Effect of Conflict Management Styles on Employees' Performance in Selected Institutions of Higher Learning in Adamawa State, Nigeria

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Abstract: **The study examined the effect of conflict management styles on employees' performance in selected institution of higher learning in Adamawa State Nigeria. Both the primary and secondary source of data were used for the purpose of this research, primary data were collected using questionnaires convenience sampling technique was applied in selecting the staff of three institution, federal Polytechnic, Adamawa State University and College of Health and Technology Mubi respectively. A sample of 358 questionnaires was administered by the researcher with the help of research assistant. Smart-PLS software was used for the data analysis respectively. The findings of this study have provided the empirical evidence regarding the significance of conflict management style dimensions. The study also show that the most common sources of conflict are needs, roles, pressures, goals, perception and styles, violations of agreement reached between, the government, management and the Unions, and denial of promotion when due. At the end, the study recommends that the management of the institutions should ensure that employees are promoted based on merit and not on sentiments because it will not only encourage the hard working ones but it will also reduce the waves of industrial disputes in the institutions. The management of the institutions and government should also ensure sanctity of all agreements signed with the unions at all times to avoid frictions and industrial crises because it has effect on the image of the institutions and some compelling costs especially on the students and entire community as a whole**

Keywords: **Conflict, Conflict Management Styles, Institution of Higher Learning.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Organization is a recognisable social entity whose members jointly pursue various objectives simultaneously with their private objectives and ambitions. Organization therefore has employees, materials and objectives that are accomplished through cooperation and coordinated efforts However, the establishment and continuous existence of every organization through the habitual realization of predetermined set goals and objectives that also needs the continuous and effective functioning of both material and human elements being indispensable. The human components needed to promote the attainment of these objectives are often involve in disagreements and variances over; interest, opinions, management style, among others. This reactionary impact is known as conflict because of the perceived incompatibilities typically arising from some type of interference or resistance. Azamoza (2004) noted that conflict includes the complete variety of behaviours and attitudes that oppose owners / managers on the one side and working individuals on the other. It is a state of disagreement on substantive or emotional problems that may arise due to anger, mistrust or personality clashes.

Conflict among employees in an organisation isn't just inescapable; rather it is the idea of complex associations (Putnam, 2006). In any case, whenever oversaw appropriately, it can positively affect employees' satisfaction and performance (Dana, 2000; Naithani, 2010; Hussain, and Mujtaba, 2012). Unmanaged conflict contrarily impacts both employee satisfaction and performance and execution since convenient timely management of conflict has the potential of improving employee satisfaction and job performance (Awan and Anjum 2015; Awan & Saeed, 2015; Henry, 2009). Armstrong (2006) argues that performance is the capacity to do the job well while Lebans and Euske (2006), also posits that it is a set of financial and nonfinancial indicators, which offer information on the degree of achievement of objectives and results. In furtherance, Walter (1995) argues that employee performance is about directing and supporting employees to work as effectively and efficiently as possible in line with the needs of the organization.

Conflict is posing serious challenges to management (Adomi & Anie, 2005) and conflict management is one of the basic responsibilities of management since it is an essential element of human relations and it is ever present process that will be present as long as people vie for power, jobs, resources, security and recognition (Henry, 2009). Hence, its management has become the top priory list for the survival of organisations. Armstrong (2006) reiterates that conflict management is the extent by which an organization to identify the sources of conflict and put strategic measures to minimize or control conflict entirely. Effective conflict management is the extent by which an organisation is achieving planned objectives by harnessing the individual's and groups' efforts (Ahmadian, 2012

Statement of the Problem

State of Union activities pose a serious threat to the future of higher Institutions of learning in Nigeria and Adamawa State in particular. Recent trends, relationship between the

Management and administrative branches in one way and the activities of the unions on the other Shave been characterized by several alarming industrial disputes among the selected institutions of higher learning in the state. Part of the problem emanates from inadequate understanding of the union activities by the managers. The entire scenario is characterized by increasing opportunism, declining in ideological clarity, increasing demonstration of ethnic\ ethno-religious consciousness, decreasing in accountability, transparency, and objectivity, low level of courage, low level of integrity and mischievous to the goals and objectives of the higher institutions of learning and the union activities. Consequently, the future of the institutions of higher learning and the students are bleak and jeopardy.

