CONFLICT AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated conflict and conflict resolution in higher educational institutions in the South East, Nigeria. Conflict is very devastative and death laden phenomenon that can destroy the structure of an organization, if necessary, control mechanism is not used to ward off its perpetration in an organization. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. One research question guided the study. Population of the study is 5,00 which comprised 3,00 200 male and female staff of University of Port Harcourt and Federal University of Technology Owerri. 60 male staff was selected from university of Port Harcourt. On the other hand, 50 female staff was selected Federal University of Technology Owerri using stratified sampling technique, which gave a total sampling size of 110. Instrument used for data collection was a researcher developed questionnaire "titled conflict and conflict resolution in higher educational institutions in the South East, Nigeria, was used with four rating scale of strongly agree, agree, dis agree and strongly disagree. The instrument was validated by two specialists from department of Business Education, Madonna University Okija campus, Anambra State. Cronbach alpha statistics was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument at 0.78 and 0.97, which shows that the instrument was reliable for use in this study. A total of 110 questionnaires were administered to students with the help of two research assistants and a total of 110 questionnaires were returned non- got missed. Mean scores were used to analyze the data. The finding from this study reveals that causes of conflicts in higher educational institutions in the South East include: inadequate planning, coordination and control. Other causes include: Staff taking order from two different executives, inadequate staff training, rules and regulations, dilapidated facilities and equipment among others. It was recommended from this study that heads of higher educational institutions should organize periodic re orientation program to re-sensitize their staff in higher educational institutions in the South East Nigeria.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Groaning and persistent dissatisfactions exhibited by staff or group of staff are symptoms which generate conflict. In higher educational institutions, unlike other organizations, there exist latent conflicts caused by manager's inadequate managerial skills. Conflict is observed when managers show signs of negative psychological feelings to their responsibilities such as tantrums, regressions, anxiety, unnecessary shouts and nagging to their staffs especially their

subordinates. Conflict is perpetrated in different forms by some staff in an organization. Some conflict laden behaviours such as: Felt and perceived conflicts are made secret or open against one staff to another in an organization. Where there are persistent quarrelling and disagreements, atmosphere of peace and tranquility takes time to be restored in an organization. Lack of planning, direction, coordination and control causes unexpected conflicts because that organization is inadequately prepared to dispense services to people that depends on the services of that organization (Akubuiro, 2003). On the other hand, when the excesses of staff cannot be controlled with sanctions to reduce the menaces of conflict by a superior, it goes a long way to degenerate goals or plans of an organization. The complex nature of organization demands that organization should be properly managed for effective productivity, safety of lives and properties of that organization. Conflict set inn when managers show laissez-faire attitudes to staff supervision and control. It also, occurs when managers and directors pursue different objectives. Issues that gave rise to conflicts in an organization may be inadequate planning, organization and coordination. To be explicit, conflict can ensue in an organization as a result of inadequate orientation, training and poor staff motivations in an organization (Albanese, 1998). Conflicts are strong forces that put organization in disarray thus, resulting to poor productivity. There is no organization without conflict. Conflict is pervasive and endears when there is mutual understanding among two opposing groups or disputants. An uncontrolled conflict causes deaths and all manners of devastations especially, when that conflict is not properly handled. Conflict has no bounds. It can come from the management hierarchy, from supervisors, foremen or among subordinates. It is endearing when two conflicting individuals or group understand themselves and settle between themselves. Conflict can be devastative, pervasive where the machinery to control it cannot be easily obtained or co-opted. It is imminent in different strands of human endevours. It causes infringement of human rights when the atmosphere of that conflict tenses high (Blake, 1984).

2.0 MEANING OF CONFLICT

Conflict is a trajectory that inhibits human and organizational progress. It is perpetrated as a result of human negative or selfish desires. In most cases, conflict is a negative human action that constitutes breach of peace and harmony. It affects individuals or groups in different occupational or class endeavours. It retards progress of an organization. It rears its ugly heads in different folds. It is caused as a result of economic, political, social, cultural and technological inadequacy in an organization. Conflict is an unhealthy rivalry contracted by man. It constitutes breach of peace and consumes time and resources of organizations. Conflict is carried out physically or secretly to constitutes disorder in an organization. It has no bounds especially, when it is not properly handled or controlled. In organizations, conflict is invisible and visible phenomenon that constitutes mayhem and retards the growth of an organization. In some situations, conflict is used to address issues pervading to growth of an organization. In some cases, conflict is used to address issues of mismanagement or bad conduct in an organization. In some circumstances, it arises as a result of inequitable distribution of financial and non-financial benefits or grants. In manufacturing or production organizations, conflict is exhibited when there is shortage of manpower, raw materials and delay in payment of staff salaries. Some conflict exhibited by some well-known staff of an organization exhume bad conduct or practices in an organization. When issues that result to conflict are resolved, it stabilizes an organization especially, when the differences that gave rise to that conflict is resolved amicably.

