

CONFLICT AS AN ORGANIZATION'S ELEMENT OF ADJUSTMENT

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations today are engrossed with many problems amounted from human interaction, interrelationship and interdependence among its members. The nature and environment of work largely determine the intensity and extensiveness of the interaction, interrelationship and interdependence of each person or group of persons within each of the organization. Conflict, is an important concept in adjustment because it makes threat or frustration inevitable precisely the action designed to satisfy one goal necessarily threaten or frustrate the other. Conflict may be problematic to the success of an organization but it could also be instrumental to, evoking a new culture that will be more enduring, give opportunity for cooperation, resource discovery, conducive working environment, and attainment of the corporate goals of the organization (Ayodele, 2002). There is no completely satisfactory solution to conflict as long as the individual remains committed to both goals. Since conflict is a universal problem, how it is handled is of the utmost importance. This study attempts to examine the dimension of conflict resolution in the contemporary world of work.

INTRODUCTION

It has been rightly observed that all activity within an organization are initiated, determined and controlled by the persons who make up the organization. And it is a truism that where more than one person come together for the purpose of pursuing or actualizing a set goal, there is bound to be inter and intra-personal relationship among such people before set objective can be achieved (Ogunyemi, 2004).

Also, the greater the inter-personal interactions, the more a person becomes more exposed to increasing number of conflicts, and the more he acquires and perfect the social skill of handling such conflicts. Inherent is conflict. Whenever and wherever human beings' interact for the purpose of achieving a goal there is bound to be some degree of misunderstanding simply because people do not view things the same way. It is just human nature to have different point of view on issues. Thus, many organizations

today are engrossed with many problems amounted from human interaction, interrelationship and interdependence among its members. It should be noted, therefore that the nature and environment of work largely determine the intensity and extensiveness of the interaction, interrelationship and interdependence of each person or group of persons within each of the organization. Therefore, to what extent would the organization, group of persons or individual be able to (i) identify the sources of conflict, (ii) identify negative conflict and (iii) develop a conflict resolution techniques or skills to adequately reach or achieve the organizational goals.

Organizations are dominants components of contemporary society. They surrounded us, we are born into them and usually die in them. Our life space in between is filled with them. Organizations are important elements which make up the social web of modern societies. Most citizens of modern societies are born in hospital, educated in a school, work in one organization or the other, and to the degree that they participate in religious and political activities, these too frequently take place in organizations (Amitai Etzioni, 1969). Modern man can be said to be robed with organizations it is therefore important to understand the basic concern of organization if one will appreciate the modern man and the society in which he lives. We need organization to get things done, for they do things that individual cannot do by themselves. For instance, when the amount of mental energy needed to accomplish a certain task requires more than one individual to make available single-handedly, organization then come up to be the only arrangement to get there tasks done.

Organization Conceptualized?

Organization has been variously defined and described by various scholars on their various perspectives. According to Amitai Etzioni (1969) and Scott (1964) defined organization to be social units (or human grouping) deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals. To Scott, Organizations are defined as relatively specific objectives on a more or less continuous basis.

Also Chester Barnard (1998) defined organization as a system of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more persons. To him, activities are accomplished through conscious, deliberate and purposeful communication, as willingness on the part of members to contribute and a common purpose. Edgar Shein (1970) Also defined an organizations as the rational co-ordination of the activities of a number of people for the achievement of some common explicit purpose or goals, through division of labour and junction and through a hierarchy of authority and responsibility.

According to Gibson et al, organizations are as devices for pooling and harnessing talent and ability together into an effective whole that can achieve for them some desired objectives. All these definitions have contributed one thing or the other to the understanding of what the subject matter, organizations is. They are all the view that, an organizations is the grouping together of individuals to accomplish goals that they can not achieve alone. From my own understanding, organization is a group of people whose activities are consciously coordinated towards a common objectives. Looking at this definition, an entity needs to meet with these two requirements to be considered as an organization.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ORGANIZATION

Besides being purposeful group with a set of interrelated objectives, organizations share a number of characteristics.

- i) **Purpose or objective or goal:** This provides a rallying point for all activities of its members. Apart from serving as common bond for unification of an organization

resources to achieve result, goals are means for measuring an organization performance.

- ii) **Task of activity:** Every organization carries out a major task of one kind or another that relates to and is directed towards the realization of its mission or objective.
- iii) **Resources:** Every organization is involved in transforming resources to achieve results. The major resources used by an organization are people (human resources), capital, materials, technology and information.
- iv) **Dependence on environment:** One of the most significant characteristics of an organization is its relationship with outside environment. No organization is an island unto itself. Organizations are totally dependent on the outside world (external environment) both for the resources they need and for customers that would consume the result they desire to attain which goods and services.
- v) **Sub-units:** Complex organizations form sub units, responsible for specific objective and tasks. These sub units and tasks are called division or departments. Sub units are division departments groups of people whose activities consciously coordinated towards common objectives.

