one is willing to listen, an argument is inevitable. Listen and understand first, and you will unlock the doors to people's minds" Brickman and Kirschner (2004).However the challenge in listening is that people do not listen empathetically to one another. As Stephen puts it, "most people do not listen with the intent to understand. Most people listen with the intent to reply"

Managers must show the willingness **(W)** to resolve conflict. The hard and soft view of human resource management prepares managers for either having the willingness to create a conducive environment where employees and managers have a mutual understanding and operate on a levelling ground under the soft model (unitaristic approach) or preparedness in mechanisms of handling issues since conflict between management and employees are bound to arise under the hard (pluralist) approach. Lastly managers and employees must demonstrate Congruence **(C)** of the mind or have a common understanding. They must reason in the same manner and get things right. "Brickman and Kirschner (2004) argue that when getting it right is your highest priority, one is likely to slow things down enough to see the details. One may even decline to act because of a particular doubt about the consequence.

II. CONCLUSION

It is obvious that in any environment conflict is inevitable. Though the existence of conflict is mainly perceived to have a negative effect, sometimes it can be beneficial to an individual, group or an organisation. Most conflict management scholars agree that what is relevant in conflict is how it is handled. Conflict can trigger the need for searching for new facts and solutions, improve group cohesiveness, teach one how to make the most of each situation and use it to identify learning opportunity or a leadership opportunity. Managers can also use it as an opportunity to transform the situation into something better. However if conflicts are poorly handled, they can reduce employee productivity, lead to delays and increase costs in decision-making process, increase interpersonal or intergroup hostility e.g. arguments/aggression, lead to poor cooperation, raise stress levels, lower morale/ commitment and involvement and lead to withholding information and resources.(Fisher 2000).

Though Thomas and Killman's (1977) mode of conflict is widely used in conflict management, their model did not take into account of the pre-conflict resolution environment elements

(ICLWC) which are very critical in preparing managers for conflict and conflict resolution. Thus the authors of this paper believe that the ICLWC environment is necessary to lay a good foundation for conflict management before you identify the modes of managing conflict. A manager does not need to wait for conflict to arise and then resolve, but can create a conducive pro-conflict environment.

Managers must focus on boosting employee satisfaction as well as increasing their productivity through managing interpersonal conflicts thus boosting interpersonal relationships. However Conflict can be managed successfully only if the environment is conducive for conflict resolution.It is evident that organizations that conduct conflict audit and manage them amicably, are more likely to have a satisfied work force and achieve their objectives.

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