2.1 Types of Conflict

There are different forms of conflict. They include: latent conflict, felt conflict and manifest conflict.

Latent Conflict: Is a conflict caused by serious struggles or competition to gain power or to compel obedience to subordinate. It takes place in an organization where a superior is in conflict with the roles he performs.

Perceived Conflict: Is a type of conflict that has not reached the peak of being observed or noticed by people in a group but its insinuations or negative intricacies are perceived.

Felt conflict: Is a situation whereby the conflict between two staff members does not stop other members from associating with the two staff that are in conflict.

Manifest conflict: Is an open conflict which comes in the form of sabotage, open aggression, withdrawal and lack of interest at a given job.

Issues that give room to conflict are complex and encompassing. Conflict arises when staff are under paid, improperly placed or short changed. It also, arises when there are individual's selfish negative perceptions. Some conflicts in an organization is caused by manager's ineptitudes. Conflict gives bad name to an organization in conflict (Bendix, 1991 & Brendix, 2001). It also, arises when staff divergent views are different with the views of their organization. It usually takes place in an organization as a result of poor management.

2.2 Factors Associated with Conflict

Factors associated with conflict include: Aggression, irritations, acrimony or unconscientised reasoning. It can result to loss of resources, loss of lives thus, beclouding an organizations success. Conflict results to long sufferings, damage to personal and group liberty (Robbins, 1989). Conflict is a byproduct of human existence and interactions. When the root cause of conflict is not discovered, it retards the success of an organization (Sawnepoel, 2002). Agreement with conflict resolution rests in the hands of people in conflict or disputants (Sternberg, 1984).

2.3 Effects of Conflict in an Organizations

A poorly managed conflict disorganizes an organization and reduces staff morale (Thomas, 1977). Conflicts create inhibitions that discourage managers from charting good course for an organization.

2.4 Concept of Conflict Resolution

Conflict is inevitable among groups. It is important to understand the root course of any conflict before proffering solutions. Conflict management or resolutions is not easy. However, It is the duty of management to decide better ways of managing conflict in an organization to ensure staff cordiality to each other and organizations perpetuity. There are various forms of conflict management, they include: Domination, compromise, and integration. Domination is a conflict

resolution strategy geared to controlling the menaces of conflict in an organization. This is a "win- lose style. Managements, by virtue of their position address issues that resulted to conflict through spate of praise and blame. In the same vein, integration is a "win – win" style of managing conflict. Integration involves the use of problem-solving approach to conflict management. In this process, each party in conflict will be involved in one activity or the order. It is informed of apology or act of showing sorry to an act or crime committed. It comes in form of peace brokerage or negotiations by parties in conflict. In the same vein, Compromise is another form of peace management. It is a process or a situation where parties in conflict partake in share of some winning and loss from the conflict they have caused.

2.5 Conflict Resolution in Higher Educational Institutions in South East, Nigeria

No organization is devoid of conflict. When the root cause of conflict is resolved, it enkindles a sense of belonging or mutual relationship among staff. Conflict is sacrosanct though, encompassing. In the South East and Nigeria in general, conflict in higher educational institutions take place when the head of a particular educational institution is devoid of managerial skills to handle or manage conflict to an expected standard. In higher educational institution, conflict can exist between two or more staff in an administrative office. It can exist between two or more lecturers in a department or different departments. Conflict can also, exist among students in a department or classroom. Conflict distracts educational managers from achieving the goals of their educational institutions. It reduces the prestige, certificate and trust bestowed on the management of that educational institution. Conflicts in higher educational institutions, causes distractions, confusions in the design and development of formidable educational plans (Uwazuruike, 2021).

Vice Chancellor, Provosts of colleges of educations, rectors of polytechnics of higher educational institutions are duly commissioned to manage conflict in higher educational institutions in Nigeria especially when the intensity of that conflict is very high. Though, they delegate heads of departments to manage conflict in higher educational institutions when it is in minute stage. Sometimes, when issues that resulted to conflict cannot be resolved by higher educational institutions heads, the aggrieved party or parties are obliged to seek redress or justice from the industrial law court. Conflict between state government and lecturers arises as a result of delay on payment of lecturer's salaries and other earned allowances. On the other hand, inadequate teaching and learning equipment and facilities can constitute conflict or disagreement between a state owned higher educational institution and the state government. Issues of conflict in higher educational institutions have caused lecturers to project their demands through use of professional militancy actions in their professions due to several delays by government on payment of their salaries (Uwazuruike, 2019).