Having known what organization is through the definitions and characteristics, it is very important to note that, during the process of managing an organization, that is, the coordination and directing of both the human and materials resources, and while attempting to implement the policy the parties involves.

Conflict is part of organizational life and they may occur within the individual, between individuals, between the individual and groups and between groups. While conflict is generally perceived as dysfunctional, it can also be different perspectives. One top executive of a major company maintained that if there was no conflict on issue, it could not have been sufficiently analyzed, and the final decision on the issues was usually postponed until all aspects were critically evaluated.

CONFLICT CONCEPTUALIZED?

Ordinarily, conflict could be seen as a struggle, a battle, and mutual antagonism. Some people seem to thrive on creating conflict while others will do their best to avoid conflict basically; there are different perceptions to the definition or the ways in which conflict is viewed. Some viewed or defined conflict in term of behavior, interest, values, ideology and emotional commitment that may not be rational and substantive to define when the conflicts are broker. Wagner III and Hollenbeck (1995) corroborate the above assertion by saying conflict exist when "there are differences between personal values and role expectation". This view was equally shared by Thompson (1997) who says unfortunately at the heart of many organization conflicts are differences concerning values, beliefs and interest" Essentially, the causes or sources of conflict are those set of differences that may exist among individuals or group in their bid to ensure a better working condition, correcting an unfavorable organization policy or on the other hand when the management wants to ensure they make maximum use of human resources available not minding the workers hopes and aspirations.

According to Thompson (1997) the following are the source or cause of organizational conflict: Interpersonal differences, differences in values and believes and differences in interest Charles and Garch (1992) also concluded, by highlighting the following as the main sources of conflict in an organization, differentiation, task relationships and scarcity of resources. Vayrynen (1991) in his own views argued the organization conflict has its which active roots incompatible value and ideologies which have been

resistant to resolution but may be transferred in other to make their outcome less destructive. Conflict may be problematic to the success of an organization but it could also be instrumental to, evoking a new culture that will be more enduring, give opportunity for cooperation, resource discovery, conducive working environment, and attainment of self set goals and enlistment of the organization (Ayodele, 2002)

The above position is supported by Alani (1991) who stated that. Organization conflict is not always dangerous to the achievement of organization objectives or goal due to the fact that it provides functions consequence on the organizations in the sense that a new leader may emerge or old goals may be restated which may be more . beneficial to the organization. Gannon (1990), though, supported the fact that conflict could be beneficiary, he also gives some caution according to him "conflict in organization is healthy because of the fact that it indicate that the individual and groups are vibrant". However, he went on to say that "An excessive amount of conflict distractive, destructive, and may prevent the attainment of the goals of the organization/prevent it. According to Pettinger (1999) in his own View on effect of conflict on the "organizational conflict is higher desirable and constructive because it energizes relationship but it might neither or die if one was ever able to eliminate conflict". The argued further that not all organizational conflict is constructive, some are destructive and one must endeavor to eliminate them. The solution of conflict in an organization may not be a serious task as educating the organizations on the inheritability of conflict, re- orientating them to know that, a conflict is easier eliminated or resolved when embraced positively and that, it takes a great deal of patient to identify the route of conflict and that, it conflict can only be eliminated or resolved totality by attacking it from the source. A conflict must not be avoided. This is in support of Alani (1991) who disagree with the position of the traditional conflict theorist that says, "Conflict should be avoided in order to protect the individuals and the organization. Conflict is a situation of disagreement between two parties. A conflict situation is therefore one that is characterized the inability of those concerned to settle out their difference.

Concept of industry involves an exchange relationship between the major actors; employers and employees as well as the state. Industrial conflict must therefore be defined as inability of these parties either between employer and employee or within their group to reach an agreement on any issues connected with the objective of employer-employee.

LEVELS OF CONFLICT

Conflict is a state in which two parties are in opposition to each other. Behaviour may be planned and formal, or unplanned or spontaneous. T may be verbal or physical, ranging from passive resistance to active aggression. Conflictual behaviour includes directs interference with and resistance of the action of one party by another as well as expression of negative attitudes.

Conflict may be interpersonal or inter-group, interpersonal conflict may be between a superior and his subordinate or between the individuals at the same level of the organizational hierarchy. Inter-group conflict may arise between two trade unions, between two departments or between management and workers while attempting to implement the policies and programme of their organization.

- ❖ Intra-personal conflict: conflict within the individual, arising from uncertainty about organization expectations; or the situation where work conflict with other demands personal to the individual.
- ❖ Inter-personal conflict: conflict between individuals usually caused by personality difference e.g. conflict between the manager and the subordinates.