Consequently, the institutions are faced with challenges of goal attainment and fulfilment of mandate upon which these institutions have been established. The outcome of these forms of industrial disputes places these selected institutions and management deficiencies such low productivity, interrupted academic sessions, delay in graduation of students out of schools, organizational disharmony and loss of other managerial challenges and problems. Conflict being it organizational or interpersonal when not managed well may breed low morale and lack of cooperation among employees which at the long run could bring about poor organizational performance (Rahim, 2002).

Therefore, conflict management styles in educational settings are areas that need further exploration (Adams, 2006; Donovan, 1993; Green, 1984; Pritchard, 1985). It is In view of that background that the study effects of conflict management styles and employees performance in institutions of higher learning in Adamawa State.

Research Questions

What are the major causes of industrial conflict in selected institutions of higher learning in Adamawa State?

What are the dimensions of industrial conflict in institution of higher learning in Adamawa State.

Objectives of the research

Identify the major causes of conflict in selected institutions of higher learning in Adamawa State.

Examine the dimension of conflict management in institution of higher learning in Adamawa State.

II. METHODOLOGY

The design for the study is survey research design. The population of the study consists of all the taffsof both academic and non-academic workers of institution of higher learning in Adamawa State University, Federal polytechnic and college of health and technology Mubi. 235 staff were randomly selected from each institution to ensure proper representative. The instrument used to collect data for the study was questionnaire

III. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

The Concept Conflict

Working in an organization means to be involved in a conflict, as people working together have various personalities and different views on life. Consequently, they can't avoid conflicts in the workplace. According to Thomas (1999), the simplest way to reduce conflict is to eliminate relationship by leaving or refusing to interact with the other party. In many situations, however, this is not only impractical, but it may be impossible. So, managers must learn how to address and manage conflict both in organizational and workplace levels.

The word "conflict". In the view of Anioke (2002), it can be violent or non-violent, latent or manifest, it is a clash of ideas, a disagreement etc. Adesina (2009), says that conflict is the act of striking together, mutual interference of opposing or incompatible forces, ideas, interest contexand discord. Similarly, conflict is also natural condition existing in any multiparty heterogeneous system.

Ekpu (2008) opined that conflict is neither positive nor negative as it is the result of diverse characteristics of our thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes at social systems and structure. He explained that it is the way one handles, manages conflict that will determine its effects. Conflict could be seen as an energizer of development if properly managed by people and the conflicting parties involved. Conflicts have negative outcomes when the affected Individual exhibits a feeling of defeat and demoralization; they also have positive outcomes when better ideas are produced, they force people to clarify views.

Ufok (1987) and Iwok (1995), almost shared similar opinion in the meaning of conflict. They view conflict as a state of emotional stress in a person or group of persons arising from collision of different needs, methods of operation in a given situation. With reference to organizations, conflict is the disagreement between employees, departments, managers or groups of people number of major functional and dysfunctional consequences can arise from conflict

Major Causes of conflict

Otobo (2000) has identified two main sources or causes of industrial conflicts in organizations namely, internal and external. According to him, the internal sources of conflict include, style of management, nature of physical environment of the workplace, orientation or social consciousness of workers, others are conditions of service, efficacy or otherwise of the promotion system, cumbersomeness of grievance and disputes procedure. The external sources include government industrial and economic policies, the nature of labor legislation, unpatriotic and unethical conduct of the elite groups, national economic miss management and general distribution of wealth and power in the society.

Porter, Bingham and Simmonds (2008:436) posited that communication Failures can be a cause of conflict in

employer-employee relations. They emphasized the need for continuous clarity in the communication process of an organization Alder (1946). Similarly, (Rahim, 2011) identified the following factors as sources of conflict in work and work place. Thus, conflict can arise when one party feels it lacks important information, according to the free management library website. When employees are continually experiencing changes that they were not informed about, or if there are decisions being made that the staff feels it should be involved in, this can bring about conflict between employees and managers.

Conflict Management Styles

.In cases when the conflict cannot be prevented, there are commonly used mechanisms to resolve them. How conflicts are resolved will have a significant impact on the success or failure of the organization. The ultimate goal is to resolve any difficulties quickly, in privacy, without disruption in service to the end user and in a manner that opens channels of communication and reduces the potential for disputes in an Organization. Rahim (2002), who is a renowned scholar in the field of conflict management, further acknowledged that, there is no one best approaches to managing conflict.