A well – managed conflict revives relationship thus, invigorating obedience to social order provided by the management. Conflict is a catalyst for a change in behaviour especially, when it is carried out to correct anomalies. It creates a better condition of living when it is properly managed. It provides enabling grounds for organizational growth and development. A well-managed conflict defines the expected behavior or guidelines staff should portray. A properly managed conflict removes tensions, frustrations thus, creating positive climate for staff to cherish.

3.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Conflict is a social phenomenon. It is a byproduct of human existence and interaction. Conflict possesses threats to achievement of goals in an organization especially, when that conflict is not properly managed. It can make staff behave extra ordinary. Conflict in public higher educational institutions in Nigeria especially, in the South East, occurs when the heads of educational institutions are harsh or autocratic. In the same vein, when there are dilapidations on equipment and facilities resulting to leakage of buildings roofs, cracked walls, inadequate lecturers, science and engineering equipment, it can result to conflict in higher educational institutions in the South East and Nigeria in general. On the other hand, insecurity of lives and property in higher educational institutions causes conflict. A prolonged conflict can lead to indefinite strike thus, causing poor learning outcomes on students. In higher educational institutions, any conflict that affects staff, will also, affect students.

4.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is glued with Mary Parker Follett Theory of (1973).

Mary Parker Follet propounded a theory of human relations in (1973). Mary was of the view that team building, team relationship; espirit de corps is important and unavoidable in organization. Mary further identified that team building, team spirit and togetherness are the means an organization can use to achieve its goals and stay together without division. This theory indicated that organizations can stay together when command, directions flows from one chief executive and are harnessed by staff. This theory reveals that conflict can only be resolved when staff acknowledges that they are in one umbrella or union and that achieving the set goals of an organization demands unity or team spirit.

Research Question One

What are the causes of conflicts in higher educational institutions in the South East, Nigeria?

SNO	Items Statement	Mean	Decision
1.	Inadequate planning	2.80	Agree
2.	Role conflict	2.60	Agree
3.	Lack of proper coordination	2.80	Agree
4.	Inadequate control by the executive	3.00	Agree
5.	Inadequate teaching and learning resources	2.70	Agree
6.	Poor training	2.90	Agree
7.	Poor supervision	2.80	Agree
8.	Inadequate motivation	2.60	Agree
9.	Poor conflict management system	3.50	Agree
10.	Staff negative perceptions to to destroy their organization.	3.40	Agree

Test of Mean: The mean generated in the analysis above are: 2.60. 2.70 2.80, 2.90, 3.00, 3.40 and 3.50. The mean scores are greater than the decision rule of 2.50. However, this shows that the causes of conflict are significant in higher educational institutions in the South East Nigeria.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of study revealed that in an organization, conflict is caused by poor training, orientation, inadequate skills by managers, lack of rules and regulation, power struggles and subordinates taking orders from two executive officers. Others include: Inadequate finance, equipment and facilities, ineffective planning, coordination and control. (Uwazuruike, 2021) identified that. Conflicts in higher educational institutions, causes distractions, confusions in the design and development of formidable educational plans.

(Albanese, 1998). Opined that issue that gave rise to conflict arises as a result of inadequate orientation, training, working tools, and poor staff motivations in an organization.

Conflict whether felt or perceived is a strong force that put organization in disarray and poor productivity. On that note, (Akubuiro, 2003) stated that poor direction, coordination and control cause poor achievement of goals. It increases unexpectedly in an organization when it is prepared secretly in a conduit manner. (Thomas, 1977) maintained that poorly managed conflict causes divisions and reduces staff morale in an organization

(Uwazuruike, 2019) established that. issues of conflict in higher educational institutions have caused lecturers and teachers to project their demands as professional militancy in their professions due to several delays by government in payment of lecturers' salaries.

5.1 Recommendations

1. Higher educational institutions managers should conduct regular re-orientation programme in higher educational institutions. This would stop perpetration of conflict by lecturers and students in higher educational institutions in Nigeria.
2. Higher educational managers should strengthen and approve academic and students' unions. This would help to curtail inordinate behaviours in higher educational institutions in Nigeria.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Conflict is seen as part of human characteristics. No group can live together in a month or a year without conflicting among themselves no matter how minute or secrecy the conflict may be. It is an unwanted human behavior. Though, sometimes, its perpetration exhumes laxities and call for readjustment. There is no conflict that cannot be resolved. It is understood that conflict starts like small ignited fire and increases like a wild fire especially, when the root cause of that conflict is not discovered for immediate mitigation. It destroys and organization and energizes it especially, when it is used to bring solutions to scarce economic resources in an organization.

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