- ❖ Intra-group conflict: conflict between individuals and group arising from the methods adopted by an individuals to the group norms e.g. conflict within the trade union members, conflict within the junior staffs e.t.c.
- ❖ Inter-group conflict: this is the conflict that occurs between group in the same organization arising from series of factors such as role conflict, power struggle etc, for example, line and staff conflict, labour management conflict e.t.c.
- ❖ Inter organization conflict: conflict between organizations usually caused by economic factors: innovations, price war, market share conflict e.t.c.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

The following are the various causes or sources of conflict in an organization:

- i) Communication service: this refers to those disputes arising from semantic difficulties, misunderstanding and noise in communication channels/. Research have demonstrated that semantic difficulties arises as a result of training, selective perception and inadequate information of the activities of other units within the organization of the activities of other units within the organization. Similarly, research also suggests that ambiguity and uncertainty all stimulate misunderstanding which can lead to organizational conflict.
- ii) Structural source of conflict: this refers to those disputes arising from a number of structural variables which have been identified as sources of conflict in organization. In particular, size and increasing size and specialization have found to lead to conflict. Although less style of supervision environment does not necessary exclude conflict entirely. Similarly, conflict is frequently present where different reward systems are provided for two or more groups and especially where one group gains at another. Conflict also results when the power held by one group is views as excessive by a group is less powerful.
- iii) Personal source of conflict: this source of conflict emphasizes the human aspect of organization. A considerable body of literature indicates that certain personality attributes including high authoritarianism, high dogmatism and low self esteem, are important source of conflict. In addition, empirical evidence suggests that conflict also stems from where dissatisfaction with roles requirement and incongruence in status hierarchy.
- iv) Growth and complexity of organization: this create social distance and reduces communication and interaction between organization members. It leads to wrong enactment or perceptions situations and issues between one department and another.
- v) Competition for resources: interpersonal and inter-group conflicts often occur where two parties compete for resources. The resources which include money, materials, power, prestige, position and status are generally valued by organization members and the competition to obtain them usually evokes a vigorous exercise of power and intense display of emotion. Such conflicts frequently manifest themselves between individuals who have diverse personalities and predispositions and are vying for positions and personal power and prestige. These type of conflict

- vi) also occur between functional departments between workers union and management.
- vii) Competition for territory: according to Rush Brookes and Glover (1983) the word territory in the context of organization means the rights, duties and jurisdiction of any job holder and the privileged and practices which may be evolved over time. Conflicts arising from territory can be a result of territorial violation, or inter-territorial jealousy or over crowding.
- viii) Orientation towards and conflicting external norms and rules: the conflicts and pressure in the ecosystem may be carried over into an organization. Many organizations have several publics-in-contact. For example, business relate directly to customers, to suppliers of various materials, to government agencies, to unions and to other groups. The internal organization of such concern frequently reflects these basic divisions. Thus, an enterprise will have a sales department, a purchasing department, a labour relation department etc. some of the internal organization conflict which develops between department result from their structural differences and diverse orientation towards different public. Conflicts occur between various department because they deals with different pressure from diverse outside groups. In other words, many conflicts between departments in an organization are subjected to a member of constraints external to the conflicting departments themselves. For example, if the law requires one department to do one thing and another department is making it, conflict may arise because of incompatible needs or preferences regarding some action.

STAGES OF CONFLICT

Conflicts by its nature's changes over time whenever group cannot accomplish its set goal or complete a task, the group's member experience frustration. Then those involved may perceive that conflict issue exists and formulation and consider multiple points of view (POV) to gain a better understanding of the conflict issue. Those affected respond, resolving the conflict or many ignite more conflict. There is therefore the need to diagnose the nature of the conflict by considering it is a sequence of conflict episodes. Researches have shown that regardless of the level of conflict, there can be a progression of conflict in a dynamic process. The dynamic process of conflict suggests that conflict develops gradually; various antecedents would cause some of which may not be noticed early or initially by parties. When conflict begins, the people concerned that conflict manifestation is through a process. For any manger who is willing to understand the dynamics of conflict, and its management, it is important to know the process.

CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT IN ORGANIZATION

The following are consequence of conflict in an organization;

- 1) Organizational conflicts divert attentions from organizational goals attainments and create resentment and anxiety among members which make the organization unable to function properly.
- 2) Organizational conflict usually causes delays in organizational action and reduces efficiency and co-ordination.

- 3) Conflicts in an organization can erode and destroy the basis for co-operation and team work among organization members.
- 4) Recruitment and persistent conflicts can cause a feeling of alienation, a loss of moral and other forms of discontent which make individual to withdrawal completely from the organization.