However, Likert and Likert (1997S) suggested the problem solving style or the integrating style of managing conflict as the most appropriate in most situations. Many authors have come out with some diverse styles and mechanisms for managing conflicts. Among these authors was Follett (1940) who came up with three distinct ways of handling interpersonal conflicts; domination, compromise and integration. She also identified avoidance and suppression as other ways of dealing with conflicts in organizations. Blake and Mouton (1964) also proposed a conflict management model consisting of five distinct conflict management styles. These included forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising and problem solving. This conceptual scheme of conflict management by Blake and Mouton (1964) was later remolded by Thomas (1976) into five different styles based on "concern for others and concern for one's own self". Concern for one's own self placed more emphasis on satisfying the interest of one's own self at the expense of others" interest. While concern for others placed more emphasis on satisfying the interest of other people at the expense of one's own self. He called the concern for others, "cooperativeness" and the concern for one's own self, "assertiveness".

Assertiveness is the strength with which one party would like to maximize their goals and interests in relation to the other party's goals. One party may maximize their total concerns (assertiveness) to the total disadvantage of the other party's needs and objectives (uncooperativeness) amounting to a "competitive" position. Also, neglecting personal needs (assertiveness) as contributing to the achievement of the other party's needs (cooperativeness) could result in an "accommodative" relationship. "Compromise" behaviour is neither accommodating nor competitiveness because it satisfies only a portion of both parties' interests.

And low cooperativeness. The author further suggested problem solving style as the most appropriate style where mutually beneficial options are required. He did not consider compromising as a distinct conflict management style like some other authors did but rather, yielding style which has a similar explanation like the compromising style. However, other models identified by Moreover, fulfilling one's expectations (assertiveness) and that of another's (cooperativeness) simultaneously portrays "collabourative" behaviour.

However, when individuals show no concern for their own goals, conflict situations could be avoided (Rahim, 2002; Euwema et. al., 2003). Pruitt (1983) also came up with a similar model of conflict management styles which was called "The Dual-Concern Model". It was also based on the degree of cooperativeness and assertiveness just like Thomas"s (1977) model. Pruitt called the style where there is low assertiveness and high cooperativeness as "the yielding style". The author called the style where there is both high assertiveness and cooperativeness, "the problem solving". Then the style where there is low assertiveness and low cooperativeness, he called, "the inaction style". And lastly, "the contending style", where there are high assertiveness scholars classified these styles into five and places more emphasis on compromise as a distinct style of managing conflict. Other authors in this field also classified the conflict management styles into two distinct styles. One of such authors was Kantek and Gezer (2009).

Deutsch and Coleman (2000) are one of such authors who came up with "integrative" and "distributive" models of managing conflict. The distributive style of managing conflict focused on the distribution of a fixed quantity of positive outcomes where one party ends up winning and the other party loosing. The integrative style focused on integrating the concerns of both parties to obtain the best possible outcome. Recent authors such as Swanstom and Weissmann (2005) came up with a meta-taxonomy for managing conflict which they considered to be encompassing all other styles based on the amount of "activeness" and "agreeableness". Agreeableness at the highest level was associated with the attempt to satisfy all parties involved while activeness was associated with open discussions of different opinions while still pursuing their own interest. In the authors" studies, they also discovered that activeness doesn't necessarily have any significant effect on the effectiveness of conflict resolution but agreeableness, on the other hand, had a positive effect on conflict resolution because it impacted positively on how groups felt about how conflict was managed irrespective of the outcome. The authors also discovered in their studies that the integrative model led to consistency in better task related outcomes than the distributive model.

In a research done by Rahim and Bonoma (2002), the two authors came up with two dimensions of the styles of managing conflicts called the Dual Concern Model which was quite similar to that of Pruitt's (1983) Model. The first dimension dealt with the degree to which a person would want to satisfy his/ her own concerns. While the other dimension dealt with the degree to which a person attempts to satisfy the concerns of others. Further studies conducted by other scholars such as Ruble and Thomas (1976) and also Van de Vliert and Kabanoff (1990) supported the two dimensions proposed by Rahim and Bonoma (2002). These two dimensions were later combined into five distinct styles of handling interpersonal conflict. These five styles were integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding and compromising.
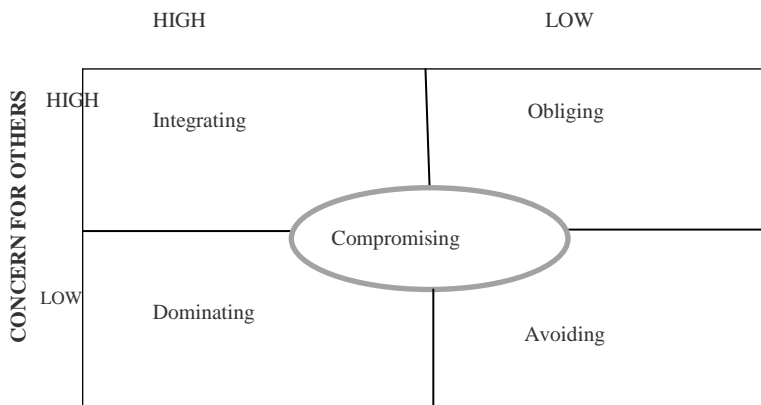
The Dual Model of Rahim is shown in Figure 1.1.

Fig. 1.1 The Dual Concern Model of Handling Interpersonal Conflict

Source: Adapted from Rahim, (2002)

A contingency theory of leadership propounded by Fiedler's (1967) led to the development of a contingency approach to conflict management. Recent studies have shown that integrating and compromising styles are more ideal for dealing with issues that are strategic in nature while the other styles are more appropriate for managing day – to – day problems in the organization. The five distinct styles have been described in detail in the section below.

Integrating Style

The integrating style of managing conflict placed more emphasis on high concern for both self and others (high assertiveness and high cooperativeness). This style also used problem solving through diagnosis of the problem and then finding of appropriate interventions for the right problems. Rahim (2002) acknowledged that the use of this style involved important variables such as, openness and information exchange, obtaining alternatives and the examination of differences to reach an effective solution which was acceptable to both parties. Here, the parties were expected to open up and exchange ideas, because this style involved exchange of ideas between the parties.

De Church and Marks (2001), hold that this style was commonly used when the problem in question was a complex one. A complex problem as explained by the above author was one that required synthesis of ideas in order to come out with an appropriate solution.

Obliging Style

Almost (2006), this style is where a person is more concerned about the interest of others rather than his/her own interest (high cooperativeness and low assertiveness). In this style, the party believes he/she may be wrong and thinks that the other party is rather right. This usually puts the party at the weaker position. This style is most applicable where one party gives something of value to the other party in exchange of something in future when he/she needs help. This style is usually used when the issue in question is of great importance to the other party and the party also wants to preserve the relationship. Here, because the party is interested in preserving the relationship and the issue is also of more importance to the other party, the party then offers something of value to the other party in hope of getting help in future (Brooks, 2009).

Dominating Style

This is where a party is more concerned about his/her own interest and neglects the interest of others (high assertiveness and low cooperativeness). This style is associated with being competitive. A dominating person according to Back and Back (1994) has the objective of wanting to win so he/she would do anything possible to achieve his/her objectives by so doing, neglecting the interest of others. Some scholars have argued that this style was selfish in nature. Unlike obliging where the issue is of much importance to the other party, here the issue is of importance to the party so he/she would do whatever it takes to win. In situations where quick decisions are to be made and the people involved are unskilled, the manager could adapt this style. However, subordinates who are skilled may see their superiors as being autocratic. This style was also considered appropriate where the issues involved are less complex. It is not appropriate to use this style in situations where both parties are powerful.

Avoiding Style

This is where the party has low concern for both self and others too (low assertiveness and low cooperativeness). A manager who uses this style always fails to meet his needs and that of others too. Here the party thinks it is not worth confronting the other party. In situations where the issue is important to one party and there is responsibility on the party to make decisions, this style may not be useful. This style requires patience on the part of the two parties. This style is non-confrontational in nature and it is used for minor issues. Avoiding is always associated with negative conflicts (De Dreu, 1997). This is true because the real cause of the problem may not be tackled and the issues may pile up.

Compromising Style

This is where there is an intermediate between concern for self and others (moderate assertiveness and moderate cooperativeness). This is a kind of "give and take" and here, both parties give something in order to get something in return. The goals of the two parties should be mutually exclusive for this style to be effective. Protracted conflicts could be handled effectively using this style. However, according to Rahim (2002), this style is not suitable for handling complex problems that require problem solving. But some managers still use it and they end up getting the wrong results. This style also, may not be appropriate in situations where one party is more powerful than the other. This style is most appropriate where integrating or dominating style cannot be used. Managing conflicts in general come along with some challenges that institutions face and the institutions should learn to deal with these challenges effectively (Brooks, 2009).

IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Research Question: What are the Major Causes of Industrial Conflict in selected institutions of higher learning in Adamawa State?