All the above are destructive consequences of conflict. But, there are others positive consequences of organizational conflict which are as follows:

- I) Better / good decision making in an organization through organizational conflict, the parties involve can come together and make a better through effective bargaining and eventually reach a better agreement.
- II) Strike which is one of the consequences of organizational conflict if well managed, usually improve the standard of living of the workers
- III) Organizational conflict usually gives the worker the sense of belonging in the decision making of an organizational.
- IV) Organizational conflict improves understanding among the parties in an organization.

MANAGEMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

The approaches to conflict management are varied as it causes sources and context. Conflicts cannot be eliminated, but it could be minimized to reduce its negative impact on the well-being of the organization.

Organizational conflict could be managed through the following means:

- i) Competition: when one party seeks to achieve certain goals or further personal interest, regardless of the impact on the parties to the conflict, he or she competes and dominates. These win-lose struggles, in formal groups or in an organization, frequently utilized the formal authority of mutual superior as the dominant force, and the conflicting parties will use his or her own power based in order to resolve a victory in his or her favour
- ii) Collaboration: when each of the parties in conflict desires to satisfy fully the concern of all parties. We have cooperation and the search for a mutually beneficial outcome. In collaboration, the behaviour of the parties is aimed at solving the problem and at clarifying the different rather than accommodating various points of view. The participant consider the full range of alternatives, the similarities and differences in view point become more cleared focused, and the causes or differences become outwardly evident. Because the solution sought in advantageous to all panics, collaboration is often thought of as win-win approach to resolving conflict.
- iii) Compromise: when each party to the conflict must give something, sharing occurs, resulting in a compromised outcome. In compromising, there is no clear winner or looser. Rather, there is rationing of the object of the conflict or where the object is not divisible. One rewards the other by yielding something of substitute value. The requirement the each party gives up something. In negotiations between union and management compromise is required in order to reach a settlement and agree upon a labour contract.
- iv) Accommodation: when the parties seeks to appeals the opponents, they may be willing to place their opponents' interest above their own, in order to maintain the

relationship, one party is willing to be self-sacrificing. This is what is referred as accommodation.

- v) The use of formal rules and agreed procedures: this can be used to resolve recruitment superior subordinate conflicts and to settle continued disciplinary matters and grievances.
- vi) Collectives bargaining: this is a method of fixing wages and conditions of services after a due process of negotiation between the representatives of the management and the organized workers' union and settling disputes. It is the method whereby management and labour come together to negotiate and reach agreement over procedural rules and substantive issues of industrial relations. Because of the relatively equal strength of both sides, the method of reaching decisions is usually that of compromise. The process is collective because it replace individual workers feeble attempt to usually gain improvement for himself with the pooled experience and strength through a single union that is backed by collective strength, it is bargaining because it is adapted in practical solutions, and because their is a constant process of give and take. Thus, the knowledge of management supplement that of workers, each side yielding here and gaining there
- vii) Arbitration by a third party: this is used when the division between the warring faction is intensified that open confrontation can not be used because the faction are not ready to come together for a round table conference. The faction have taken definite positions and their decisions are very fundamental. The arbitration approached is then used to break the deadlock. The arbitrator, who acts at the requests of an chosen by both parties in conflicts examine the facts and make a decision to settle the conflict. Although this approach may not eliminate the causes of the conflict, it could prevent its escalation and minimize its negative effects. A major weakness of this approach is that the 'solution' arrived at by the arbitrator alienate one of the parties in conflict because the arbitrator act as a judge.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION

Conflict is an inevitable factor in any human organization. As long as human being, interact with one another conflict is inevitable because we always run into others who 'have a difference value system from ours. Conflict is not bad it's our intention, perception thought, values up-bringing, personality that make it so. It was observed from that most employees from the population studies make use of different methods in resolving their conflicts; most of which do not benefit themselves or others. The word of Ayodele (2002) is of great important here. He said, "Conflict may be problematic to success of organization but it could also be instrumental to evoking a new culture that will be more enduring, give opportunity for cooperation, resource discovery, conductive working environment, attainment of sets goals and upliftment of the organization.

In conclusion, "conflict in an organization is healthy because of the fact that it indicate that the individual and groups are vibrant "(Gannon, 1999). Organization conflict on the other hand is distractive, destructive and may prevent the attainment of the goals of the organizational to prevent it. However, the elimination or resolution of conflict in an organization on the inevitability of conflict, re-orientating them to know that conflict is easier to eliminated or resolved when embraced positively. And it takes a great deal of patient to identify the route in totality by attacking it from the source. A conflict must not be

avoided. Conflict must arise in the management of an organization because conflict is an inevitable phenomenon of human's life, in as much there is an interaction, there must be conflict. In an organization, conflict will arise among the junior staff, among the senior staff within and among department management, trade and between other organization during the process of implementing organizational policies and programme but in order to maintain harmonious relationship within an organization, these conflicts must be adequately managed through scientific methods.

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