Table 1.1: Major Causes of Industrial Conflict in selected institutions of higher learning in Adamawa State

S/No.	Items	$\overline{X}$	σ_S	σ_E	Remark
1.	Denial of promotion causes industrial conflict in institutions of higher learning.	3.31	1.41	0.09	Agreed
2.	Violations of agreement reached by Unions affect industrial conflict management in higher institutions of learning.	3.49	1.31	0.09	Agreed
3.	Inadequate training of the staff could lead to industrial conflicts in institutions of higher learning	3.43	1.27	0.08	Agreed
4.	Conflicting needs, roles, pressures, goals, perception and styles do lead to conflicts in institutions of higher learning	3.50	1.25	0.08	Agreed
5.	Constant demand of labour union contributes to the industrial conflicts in institutions of higher learning	3.37	1.21	0.08	Agreed
Total	$\overline{\overline{X}}_G$	3.40	1.34	0.06	Agreed

Source: Field Survey, (2019).

Minimum Criteria = **3.00**

$\overline{X}$ = Mean of Response.

σ = Standard Deviation of Response.

$\overline{\overline{X}}_G$ = Grand Mean of the Respondents.

Table 1 presents data that answered research question, which is on the major causes of industrial conflict in selected institutions of higher learning in Adamawa state**.** The mean scores of the respondents ranged between 3.31 and 3.50, while the standard deviation on the other hand is ranged 1.21 to 1.41. A cursory evaluation of table reveals that the major cause of conflicts in institutions of higher learning is the conflict of needs, roles, pressures, goals, perception and styles. The next mean on the hierarchy of cause of conflict is the Violations of agreement reached between, the government, management and the Unions affect industrial conflict management in higher institutions of learning (M =3.49). In the end, denial of promotion causes industrial conflict in institutions of higher learning. The grand mean of the respondents is 3.40. This means that the respondents agreed with all the items in the table and their attitude is positively inclined to the fact that all the factors enumerated in table1 are the major causes of industrial conflict in selected institutions of higher learning in Adamawa state.

Major findings

The findings of study reveal that:

i. Most cause of conflicts in institutions of higher learning is the conflict of needs, roles, pressures, goals, perception and styles.

ii. Violations of agreement reached between, the government, management and the Unions affect industrial conflict management in higher institutions of learning.

iii. Denial of promotion causes industrial conflict in institutions of higher learning. The grand mean of the respondents is 3.40.

V. DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that the most common sources of conflict are conflict of needs, roles, pressures, goals, perception and styles, violations of agreement reached between, the government, management and the Unions, and denial of promotion when due. The management of the institutions should promote the training and development of employees to enhance their interpersonal and team development skills. This is because the training programmes always encapsulate interpersonal skills, role-playing and sensitivity training, which places emphasis on emotional issues in the relations, creating realistic situations and giving the roles to play to the participants, communication skills, conflict resolution*and G*roup decision making. The management of the institutions should also ensure that employees are promoted based on merit and not on sentiments because it will not only encourage the hard working ones but it will also reduce the waves of industrial disputes in the institutions. The management of the institutions and government should also ensure sanctity of all agreements signed with the unions at all times to avoid frictions and industrial crises because it has effect on the image of the institutions and some compelling costs especially on the students and the community as a whole.

Both managers and unions are encouraging to update their problem-solving skills use a third-party intervention technique to always take a more rational conclusion in the conflict situation because of the general understanding of conflict resolution techniques and the problem-solving process. However, great concern has to be given post conflict management analysis to implement for proper planning and avoidance of imminent reoccurrence of conflict.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the outcome of the study, the following recommendations were made:

i. The management of the institutions should promote the training and development of employees to enhance their interpersonal and team development skills.

ii. The management of the institutions should also ensure that employees are promoted based on merit and not on sentiments because it will not only encourage the hard working ones but it will also reduce the waves of industrial disputes in the institutions.

iii. The management of the institutions and government should also ensure sanctity of all agreements signed with the unions at all times to avoid frictions and industrial crises

because it has effect on the image of the institutions and some compelling costs especially on the students and the community as a whole.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

The ability of every institution in solving employee's problems is determined by the strength and how often it manages and reduces the rate of grievances at working places by solving the existing problems either individually or collectively. Employees are always motivated for being a member of a formal institution especially when the institution presents their problems to the employers to be solved. These go a long way to make the employees to be satisfied with the working environment.

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